

Righteous Ps 281

### **The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 281**

Dusk was over, and the sky quickly turned dark.

The fireworks in the sky replaced the sunset.

These fireworks would continue until the end of the dinner.

This was a sign that the birthday banquet was about to start and that guests were to be seated.

It was also a universal ritual. Just like how lighting candles at the dining table or brightening one's house with lights could be regarded as 'purifying' with the usage of 'light'; how decorating one's house with art could be regarded as protecting 'nobles' with 'art'.

A grand firework show could simultaneously satisfy the regions of three upright deities, "light", "art" and "fire," to receive blessings from the upright deities: Mr. Ray, the Elegant Elder, and Father Flint.

This universal custom was quite practical. But in fact, that was exactly what it was for. It was more about seeking peace of mind.

Fireworks also weren't complicated alteration products.

If the patterns and colors were not particularly complicated, the difficulty for its alteration was even lower than that of the Black Fire. Therefore, the fireworks price could also be considered low— at least in the Alteration school, it could be regarded as cheap.

Therefore, when carrying out some major events, fireworks were always essential.

The explosives used to "unveil the curtain" were hidden in the fireworks this time.

The goal of these explosives was not to kill or injure anybody. The main purpose was to start a fire... The purpose of starting a fire was to cause panic.

If the goal were to cause panic immediately, one would not choose to cause an explosion at the start of the fireworks show.

Since it was Henry VIII's 80th birthday, the 80th firework was the only giant firework. After it started, the band would soon begin to perform.

The moment the fireworks painted the sky...

Everyone turned their attention to the fireworks.

Annan clenched [Miss Quiet] tightly.

He suddenly jumped out of the seat.

Noticing Annan's actions, Philip turned his head inadvertently.

—He then saw a pair of gray pupils.

A strong sense of indolence rose in Philip's heart unreasonably.

Annan's body suddenly melted. A tall, black-haired, and black-eyed middle-aged man jumped out of Annan's body!

Philip Noah had quick reflexes, and he immediately realized something was wrong.

At that moment, his eyes were full of fear. But Annan was slightly taken aback by the fact that Philip had broken free from the [Slothful Eye] effect in less than two seconds!

Is he a Transcended? The thought flashed through Annan's mind.

The moment Philip opened his mouth, Annan had already drawn the gun and pulled the trigger simultaneously.

Annan was unsure if the [Death Declaration] he made before was still valid after such a long time. If it was no longer valid, firing it in Kafni's skirt could likely injure Kafni.

Thankfully it still worked.

The bullet had not left its chamber, yet it had pierced Philip's chest. The excruciating pain caused his body to lose its ability to escape.

Annan stuck out his right hand to grab Philip's neck and crushed it!

He then punched Philip in the chest. Frigid cold air burrowed into his still-beating heart, freezing it. The bullet was also sealed in Philip's chest.

The more complex the plan, the more prone to disruptive outliers the plan would be.

Annan's plan was straightforward.

He first let Ferdinand's body encountered Chilling Touch be found and then let Elizabeth bring Old Merlin along to identify the body.

Elizabeth naturally knew that Old Merlin couldn't be the murderer. If he had killed the man himself, he definitely wouldn't have left any evidence that was against him.

But Old Merlin was proficient in the spells of the Energy Falteration School. He could provide the details to Elizabeth about the wizard who murdered Ferdinand had, for example, the murderer's spell mastery and height.

If Old Merlin was cooperative and willing to share this information with Elizabeth, there should be suspects surfaced in Elizabeth's mind.

After that, there was only one way to rule out Annan's suspicions completely.

The tactics in which he had to sustain injury.

That was to leave similar injuries on both Philip and him.

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With Kafni's eyewitness testimony, Elizabeth's testimony, and Old Merlin's absence, she would be able to make up a nonexistent... tall, and powerful killer who used the Falteration spell!

Even if the spells of the Prophet and Edict factions were used to verify, they would at most only obtain information that the murderer was called “Ghirlandaio·David·Buonaro”!

“Wow...” At this moment, the fireworks were in full bloom.

A huge, lifelike golden lion roared silently in the sky as if it were alive. Eighty stars then flew out from the lion in all directions and exploded twice in the sky, forming a splendid scroll of painting that covered the entire night sky!

The people couldn't help but exclaim at this grand scene. At the same time, they got up and were about to bow down to Henry VIII, who was about to enter the door as the music sounded.

At this moment, Annan had changed into his physical form and aimed the gun at his stomach.

He pulled the trigger without hesitation!

His face quickly turned pale, and his body trembled. Even with a curse that weakened the pain, Annan felt an intense, unbearable pain instantly. It was the pain of having internal organs penetrated.

Luckily, Annan had lost the ability to make any sound due to the [Miss Quiet].

He couldn't let out a scream!

Yes, Annan chose to use the last bullet of “Miss Quiet” to attack himself so that he could maintain absolute silence in all his actions in the next ten seconds!

Since he transformed into David very shortly last time, his cooldown period was relatively short.

After two seconds, Annan changed into David again.

He endured the pain, shoved [Miss Quiet] into Philip's mouth, and then took out Ferdinand's silver pocket watch. He didn't use the last silver vessel he had to save himself but aimed it at the pistol in Philip's mouth. He then fired [Clanging Object] mercilessly!

His goal was to destroy the pistol and Philip's dying expression.

Yet it was unexpected... The power of [Clanging Object] displayed by this pocket watch was far beyond Annan's imagination!

A silver sonic boom oscillated vigorously but didn't make a sound.

It silently smashed Philip's head, all the parts above his shoulders, as well as the curse vessel pistol into pieces!

Annan instantly reverted into himself and reached out to touch his abdomen. Then, he attacked himself again and froze the wound on his tummy.

By the time this was done, Annan had only 8% Health left.

—This would be Annan's only flaw in his plan.

Because with Old Merlin's experience, he could naturally see that the spell caster level of [Chilling Touch] on Annan's abdomen was not the same as that on “Philip” and “Ferdinand”!

But Annan was willing to take a gamble, a somewhat pointless challenge to himself.

Failure would ruin the nightmare that could have been cleared.

Success would then provide the perfect decryption reward — the elemental power.

But Annan wasn't craving the elemental power... or rather, he was craving more than the elemental power.

For some reason, Annan felt a strong desire to win.

He didn't want to admit defeat.

Only in this incident... Only when he used the body of “Annan” did he hope to be the “protagonist”!

Maybe Philip was right. Annan's desires were immense.

Satisfying the desire itself was more important than any reward!

He believed that after Old Merlin saw Ferdinand's body and sensed the remains of the ritual, he could realize what Annan was doing and cover up for his plan.

Would you understand the message I'm leaving... Merlin!?

“Get ready to cry for help, Kafni... The rest is up to you.” Annan whispered, showing a bleak smile as he endured the pain, “Also... Happy birthday.”

“...Thank you. I will remember you.”

Kafni hugged Annan's body, which was getting colder. She murmured in a soft voice, “Even if no one praises... Even if no one knows that you are the hero who saved us all, I will...”

Annan lost consciousness in Kafni's arms before she could finish her words.

Even without any evidence.

In the moments before he passed out, Annan also thought that he would succeed.

It was a throbbing sensation that came from the depths of his soul... as well as intuition.

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Annan didn't know how long he had been in a coma, and when did he woke up.

When he regained consciousness, there was still a line of blood-red, scribbled characters floating in front of him.

[The curse has been severed —The Fated Feast of the Great Hunt.]

[You completed the Ritual: Swift Murder, so you're granted the Basic Influence: One Step Ahead.]

[If you don't remove it in time, you will fall into a random nightmare that has the keyword “Sharp Blade” on either April 4th or June 6th (difficulty: hard).]

[You have completed a ritual, Will Attribute +1]

[The Tragedy Writer is satisfied with your ritual. You have received 1 holy light engraving from the Tragedy Writer.]

[Current total engravings: 3 (Silver Sire) / 1 (Tragedy Writer)]

After a brief pause, the official notice of having cleared the dungeon finally appeared before Annan.

[Guarantee the survival of “Annan·Austere-Winter”, “Dmitri·Austere-Winter”, “Elizabeth·Noah”, “Kafni Noah”.]

[Find and interrupt the key ritual (Completed).]

[Do not reveal your identity (Completed).]

[Nightmare has been purified.]

[Purified the nightmare with the designated character. Evaluation ratings increased.]

[Perfectly stopped the ritual. Evaluation ratings increased significantly.]

[Stopped the explosion. Evaluation ratings increased.]

[Killed Philip Noah. Evaluation ratings increased significantly.]

[Received acknowledgment from the Tragedy Writer. Evaluation ratings increased significantly.]

[Completed the collection of memoirs. Evaluation ratings increased.]

[Comprehensive Evaluation — S]

[Received 3200 points of Shared Experience, Perception+1.]

[Reward for clearing dungeon: Increase any desired profession by 3 levels]

[Hidden plot you have decrypted: 100%]

[Reward for decrypting the dungeon: Element (Brilliance) awakening progress increased by 10%]

[Reward for attaining the highest evaluation rating: A Random Falteration Spell]

...It's over.

“I have won.” He indeed didn't let himself down.

Or rather, it was all within Annan's expectations.

Like everyone else knew about Annan, he was just a “lucky madman”. He had a little bit of guts and a little bit of luck.

There was first a burst of ecstasy In Annan's heart, followed by excitement.

But after such intense pleasure, Annan felt a little empty.

Annan took a deep breath and slowly exhaled in an effort to calm his rapidly beating heart.

He was not betting on whether the Goddess of Luck was on his side.

This gamble wasn't about luck but his capability.

What he was betting on, what he believed was his ability to see and read people.

It wasn't a sudden accident that led him with no choice but to trust Old Merlin. Instead, it was his decision to set up the plan, handing over the final victory button to Old Merlin, who knew nothing about his plan.

Undoubtedly, this confidence came from Annan's understanding of Merlin Manning and his trust in his abilities and intuition.

Annan took a deep breath and slowly opened his eyes.

The sun outside had been up for a while.

...It's already half-past seven. He glanced at the clock.

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It seemed that a long time had passed since he passed out in the nightmare.

But that didn't matter as long as he won.

Annan added all three free levels to his wizard profession and put all the remaining experience on Silver Knight.

As a result, Annan's panel looked like this:

Attributes: Strength 11, Agility 10, Constitution 13, Perception 44, Will 15

Profession Overview:

Silver Knight LV13: [Austere-Winter Swordsmanship LV5], [Frost Sword LV9], [Parallel Comprehension LV1], [Silver Hand LV1]

Wizard (Energy Falteration School) LV20 (Advancement available): [Instant Spell LV4 (Chilling Touch, Slothful Eye, N/A, N/A)], [Guided Spell LV4 (Impeding Wall, Frost Arena, Notion Rain, Denial of Life)], [Chant spell LV3 (Frost Wheel, N/A, N/A)], [Ritual Spell LV1 (N/A)]

Annan noticed that starting from LV11, Silver Knight would increase 2 points in Constitution by default every time it went up a level and add another 1 point to either one of the three physical attributes: Strength, Constitution, and Agility.

In other words, this was a profession that could upgrade three attributes per level!

It was even more powerful than the wizard profession!

The wizard had only two attribute points bonuses per upgrade!

This is a premium profession indeed.

[TN: The idea of imbalance pay-to-win mechanics.]

Of course, on the other hand... Annan didn't get any new divine art or abilities from upgrading the [Silver Knight] level. Although he had obtained skill points as per usual, he could only add points to his existing skills.

Its skills list... or rather the divine art list, seemed to require being purchased directly from Silver Sire using holy light engravings.

But the upgrading of Constitution attributes alone had brought a massive change to Annan.

Annan could feel that his body had gotten more vigorous now. For example... where Annan had to have at least three hours of sleep in a day to remain energized, he could now stay up all night!

But the more significant change was his Perception attribute.

The sudden increase of three wizard levels and the rewards for clearing the nightmare surged Annan's Perception attribute by seven levels. He felt dizzy, as if he was seeing the world through a lens that was too clear.

But Annan could considerably dispel this discomfort after shaking his head.

It was all thanks to the poison Rotten Man had once used on Annan.

If Annan had not experienced the distortion of his perception of the world brought about by even higher levels of Perception, he would not have been able to adapt to this level of Perception attribute.

It might even increase his erosion rate. According to Salvatore, some wizards might even have their sanity eroded by a curse if their strength increased too quickly after completing a difficult nightmare.

This was also the case with professions like "Berserker" that would have a 2-point increase in Strength per level. The Berserker profession could be used in Silver Rank directly. As for the somewhat robust Silver Rank Berserkers, the muscles throughout their whole body might be highly activated after waking up from a nightmare, flowing around the body like a worm... It might even simply crawl away.

This phenomenon was called "sublimation".

If one couldn't handle these "muscle worms", then without a doubt that their strength would drop quite a bit.

Basically, this phenomenon would appear in Silver Rank or somewhere close to Silver Rank.

According to Annan's calculations, professions of this level had about 50 points on their main attributes.

Once the attributes exceed 40 points, it would be uncomfortable to increase their strength further because the curse absorbed would be close to the limit of what the human body could handle. In addition, there would be an unknown threshold that was different for everyone at the 50 points attribute. If one did not overcome it, they would drop directly back to 40 points.

This could be said to be a heavy hit.

Because one of the necessary conditions to advance into Gold was to "complete sublimation". In other words, having over 50 points on main attributes was only the first requirement of the Gold Rank.

Once failed... other professions might not be able to recollect to 50 points even when they had upgraded to the peak of the Silver Rank. Aside from the professions with attributes similar to wizards that were easier to upgrade, they could only make two “advancement” attempts.

That was to obtain a secondary profession and progress smoothly.

According to Salvatore, this process seemed somewhat life-threatening, except that Annan wasn't quite sure what the danger was after successfully advancing himself. But to be on the safe side, he temporarily locked the players' ability on getting secondary professions.

Only after he had clarified what the risk actually was would he release the functions back to the players again, lest they ruin their own “gaming accounts”.

“Next, it's time for the lucky draw...” Annan's expression turned serious.

He wiped the sweat from his palms onto the quilt and then reached out and clicked on the notification bar for [reward for attaining the highest evaluation rating].

As the notification gradually faded away, a new notification popped-up.

[Based on your profile and existing profession levels, you received Order Magic: Chill of the Winter Sun (Ritual).]

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[Chill of the Winter Sun (Ritual)]

[Related discipline: Frost, Light, Death]

[Ritual environment: You may freeze water naturally during the daytime, outdoors, and in outdoor temperature.]

[Ritual's requirement:

1. Influence: Any “influence” in the frost category (mandatory).
2. Material: 12 complete corpses that have lost their temperature (mandatory)
3. Curse vessel: Light-concealing ice cubes (mandatory), blizzard weather (complimentary), hail weather (complimentary), heavy rain weather (complimentary), Transcended corpse (complimentary), “Old Grandmother's” Real Name (complimentary), “Mr. Ray's” real name (complimentary)]

[Ritual description: In this ritual, the person who carries influence must be the ritual host; the host places all the corpses according to the 12 timings on the clock with their faces facing up and their mouths open. There is no requirement to the corpse's posture, but it must be as consistent as possible with the other corpses. Next, put a light-concealing ice cube in each corpse's mouth. The host stands in the middle of all the corpses, breathes naturally, and waits for the ice cube to melt. Additional materials can be added at this time. The ritual is achieved if all the ice cubes melt before sunset.]

[Ritual effect: The host's ritual spell “Chill of the Winter Sun” will alter into an aptitude type ability “Chill of the Winter Sun”. This effect will last for 12 days of winters.]



[Chill of the Winter Sun (Enhanced): Ability to freely alter breathing into “Chill of the Winter Sun.” This process will continue to exhaust the order magic.]

...What else?

Is that all?

Annan knew that an ability unlocked via a series of complex missions or achievements should be superb, but it was baffling for him because he didn't understand its specifics.

...Wait, I can ask someone, right? Annan suddenly remembered that he was no longer alone! He had a mirror!

As Annan recalled the item, he immediately tapped the [The Man in the Mirror's Newborn Mirror] out from his inventory.

Since looking into the mirror would shorten lifespan, Annan had covered it up with a cloth. But Annan had almost forgotten about it because it was not in plain sight.

Annan unveiled the cloth covering the mirror and cast his gaze into the mirror.

It could be because of the increase in his Perception attribute, he could feel that something in his body was permanently lost this time.

It cost one day of his life.

“Michelangelo Buonaro... are you there?” Annan hesitated and chose the “past” name of the Man in the Mirror.

Although he knew both forms of the [Man in the Mirror] shared the same knowledge, he instinctively felt that the older form would be more knowledgeable.

After a short delay, the mirror's surface undulated like water waves.

An old man with white hair and a white beard whom Annan had never formally met before appeared in the mirror.

His face was solemn, but his tone was gentle, “What's the matter, Annan?”

“I'd like to ask...” Annan quickly voiced his doubts.

Michelangelo nodded. He indeed knew the answer.

“You actually know what Chill of the Winter Sun is.” Hearing the questions, Michelangelo replied with a chuckle.

Are all you people from the Prophet faction so boisterous? Annan murmured instantly.

Wait, if I'm supposed to know about this... Annan was stunned as he suddenly realized something.

“It's... Old Grandmother's?”

“Yes, you have guessed it right.” Michelangelo replied slowly, “It is the blizzard exhaled by Old Grandmother at Wyrmmrest... the blizzard that enveloped the entire Austere-Winter territory and could be used as a barrier to isolate and freeze the curse.

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“This is a [Dragon's Breath] ability with Old Grandmother's traits. Among all the aptitude abilities, this is a relatively rare type. You have the blood of the Old Grandmother, so your spell output will be higher than others. Of course, it certainly wouldn't be as strong as having it unleashed by Old Grandmother herself.”

“...Ya, I got that.” Annan nodded.

He was self-aware in his heart. Although this ritual itself seemed complex, it wasn't yet at the extreme level.

Annan also had a vague impression of this ability.

He seemed to have used a similar spell in [Nightmare: White Tower] when Merlin realized that Maria was in danger and stood in front of her.

He took a deep breath in and exhaled the air slowly from his lungs as if he was smoking. White smoke then poured out slowly of his mouth and nose. There was also visible white chill air gushing out of his eyes and ears, and the surrounding temperature dropped rapidly.

It was Merlin's nightmare, after all.

The spell he had acquired should be [Chill of the Winter Sun], where Merlin channeled his energy, getting ready to unleash it.

Although Annan didn't know what would happen if Merlin exhaled that breath out, it seemed overwhelming while it was still being prepared to be cast.

Annan's heart wavered. This ability seems to be quite strong.

“Since it carries off Old Grandmother's aptitude, it is then an aptitude ability. The long-term ability obtained through the ritual will roughly be divided into 'aptitude type' and 'quirk type'.

“The aptitude type is a divine mutation within one's own body. One clear example will be the Shadow Demon of the Noah Kingdom's royal family, granting her shadow a life. As far as I know, when your [Winter's Heart] curse can be fully awakened, it will also hatch into an aptitude ability.

“The quirk ability is to call upon a specific alien creature to merge with oneself and to enhance it with a special blessing. It does not change the organ or the soul. Usually, aptitude-type abilities are based on years, while quirk abilities cannot last for more than a day in the ritual area or after the ritual ends.

“The common quirk-type abilities include the deity of fire and creation, the Father Flint's [Fire Breath], and the deity of light and purification, Mr. Ray's [Purifying Touch]. The former allows the ritual host the ability to breathe fire. Although its spell effect sounds similar to the [Chill of the Winter Sun], it is different from the special ability of Father Flint's apostle's [Spirit Casting]. As he spits fire, the [Casting Spirit] that synchronized with him would spit fire at the target as well. For the latter spell, [Lake Fairy]

will be summoned in the ritual area. One could borrow the [Purifying Touch] ability of Lake Fairy as long as one is not far from it.”

Michelangelo in the mirror explained patiently to Annan.

If this is the case... Annan quickly understood — the first ritual ability he saw, [Tongue in the Mirror], should be a quirk ability.

But...

“Kafni's ability came from ritual?” Annan asked, “Then do you know whose ritual it is?”

“That's the Silent Lady's ritual, [Animate Shadow]. It's Silent Lady's aptitude ability. She can freely shape the shadows She touches into different forms like flames, cobwebs, chariots, or castles. She can even turn them into beasts, monsters, or people.”

Michelangelo answered, “Judging from what I saw that day, Kafni should have gotten [Animate Shadow — Tentacle Form]. She is brilliant in choosing a form that isn't difficult to shape and has great potential. These tentacles connect with her on a spiritual level, thus expanding her Perception range and naturally enhancing her shadow as if they are parts of her body.”

...Silent Lady? Annan was startled.

He even thought it was a gift from some false deity.

He didn't expect it to be from an upright deity.

Did Kafni actually have contact with Silent Lady?

“Then, I have one last question.” Annan asked as he thought of this, “Do you know the nightmares of the 'memory' type? What is the collection of memories?”

“...That's the basic distortion level nightmare, but also the challenging kind.”

Michelangelo paused before answering, “If the nightmare is of a distortion level and the 'possessed' is your past self, the memory feature may be triggered. Under the memory feature, the nightmare will not seem normal. It will not distort the past but instead is completely consistent with history— unless you fail to play yourself properly and be exposed. Then, enemies called 'memory fragments' will appear. Memory fragments may be any of your past enemies, and the 'memory' feature will gradually collapse upon their appearance in the memory...

“When a nightmare has a memory feature, you don't have to think about anything. Just do what you did according to the original history, and you can complete it. This is where it's simple.

“But what's hard about it is that you have to reverse your thought process. You have to do things you dared not do and think about possibilities you didn't dare imagine to decrypt the nightmare completely. It means you have to overcome your past and think outside your box. You have to change what happened in the past.

“On the basis of decrypting the nightmare perfectly, you will complete the 'collection of memories' if you play yourself successfully throughout the nightmare. It symbolizes that you have confronted your

own heart — and the 'memories' itself is also an advancement material for some professions. I also know a ritual that can deepen the extraction of elements by burning large amounts of memories during the Gold Rank's advancement process. In short, this is a precious resource.”

Michelangelo paused and replied softly, “Also, Benjamin has always been waiting for 'memories' of his own.”

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“Light-concealing ice cubes...” Kafni tilted her head and thought for a while, “I know this item.”

Annan let out a sigh of relief.

He had just ended his conversation with the Man in the Mirror. It would be best if Kafni knew of it.

Annan adhered to one principle — you can't always depend on just one source.

If he could avoid asking the question from the Man in the Mirror, then he would. Although the Man in the Mirror owed him a favor, this favor would soon be depleted if Annan were to constantly go to him for every question and help he needed.

If another person could have a sense of gratitude towards me, it would show that they have a conscience. So I should keep the favor there.

Annan was self-aware to avoid looking for help from the Man in the Mirror all the time. Moreover, he sought the opportunity to help the Man in the Mirror instead. With that, he could pile up more favor, turning the deed into a friendship.

After all, Annan could still go to Old Vasily, Kafni, Senior Salvatore, and Bread Daryl for help besides the Man in the Mirror.

He wouldn't become a good-for-nothing piece of trash without the Man in the Mirror's help.

Yet it was unexpected to Annan that the first person he met could already give him the answer.

—Kafni actually knew about this curse vessel!

“The light-concealing ice cube is a curse vessel involving the field of frost and light. It's not considered rare.”

Kafni explained to Annan, “It doesn't appear naturally. Any one of them you may encounter is artificially made.

“It looks like an ice cube that's constantly glowing. It's about the size of a grape and cooler than the usual ice cubes. If you're further away, you would be able to feel the warmth of the light; if you touch it, you would feel the coldness of ice instead. If you immerse it in water, it will glow underwater. I know a ritual that requires placing some 'light-concealing ice cubes' into clean seawater and then lying directly in it.”

“What's the use of the ritual?” Annan asked in response.

This ritual and [Chill of the Winter Sun] required the same curse vessel, and the effect may also be similar...

However, Kafni paused as she heard his question.

She then replied calmly, "This ritual gives people the ability to have night vision. The side effect is that their skin will become extra white, smooth, and cold. It would even glow slightly in the night."

Alright, I got it.

The primary purpose of this ritual is the skin whitening effect, and the side effect is night vision.

Seeing that Annan was silent for a while, Kafni suddenly said softly and slightly aggrieved, "But I've not used this ritual before... My skin is naturally like this..."

Of course, I know that yours is natural. After all, your skin was even fairer when you were a child.

Annan didn't voice his thought since that might frame him as a hooligan. After all, they were no longer nine-year-old children.

But Annan found it a little inexplicable. It doesn't matter even if you have used it. It isn't a crime for the ladies to put on makeup.

Putting on makeup is merely enhancing the view. You don't lose any part of your body anyway!

Although Annan didn't understand what Kafni was struggling about, he changed the subject tacitly, "Do you know where I can get this curse vessel? I might need it later."

"...When do you want it then, Your Highness?" Hearing this, Kafni glanced at Annan, baffled.

She added on quickly, "I can try to make it. I haven't made it, but I know the recipe. So it should be ready soon."

"Wow, I didn't know you were good at making curse vessels." Annan was a little surprised.

Kafni looked at Annan weirdly as if he had asked her, "so, you can cook?"

But Kafni soon understood as she thought about Annan's identity.

After all, Annan had only just become a Transcended recently.

He also wasn't trained as a Transcended before this. So it made sense that he didn't understand the common knowledge of the Transcended circle.

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Kafni then explained to the newbie Annan, "This isn't difficult to make. It is mainly a matter of materials. Not all curse vessels needed the influence to be produced. Some curse vessels can be made with only raw materials."

What? You use influence to make curse vessels? Annan was stunned for a moment.

He had always thought that influence was mainly used to enter the nightmare dungeon and alternatively used to activate rituals the other times.

Now, it all makes sense.

If all influences obtained by chaos spells were used to enter nightmare dungeons, Transcendeds of this world would have long kicked the bucket in the endless high difficulty nightmares.

Kafni continued her explanation, "Light-concealing ice cubes are easy to make. All you need is either 'white liquid fire', 'red liquid fire,' or 'black liquid fire'. Then, add 'pure water' into the mixture. There are still a lot of materials left from the Light Chasing Beast last time. Pure water is an alteration product that can be made by any Alteration Wizard, which is a liquid that contains as little as possible of other substances other than water. Almost all the base materials of alteration reagents are simple and cheap. Your Senior Blacktower can also produce high-quality pure water..."

Annan wasn't sure if he was delusional, but he had always felt that Kafni's tone would become a little weird whenever she mentioned Salvatore.

Yet he still didn't interrupt and continued listening.

"The way to make it is to first freeze a large part of the pure water with any ritual in the frost domain or spells of the Energy Falteration School. Then, use a silver or crystal tool to hollow out the middle part and pour the liquid fire amounted to one-third of the existing pure water into it. Cover it with the scraps after hollowing it, and pour the pure water in while sealing it. Its shelf life will be about two months."

"It sounds simple."

Annan answered subconsciously.

It feels a little like making dessert...

Double skin milk [1]?

Or is it rum centered chocolate?

"It's indeed not difficult on principle." Although Kafni's voice was soft, she said it in a somewhat impolite way, "But it depends on your craft, Your Highness Annan."

She implied her doubts on whether Annan's hands were skillful enough.

I do have the hands of more or less 10 points in Agility.

Annan wanted to argue but suddenly felt that he might get strangled by Kafni's shadow tentacles if he were to refute. Hence, he gave up the argument obediently.

That's strange. Kafni seems to be in a bad mood today, and she is more talkative than before.

"Did you have a nightmare today?" Annan asked with concern, "Or did you have trouble sleeping?"

Kafni froze and then shook her head.

She poured a cup of tea for herself and Annan in silence and then picked up a cookie and munched on it quickly.

Annan refrained from digging deeper since it could be pretty impolite. Instead, he drank the hot tea and ate the dessert.

Those were their breakfast.

It was getting late, but both of them got up late today. If they ate a little more, they wouldn't be able to have lunch.

It would be better to have some light snacks.

"It wasn't a nightmare." Kafni lowered her head and said faintly, "It was... a good dream."

"...Would it be convenient to share it?" Annan asked warmly.

Kafni was silent for a moment and then nodded.

"Your Royal Highness Annan... no, Annan." She asked Annan softly, "Do you remember... the first time we met?"

Annan's heart wavered. He returned the question, "Do you mean five years ago?"

A rough guess appeared in his mind.

Perhaps...

### **The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 285**

"Yes, it was His Majesty's birthday... I dreamt of you back then." Kafni averted her gaze, and her complexion turned slightly red as she said this, "You were quite cute at the time..."

Are you implying that I'm not cute now? Annan thought to himself.

She held a biscuit in her right hand but didn't continue eating. Instead, the fingers on her left hand clenched somewhat uncomfortably. She then slowly put them back into her sleeves.

After a moment of silence, she said softly, "I've almost forgotten the dream by the time I woke up. But I vaguely recall that you have ended up killing my uncle."

"...Then shall I apologize?" Annan chuckled and said, "For my behavior in that dream?"

Deep down, he vaguely understood something.

No wonder the key to that nightmare was Kafni...

No wonder Kafni could be so calm. She didn't fall off track at the critical moment, nor did she panic, cry, or make any noise.

Regardless of how withdrawn she was, she couldn't become so mature without any experience.

It seems that 2 players had entered the nightmare.

It was just that Kafni did not have the memory of the future as if she was inside a real dream.

"—No need to apologize!" Kafni replied subconsciously. Her voice was a little louder than usual.

She immediately realized her impoliteness and lowered her voice, "Sorry, Annan... I just wanted to say... no, it's fine. Sorry. I don't know what's going on today too... My emotions..."

If you had really killed Phillip at the time... that would be great. Kafni's rationality made her swallow these words back down her throat.

After all, Annan was the future Austere-Winter's Grand Duke.

Not only was this inappropriate, but it might also make Annan think of her as a cruel and power-hungry person.

Why are you also such an apologetic oddball? Annan smiled helplessly and said nothing.

Suddenly, Kafni's eyes lit up, "By the way, I also recalled something!"

Her voice was a little hurried. She quickly stood up and bowed towards Annan, "That's right. Your Highness Annan... Please wait a moment!"

Annan nodded gently, signaling that he heard her.

Everything else aside, Kafni seemed a little more human after the nightmare than the previous version of her, who spoke leisurely like a ghostly spirit and seemed as if she didn't have a care in the world.

She also became fluent in speaking, and her emotions had become richer.

It was like a corpse gradually coming to life.

Could it be that the erosion rate had dropped?

Annan had some vague guesses as he watched Kafni bring over her jewelry box from the dresser.

As expected—

After Kafni opened the jewelry box, a blue gemstone was lying quietly inside.

"Frost Eye..." Annan exclaimed.

"The gift you had given me back then... it's been of great help." Kafni said with a lingering fear, "If it weren't for this, I wouldn't have realized that my memory was modified.

"It's just... I apologize. I can't give it back to you right now. I still need to use it against my enemies... and I... also have nothing of equal value to give you... I didn't know you were here. Otherwise, I would have brought all my collections with me before coming here..."

Looking at Kafni, who was trying to explain to herself, Annan was in a trance for a while.

Did the original Annan Austere-Winter also choose to give the [Frost Eye] to Kafni?

He even said something similar to me.

Annan was baffled.

He had no real memory of Annan Austere-Winter himself, and there was no possibility for his subconscious to be affected. It seemed he had given the Frost Eye to Kafni and asked her to return something of equal value to him the next time they met. Those indeed aligned with Annan's character.

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He knew himself very well.

But the Annan in history had made a similar choice to himself.

“Keep it, Kafni. It's no use to me anyway.” Annan said gently, “As for your enemies... you don't have to be afraid either.

“When spring arrives, I shall accompany you to the capital.”

“But that's too dangerous!”

“It's not dangerous, Kafni.” Annan said slowly, “I'm about to advance into the Silver Rank.”

Kafni's eyes widened slightly when she heard those words.

Under the morning sun, her ruby-like clear pupils seemed to be glimmering.

“Hasn't it only been a month since you became a Transcended?”

“Maybe I'm a genius,” replied Annan with a smile.

But Kafni stood up somewhat seriously. She walked over and touched Annan's forehead with her own.

At this distance, Annan could clearly smell the gardenias and citrus scent from Kafni's body, as well as feeling her body temperature was lower than average.

Annan thought this was some sort of a ritual or that she wanted to see if he had a fever.

But Annan soon saw a line of notification appear before his eyes.

[Kafni Noah is trying to absorb your erosion rate...]

Annan quickly interrupted her actions.

“What are you doing?”

“I want to see if my curse erodes you.” Kafni looked up in confusion and assessed Annan.

She emphasized, “It's not normal to advance so quickly.”

“Weren't you quick too?” Annan asked with a casual smile, “And the result?”

“...No. Your soul is clean. So clean that you don't look like a Transcended.” It was even shining with dazzling brilliance.

It was just like the Annan that Kafni had seen in her dreams.

She said worriedly, “Do you remember... I told you that there are demons in the capital.”

“I remember.” Hearing that it was serious business, Annan became serious, “What actually is that?”

“My mind at the time was clouded, and so perhaps I wasn't clear...” Kafni bit her lip and explained softly, “Have you heard of the Fallen path?”

“Actually, the 'Transcended path' that we often mention is the 'Ascension path'. Instead, the combination of the Ascension path and the Fallen path is then the Transcended path.

“If the Ascension path is to continuously purify nightmares and extract curses, later defeating the curse with strong will and finally reshaping the soul with one's strong desire to reach the 'Dyed' rank, which is the current 'Gold' rank...

“The Fallen path is then to erode oneself with a curse ultimately.

“On the two paths, only the Bronze rank overlaps. If you choose to purify your soul, you will reach the Silver Rank... If you choose to be overflowed with curses, you will step onto the Fallen path. The Fallen path does not have a Silver Rank... You can go directly to a new ranking similar to 'Dyed'. This means that they have all misunderstood. I'm not a Silver Rank without curse vessels... I'm simply on the Fallen path.

“There is also a need for some kind of intense desire, but the desire is not to reshape the soul, but instead to reshape the body.

“...In other words, it is to be a demon. A demon with self-awareness... just like the people who have lost control.”

Kafni paused as she said this and looked toward Annan, “After becoming a demon, we can no longer carry the Truth because our soul is still mortal.

“There is only one exception. That is, if the demon received blessings from an upright deity who is willing to cleanse the erosion on their bodies... In that case, the demon would become an 'apostle' and gain immortality like a demi-deity. They would just have to respond to summons from rituals... this is the price of taking shortcuts.”

—The summoned creature in rituals.

Kafni took a deep breath and looked at Annan.

“And ever since I met you... my erosion rate has been continuously dropping.”

### **The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 286**

Freezing Water Port city's main office.

“...Whose letter?” Salvatore looked curiously at the letter that was teleported to his table.

This was a simple and common ritual — three purple pine wood and a piece of amethyst were enough to construct a one-way teleportation portal. Although the portal couldn't deliver anything and everything, people who mastered this ritual could use a special aluminum foil to send messages to each other.

Almost every wizard tower had a similar tradition mainly used to notify tutors to come back to class. The cost of the ritual itself was minimal, but it required a code similar to a “phone number” — this number only had two digits, and each wizard tower had an independent numbering system. Therefore, one would generally get their number when they have reached the Silver Rank.

Salvatore had also gotten a copy in advance because of his special status.

It was impossible for the tutors at the wizard tower to stay in the tower all year round when they were Transcendeds guaranteed to attain Silver Rank. They also had their own matters to deal with, family and friends to socialize with, as well as materials, curse vessels, and influences to look for.

Although there were plenty of materials in the wizard tower for these tutors, the influence was hard to come by. There wouldn't even be corpses in the wizard tower after a nightmare, let alone a nightmare.

Take Swamp's Black Tower as an example. Although the children they recruited were all around the age of fourteen, their teaching model differed from the schools outside.

—Because they didn't have teaching materials.

On the one hand, the Great Wizards were too lazy to prepare them. On the other hand, the diligent wizards would not necessarily be acknowledged by other wizards.

Every year, Swamp's Black Tower would recruit new wizard apprentices. There would usually be about sixty or seventy of them, no more than a hundred at most.

The tower was said to be a wizard school, but there was only one tower in total in the continent. Although this tower was enormous, it was simultaneously used for learning, research, and lodging. So, they couldn't recruit too many people.

In the first two years, a typical wizard apprentice would have to learn and apply the general knowledge of spells, common knowledge in the Transcended circle, mathematics, Elvish language, basic rune, painting and sculpture, and hand-to-hand combat, as well as military weapons. These subjects were elective courses offered every three months. There were no textbooks nor holidays. If there was anything they didn't understand, they would have to either look it up in the library or inquire about it with a close tutor.

After learning all these and passing the exams, they would be allowed to choose their school specialization and construct a spell. If the apprentice were a little smarter, this would take about two years... If they were a little dumber, some wizard apprentices had yet to pass the exams even after five or six years.

Then, they would be left on their own once they had chosen a school specialization. There would be one to three classes in a month announced one week in advance, where wizard apprentices and wizards of the same school would attend together. After that, it would be up to the tutors to decide what the content would be about. Of course, attendance was not compulsory as long as one could pass the exams of each school and advance to graduate.

For example, Alteration Wizards were tested on glibness.

They would basically be required to look up information on their own in addition to the primary classes. Different wizards had a different level of access, mainly separated into classes of apprentices who had just been recruited, apprentices who had chosen their specializations, apprentices who had advanced into wizards, wizards who were preparing to advance to Great Wizard. The only limit was — if they were to leave before becoming an advanced wizard, they would not be welcomed anymore.

Of course, tutors would advise those who still couldn't advance into wizards after many years to quit. They could also stay if they indeed didn't want to quit, so long as they didn't affect other people.

After all, aside from these wizard apprentices being talented children recommended by the outside wizards, there was also a special admission program called "Patrons".

Anyone could try if they wanted to. After all, they wouldn't starve to death even if they failed to learn the magic.

There were no tuition fees at the wizard tower. After all, the wizards weren't short of money... but manpower instead.

As a price, one would have to serve at the wizard tower for five to fifteen years as a way of giving back if they managed to advance to a wizard or a Great Wizard in the wizard tower.

Of course, they could also become a tutor if they could pass the tower master's exam. That way, they would get paid.

However, these salaries didn't mean much to the Silver Rank wizards. It was easy for them to make money, and they didn't have much to spend on. The main thing that could tempt these Silver Rank wizards to stay was the library at the inner section of the wizard tower.

This was the core component of the wizard tower. The wizard tower would determine and record the value of every book read by every wizard who graduated from the wizard tower and then upload it to the library. After they die, their curse vessels would also be delivered to the wizard tower... Some old and powerful wizards might even volunteer sacrificing themselves to the wizard tower so that they could move freely in the tower in a spirit state, projected state, or constructed state. Their curse would naturally be consumed completely by the wizard tower... That was on the premise of getting recognition from the wizard tower.

The wizard tower itself was a giant, living curse vessel.

There was no such thing as spell scrolls in this world. Also, the experimental products were on demand to be sold. Alteration wizards could make easy money just by selling some things; Prophet wizards could also make a lot of money simply through fortune-telling, whereas Idol wizards were the masters of using curses to kill and the masters of countering curses that all the influential people respected.

If one did not wish to continue advancing after attaining Silver Rank, they could live like an ordinary person.

Spells were just a professional skill... At least in the eyes of most wizards, the spells themselves were not the primary goal of their lives.

The pursuit of great power, authority, money, societal influence... These were the actual choices of many wizards.

To look for materials to display rituals to solidify their aptitude abilities, extend their lives and optimize their bodies, or do whatever they wanted to and only look for jobs when they ran out of money. These were the life trajectories of wizards who graduated from the wizard tower.

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Although the path of transcendence was for ascendancy, not everyone had that desire.

In other words... Not everyone could let go of the good life they already had in their hands, risk even greater dangers, and continue to climb upward.

The pathway ascending from the Silver Rank to Gold Rank was called "Dyed".

The huge risk of breaking through the limits of mortals, the desire to alter one's own personality, to destroy one's old soul and remodel it... Every failed attempt may lead to one's doom in each of these levels.

Salvatore had once only wanted to advance to silver as well.

He only wanted to become a noble Great Wizard and be invited to become a consultant at an earl or a marquis' home. It was either that or to open up a secret shop anywhere in the royal capital to sell the items he made. Then, he would earn some money to buy a few manors, hire seven or eight servants, and then marry a young and beautiful girl and have two or three children. This was his initial life plan, simple and unpretentious.

Yet somehow...

Such a future had gradually become blurred in Salvatore's mind.

"Read the letter," The shadow whispered in his ear, "I guess that the tower master is asking for you to go back. You've wasted too much time, Salvatore."

"My guess as well," Salvatore said casually, opening the envelope.

Salvatore first seemed a little surprised as he read the letter, and then his expression gradually turned serious.

The letter was sent to him by the tower master, and the content was straightforward. They had already learned that Salvatore had successfully obtained the hammer, urging him to return quickly and prepare for his advancement to the Silver Rank.

This was nothing. Salvatore had already expected it.

But he noticed that the tower owner referred to Annan as "the little duke" in the letter. So he didn't believe that the tower master had made an error.

So, they already know that it's Annan and not Don Juan?

This showed that someone had already checked this fact using the spells of the Prophet school.

This was also within Salvatore's expectations.

After all, Annan couldn't reflect the incoming Prophet spell or disguise the identity error detected through Prophet magic. He also didn't bring a substitute. High-level Prophet spells could definitely get this information.

But why did the tower master say that it would be dangerous to be by Annan's side?

"It's probably about Annan's trip to the capital in a few months..." Salvatore thought worriedly.

If the tower master has learned of Annan's true identity, could there be anyone in the capital who has also known about it?

Are they going to cause trouble for Annan?

What will happen to Annan when he goes to the capital this time?

Will someone try to curse and murder Annan?

"This can't do. I have to tell Annan before I go..." Salvatore murmured. Crystals condensed at his fingertips, and the letter was engulfed in flames.

He then pulled out a piece of paper and began to write something on it quickly.

I need to complete the advancement ritual as soon as possible.

If all goes well, I should be able to advance within a month.

Swamp's Black Tower is not too far from the capital.

"If something happens to you, I'll come help you, Annan..." Salvatore muttered.

On the other hand, the shadow, who had always liked bickering, was silent about this.

### **The Righteous Player(s) C287– Student Longjing Tea**

Chapter 287: Student Longjing Tea

Luckily, Salvatore didn't leave immediately after sending the letter.

He had already written to Annan after receiving the letter from Black Tower. So, he began packing his luggage after the letter had been sent. The things he packed were mainly the materials, reagents, and utensils in the basement.

As it turned out, Annan had already rushed back to Freezing Water Port before Salvatore had finished packing his things.

"We're so close to each other. Wouldn't it be easier if you just summon me back to talk?" Annan said displeasingly, "What did you have to write a letter for..."

"I was simply worried that you were busy." Salvatore sneered as he said, "What if you weren't able to rush back within an hour and a half upon receiving my voice message... Wouldn't that delay things?"

The truth was that Salvatore had forgotten because he had a tight daily work schedule. He subconsciously thought that Annan would also be busy.

Yet, for Annan, this meticulous work could be assigned to the players.

It could be delegated as a mission to give experience points or affection ratings, and even in the form of payment if Annan were to be more considerate.

At the same time, it would also allow the players to experience the joy of managing the city and handling government affairs.

Isn't that a win-win situation?

Roseburg has been operating stably anyway with nothing major happening. Plus, the job posts assigned to the players are the positions that were once corrupted or assassinated by the Rotten Man believers.

Since this bunch of villains could do the work, surely the players can manage it.

There aren't much expectations for the players to perform well. It will be fine as long as the governing system doesn't collapse.

Even if it were to collapse, it would be none of my business.

It's not my home anyway!

Annan narrated it righteously.

According to Annan's observations, these players were doing really well. They mainly had a great passion for work.

The players mainly spent their sleep time in their original world to log into the game.

They would probably not enjoy having to move bricks and chop trees during their bedtime. But, it was fun for them to just easily upgrade their levels just by drinking some tea in the office, signing some documents, having some snacks, reading some books, and even going out for a walk during their free time. This was already pretty good treatment.

Annan wouldn't turn the players into drudgery who didn't get paid or the mistreated workers with no rest time. The players would also clock in and out according to schedule and have more than enough free time.

Delicious Wind Goose and the new player Longjing Tea had good management skills among these players. Annan observed that these two were probably the oldest and most capable among this batch of players, judging from their communication skills.

Aside from that, Annan had also slowly picked out some talents who were not exactly strong in combat but had surprisingly good management and organizational skills.

Two of them seemed to have an accounting background, while the rest were from logistics management. There were also a few players who appeared to be streamers who focused mainly on simulated managerial games in the real world.

I'll let them practice with Roseburg first. After they have gained proficiency, I'll bring them back to Austere-Winter. Annan thought.

The previous backlog of government affairs in Roseburg had been dealt with. Everything returned to smooth operation. These players who Annan had summoned urgently for work could now be another batch of laid-off employees.

Of course, it was not to make them unemployed on the spot.

Annan had assigned them different tasks based on their behaviors.

This was called “The one and only hidden mission obtained upon fully demonstrating one's abilities.”

“...You want me to get Longjing Tea to Black Tower?” Salvatore rubbed his temples in distress as he looked at the well-behaved, well-mannered Longjing Tea behind Annan. He said, “This indeed isn't much of a problem. His ability to self-learn Edict spells shows that he definitely has the talent of a wizard. It's no big problem that no one had recommended him. Although I don't have a say in recommending someone into the tower yet, I am still part of Black Tower. Such privilege wouldn't be a problem.

“However, if he wants to join Black Tower, he wouldn't be able to graduate and leave if he failed in becoming a Transcended. Even if he graduates and is able to leave, he will still have to serve the Black Tower for five years.”

Salvatore explained the rules of Swamp's Black Tower to Annan.

I know, I know. He would need to behave as a normal student.

Annan nodded and asked, “What type of work is it usually? How is the workload?”

“The workload isn't heavy at all. They're wizards, after all. They wouldn't be assigned to do any labor work too.”

Salvatore shrugged, “The task is usually to help their tutors craft things, or to collect some magical materials, influences, and what not at the ancient ruins, wilderness, those kinds of places. They might also go out to help buy some things or recommend talented children they find along the way back to Black Tower. In short, it's to run errands.”

“And what if he doesn't have a tutor?” Annan asked, “If I remember correctly... Swamp's Black Tower didn't seem to have a tutor from the Edict School, right? So I just wanted him to study some books and consolidate his foundation.”

—and give me a copy of the Swamp's Black Tower collection while he's at it.

It didn't matter if there were no nightmares in Swamp's Black Tower.

The “Secret Eye” faction that Annan had activated previously could now be utilized.

One could gain experience steadily just by learning through copied books. They could even be granted the reputation points from the “Secret Eye” faction so that players who chose wizard apprenticeship could advance themselves within their school with that knowledge. With that, Annan wouldn't have to give out too much of his affection ratings as currencies for the players.

What then could the reputation points of the “Secret Eye” faction be exchanged for?

It would depend on what Annan had at the time.

Naturally, the price would also be discussed then.

After all, wouldn't your reputation points be useless if you couldn't see the NPC of the “Secret Eye” faction?

“Hmm... That's true.” Salvatore mused, “If it's just to read...”



He frowned as he was in deep thought for a moment and then asked Annan softly.

“How about this, Annan? I'll bring him to tower first, let him self-learn with those books, and then come for classes to solidify his basics further. After that, I'll sign up for a tutor qualification after I've successfully passed the exam and advanced in my rank, and then recruit him.”

“That's fine.”

Annan said with a smile, “I believe in your character and capability. Use him as an errand boy as much as you want, and you can also give him any task. I'll arrange with you if and when I need him. Take the exam as soon as possible then, senior. I might still find you a batch of wizard apprentices in the future. I'll send them all to be your apprentice then.”

“Are you trying to poach the Storm Tower and the Howling White Tower?” Salvatore asked worriedly, “Is that okay?”

“Of course it is.” Annan replied affirmatively, “No need to worry.”

Annan would just have to give Salvatore a mission authority when the time came. That way, the tasks that Salvatore had granted to the wizard apprentices could be used as feeder tasks to be altered into experiences. However, the everyday experience gains would still be extracted from the experience pool with a limit imposed. This was to prevent the wizard apprentices from getting addicted to Salvatore and stopping their learning...

“Alright then, I'll take him with me.” Salvatore agreed.

He soon instructed worriedly, “When you go to the capital, you must be careful.”

“That Hermetic School always gives me an off feeling. I will go to the tower master and ask for information about Nicholas Flamel when I return. If there is any problem, I will write to Freezing Water Port at any time. Remember to keep someone here to help forward the letter to the capital.”

It's not that troublesome. You can simply tell Longjing Tea if there's anything, I'll be able to hear it...

But Annan still didn't say it out directly.

Instead, he hinted, “If the information is extremely crucial, you can give it to Longjing Tea. They all have a way to contact me during an emergency.”

Like posting an SOS message on the forum or something.

Or he could even just dial the other players' number directly offline, making an exaggerated thirteen consecutive calls.

Isn't that much faster than writing a letter?

This is the power of technology.

Let me tell you, Ron [1]. This is so much better than a magic wand.

## **The Righteous Player(s) C288– It's Time To Release the Players**

Chapter 288: It's Time To Release the Players

Salvatore was hesitant after hearing this.

After thinking for a while, he still said to Annan, "Then can you give me a copy of the magic in contacting you?"

No way, I want to give it to you too.

But I can't...

Annan shook his head with a wry smile and explained, "This won't work. They have a contractual relationship with me... the one you've seen before."

"The contract that can be used for resurrection?"

Thinking of Yiyi, who suffered terribly that day, Salvatore suddenly said, "Is that still effective when you are so far away?"

"It will work as long as I'm not dead, but that resurrection could consume a lot of curses if they're too far away from me. Also, that will be put me in a vulnerable state for a while.

"But if it's really dangerous, you can ask him to scout the path for you." Annan reminded Salvatore, "They don't die after all."

...Or rather, it was a reminder to Salvatore's shadow.

Annan was well-aware in his heart that even if he told Salvatore that the players could be resurrected and could be utilized to tank the damage at a critical moment, Salvatore still wouldn't do it.

Annan had a clear understanding of this idiot's personality.

Salvatore was an idiot.

He was different from Annan.

If Annan did a good deed, it was only because he did it without hesitation or regret based on his morality, common sense, and judgment. At the same time, the outcome was attributed as a form of kindness.

Salvatore, like Annan, didn't care about the mundane compass of justice and evil or right and wrong. This might also be the reason why the two of them could quickly become friends.

But what separated Salvatore from Annan was that he had strong compassion, and he didn't like to trouble others.

As long as he noticed others encountering trouble, it would be difficult for him to just leave. He belonged to that kind of people who still donated money to the beggar even if he was aware that shady groups were manipulating the beggars in the dark.

Of course, he wouldn't give too much, but just satisfy the quota for the beggars that day. He wouldn't root out the criminals either because he didn't know if his actions would screw things up further.

All of it was mainly because of Salvatore's inferiority complex.

He always thought that he lacked talent, so he never fantasized that he could be a hero or that he could save others. Thus, he didn't meddle or do what he thought he couldn't. Instead, he would only do what he could and protect those within his limits.

He didn't want to see other people suffer because of him.

As for how those who he had saved would view him and how those who he didn't save would view him, it didn't matter much to Salvatore.

However, the situation was different from the shadow.

Shadow was the opposite of Salvatore, a selfish personality.

She wouldn't take the initiative to hurt others because it was meaningless — just like what Salvatore had always pursued, “meaningless kindness that treats the symptoms but not the root cause”. But this “meaningless” became meaningful in front of the shadow.

Because of this, she could only pursue “meaningful” evil.

Apparently, Salvatore was unaware of his true talents.

In other words, he hadn't yet noticed now that the state and character of the shadow would change at any time according to his state.

After all, the shadow was his “reflection”.

Based on the restriction that “what you do must have meaning”, she could only abuse others to accomplish her purpose.

Efficient, selfish, confident, and without entrusting anyone like a lone wolf playing a high-rating game.

Annan believed that the shadow would be able to make good use of “Longjing Tea”, an immortal player at a critical moment.

This was the tacit understanding between Annan and the shadow.

Even if a person were mediating between the two, even if they weren't talking directly, they would still be able to exchange information.

Indeed, Longjing Tea was the “moving eye” that Annan infiltrated into Swamp's Black Tower. He could be regarded as the “spy” who stole knowledge from the wizard tower's library.

At the same time, Longjing Tea was the danger detector and bodyguard Annan gave to Salvatore to save his life.

If something happened to Annan, Longjing Tea would find a way to inform Salvatore too.

However, Salvatore never thought about what if something happened to him.

At that time, the shadow would need to make the right choice for him.

Whether it was to let Longjing Tea buy time... or let Longjing Tea ask Annan for help.

“Then, I shall go, Annan.” With the help of Annan and the players, Salvatore quickly packed up.

“Don't you need to bring Sage's Stone? There is only one left.” Annan asked, “You crafted the item yourself. It's the proof that you made Sage's Stone while you're still in Bronze Rank.”

“It's only half-finished. It's not yet a Sage's Stone...” Salvatore smiled bitterly, “Even if I take it back, I'm afraid they won't believe it easily.”

“How can they not believe it?” Annan raised his eyebrows, “If you do it again in front of them, won't you be able to prove everything?”

Hearing this, Salvatore shook his head again and again, “Forget it. It's still meaningless. Also, I don't have the confidence to duplicate the process again perfectly. I managed to do it that time with external help. It's all my luck. There's no need to waste materials.”

When Salvatore mentioned “external help”, he just brushed through it.

But Annan still knew what he meant.

These three Sage's Stones were all the Alteration products the shadow produced.

After all, the material of Sage's Stone was the wizard's bone marrow.

Whether these materials came from the deceased of those wizards from the same tower, or the remains left by the executed Black Wizard, each material represented a human life.

Salvatore didn't dare to use these materials without the confidence to complete Sage's Stone.

This was also the reason why his previous research was in a deadlock. Although he had done his best in the theory aspect, he still felt that there could be a problem with his formula. So he didn't dare to combine the materials... until he fell asleep.

The shadow used his body to synthesize Sage's Stone.

Once the shadow was summoned again, it was possible to craft Sage's Stone again.

Salvatore's self-esteem, responsibility, or something else stopped him from relying on the shadow's outstanding achievements to be recognized by others.

Salvatore was adamant in separating himself from the shadow and was still wary of the shadow's presence.

This showed that even though Salvatore had successfully cooperated with the shadow once after injecting Sage's Stone, he was still wary of the shadow and still intended to seal his own shadow.

“You should take this Sage's Stone.” Salvatore instructed Annan, “It's likely that Nicholas Flamel is in Gold Rank. After living for so long, his strength is expected to surpass the ordinary Gold Rank. If he used Sage's Stone to live until now... The Sage's Stone in your hand may save your life in critical moments, no matter you use it against him or to flatter him.

“Besides that, I have an intuition that you will advance again after being a Transcended for a month. I know it sounds baffling... Here is what I have summarized in the past few days, and you may be able to use the stone for advancement.”

Salvatore handed Annan a piece of paper, "Be careful, Annan. Don't die."

Annan didn't even look at the paper and put it away solemnly.

He nodded earnestly to Salvatore, "I will."

"...I'll try my best to finish the exam in May, and then I'll go to the capital to find you. Goodbye, Annan."

"See you in May then, Salvatore," replied Annan softly.

Watching Salvatore and Longjing Tea leaving, Annan sighed lightly.

After some preparation, I should get ready to advance into silver.

The remaining availability of Nightmare: Gallery was running out. The players' adventure group had almost finished exploring the nightmare.

At that time, Annan had to reserve at least one more entry into the "gallery" to advance into the Silver Rank.

After all, Annan was quite familiar with the dungeon. It was best to use this nightmare to fulfill the requirements of the advancement mission.

The players were about to use up the entries into the beginner dungeon instance.

Then, it's almost time to let the players out.

### **The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 289**

"Although I yearn for adventure, I miss grilled fish and steamed chicken at this time..." The Wandering Child sighed at sunset, "If only I could come out with food."

He had embodied the essence of the "Wandering" Child.

Half a month after the end of the prologue, the Gallery Nightmare had finally expired.

The next stage of the storyline would trigger 3 months later.

Wandering Child knew from the beginning that they wouldn't be doing the same dungeon over and over again. Of course, it was great to increase the level steadily while enjoying the free leisure and free food, but he always felt that something was missing.

It was until Annan summoned him to the viscount house the day before yesterday that he finally realized what he was missing.

"...Elven ruins?" Wandering Child repeated.

Only then did he learn that there were elves in this world?

"Yes, a relic from the Yaselan Empire's era. At that time, elves and centaurs are the rulers of this land."

Annan briefly introduced the history and explained, “This is the information I have gotten from the senior... It's a ruin that the Swamp's Black Tower has explored with a moderate danger level. Since your profession comes from the elves, getting the next promotion requires exploring the elven ruins.

“I'm going to distribute this mission to four people. You shall lead the team with Dove, Suuankou, and Citalopram, backing you up with their respective profession of [Hunter], [Lurker], and [Half-dead Enchantress]. This ruin is located in the jungle. Even if you know the approximate direction and walk toward there in a straight line, it will take 4 days to reach there. Therefore, you need a [Hunter] to survive in that place. In addition, there are the possibilities of traps lurking, so you have an [Lurker] in your lineup. Suuankou is a trap master, you should trust his skill. Last but not least, [Half-dead Enchantress] doesn't need much healing and sleep, so she saves the consumption of supplies and offers great help in guarding the camp through the night. Moreover, she can phase through a wall and thus a valuable asset in exploring the ruin.

“I'll give you the path and password into the ruin. If you're lucky, Dove and Suuankou may be able to get clues to the rare advancement method in it.” So Annan instructed the Wandering Child at the time.

Exploring the jungle's depths wasn't a simple adventure that could be carried out with weapons, bedding, and reagents.

Without the relevant knowledge and skills, there were the risks of getting lost, sick, hungry, thirsty, and poisoned.

Luckily, Annan was merciful and allocated Dove to the team.

“You don't have to worry about food.”

A calm female voice sounded, “You're lucky. We have ample food in this place. With my help, you won't starve to death. With you, we can also get enough freshwater. Is the fire ready?”

Dove dropped a young deer that she carried over.

There was only one wound on the deer — at the spine.

The young deer wasn't completely dead yet, and it still struggled from time to time. But under this kind of injury, it couldn't jump up and escape even if it was good at pretending to be dead.

“Sure, the fire is almost up and ready.” The Wandering Child immediately replied, “Don't worry too much. Suuankou and Citalopram aren't online yet.”

As the Wandering Child spoke, he raised his head and glanced at the majestic huntress, who wasn't quite tall.

Dove's brown hair wasn't long at all, and it looked neat after being tied into a ponytail. A serval silently followed behind her. The pet seemed a little short.

Before his departure, the Wandering Child got the military longbow behind him from Annan. As for Dove's original short bow, it was deposited in the inventory readied to be swapped into after entering the ruins.

While Dov's voice was mature and reliable, her face looked a little too youthful. She was also short in height, about the same size as Jiu Er.

...of course, so does her figure too.

But according to Dove, those were adjustments she made in character customization, which was in the opposite approach to Lin Yiyi.

She shrunk her breasts a lot to avoid them getting in the way when shooting arrows. But, she didn't quite understand why altering the breast size consumed the limits in beautification effect.

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For the remaining beautification limits, she also didn't use the function to increase her size and height because she knew that this might lead to her inaccuracy in the spatial distance.

However, Dove wasn't putting those functions to waste either.

Her habit was to make the best use of everything.

She first used the remaining beautification quota to optimize her muscles that she couldn't train up to normally and enhanced her flexibility at the same time. Then, she smoothened her skin which had been exposed to the sun all year-round and made them less rough. She didn't proceed with the character customization until the beautification effect's limit was filled up.

Although this didn't directly increase her Constitution and Strength, it made her feel that her stamina had increased.

Dove also found a certain rule from it — if she tried to use the beautification effect to increase her attribute, then the consumption of the functionality would be rapid. Otherwise, the beautification effect wouldn't reach the limit so fast.

With the existing ratio, if she used up her beautification limits to increase her muscle or optimize her eyesight, she should be able to increase one of the attributes close to 1 point.

"I'll finish roasting the meat in a while, and I'll go offline early after I eat it. I have to urge those two kids to exercise... I'll be back online in eight hours, about 3 a.m. It would be best if you waited for the two of them to come online first and then travel forward for a while in the direction I planned for you. When I come back, I will take you to the next station."

Dove said casually, "Before that, I'll leave my body to you, Cade."

"It's okay. You're pretty light anyway." The Child smiled.

It wasn't nighttime yet when Dove went offline. The Child carried a sleeping bag with Dove on his back.

After all, he advanced from the swordsman profession and was the party member with the highest Strength attribute among the group. Moreover, he wasn't stuck with the only option to fight in melee now. So, carrying another person wouldn't affect his battle.

There was also the advantage of having a small size, such as being convenient to be carried around.

The bodies Annan made for the players were ordinary human bodies rather than digitally simulated puppets — that was to say, not sleeping for a long time would ruin the body. Taking daily necessities into account, Annan instilled an anti-addiction system for the players to be offline for at least 8 hours a day so that players must log off in their sleep. After that, the players reached a higher level and better attributes, Annan would gradually relax this rule under the pretext of giving more authority to the players.

It was possible to go offline in the tent, but the tent wasn't a safe area. If a wild beast or a malicious person were attacking them, causing their physical death, their level would drop by one level after coming back online again.

So before arriving at the ruins, they had to go offline in batches to guard others' bodies.

Half-dead Enchantress didn't need sleep, but Wen Xue had to go offline to eat and work. Suuankou's "leave because of sister's marriage" was also insufficient. He had already gone back to school.

Coupled with [Half-dead Enchantress] and [Lurker], the party's fighting power at night would soar.

Considering the routines of Citalopram and Suuankou, several of them turned the game time upside down.

They would advance through the night and sleep in a safe place during the day.

When Citalopram and Suuankou went to work and school, and when the Wandering Child stream during the day, Dove would be responsible for guarding their bodies. After all, she was self-employed and had no work pressure. Currently, she lived in Jiu Er's house as a martial art coach, and she had no jet lag.

Also, she had the time to watch the streams while playing with her cat.

Anyway, she had adapted to life in the jungle, which was a much more comfortable environment for her.

She wouldn't die, become stronger, and see animals she had not met before. Most importantly, she had reliable teammates.

In addition to conjuring freshwater, Dove had little chance to see the Wandering Child's other abilities. After all, what attacked them were ordinary animals. After having her serval detect the hostile animals, she would take them down with one arrow at a time... and some animals were eliminated directly in Suuankou's traps.

This helped her save some effort, and this stream was quite good.

For example, Longjing Tea would stream "I'm a wizard apprentice in Black Tower" for 16 hours every day. The stream title of Delicious Wind Goose's trip to the capital with a carriage would be later converted to "Infiltration". At the same time, Yiyi would give her updates on time every day in the stream "Little Annan's Daily".

Since Lin Yiyi was the only player specializing in defense who didn't need to hold a shield, she was also the only player who stayed by Annan's side, continued to serve as a bodyguard, and enjoyed her time leisurely while completing her weekly missions.



## The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 290

As far as Dove knows, apart from her group and Longjing Tea's who was the only wizard among the players, the other party who received the special mission would be Delicious Wind Goose's group.

But their mission wasn't to collect materials or explore the details of changing one's profession.

Instead, they were heading to the capital for adventure.

Annan wasn't stupid. Since he had the players to scout the path, he wouldn't be doing those risky deeds himself.

Annan gave a mission to Delicious Wind Goose to sneak into the capital and collect information before he arrived. After that, he would release new tasks at any time according to the situation. Anyway, after the "update", he could already delegate missions remotely.

This was the first time Annan used this feature.

The team was in the setting of an elite squad consisting of four people, but there seemed to be a small issue.

Besides the Delicious Wind Goose being in charge of communication and Jiu Er being proficient in combat, the remaining two players were "Van Helsing" and "Yokai Sensei", who had joined the Silver Sire Church.

They had only mastered one divine art because they had only acquired one holy light engraving, which was usually provided to the newcomers upon joining the teaching.

But the great thing about the two of them was that they both wisely spent their only holy light engraving on buying the divine art [Eternal Youth], the only healing divine art. As a result, they became the rare healing profession with a status comparable to a national treasure.

Indeed, there were basically no players in this batch who could heal except the two.

Van Helsing was a balanced swordsman who prioritized more in the Agility attribute. His next goal was to complete the mission from the church. After getting the next holy light engraving, he would learn [Sharp Object]. Then, the next profession advancement for him would probably be the agile [Fencer] or [Duelist].

Indeed, Van Helsing was still a Level 10 Swordsman, with his secondary profession being a priest. He failed to meet the advanced requirements in his previous dungeon instance.

On the other hand, Yokai Sensei had attained advancement and became a Transcended.

As the healing tank majored in physique and parry, he planned to follow the path of healing.

His upcoming profession after advancement would be "a knight specialized in shield". It was also the only profession advancement that allowed the players to wear plate armor or heavy armor and focused on shields.

If it weren't for his ability to heal, he was actually the most orthodox tank.

In terms of defense alone, Yiyi's stats were worse than him.

But Yiyi's advantage was that she was the only tank proficient in agility — a defender who utilized parry with no armor and no shield.

On the other hand, Yokai Sensei had to wear his heavy armor and put on a shield on his back. This set of equipment was purchased with the accumulated affection ratings of both him and Delicious Wind Goose.

To carry these loads, they needed a horse, which Annan sponsored.

In the end, Yokai Sensei being the only healer and the stable tank among the players, was assigned to the Goose's elite squad.

Then, the squad was complemented with the addition of a flexible [Swordmaster] who had learned three sets of swordsmanship (Basic Swordsmanship, Bodyguard Swordsmanship, and Military Swordsmanship) and also a [Berserker] who had the most serious burst damage.

Annan was quite invested in this squad.

The rest of the players couldn't help but complain: Those are pretty extreme cases.

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But as long as they knew about Jiu Er's fighting style, they would realize that having two healers might not be enough.

The “spell casting material” that Annan prepared for the squad alone was worth 40 silver coins.

There were travel expenses and also healing potions.

In the beginning, Delicious Wind Goose felt that the money was quite a lot, and there might be a couple of coins left for them to keep. After all, including eating, drinking, lodging, and renting a carriage along the way, the squad would only spend up to 20 silver coins.

When they first departed, they discussed about distributing the remaining money after arriving at the capital.

Unexpectedly, after they encountered a wave of bandits, they found that Jiu Er's participation in battle took resources worth at least 6 silver coins to recover her lost health. Half of the given silver coins were used already, after including the treatment cost of the rest of the squad members.

After that, they didn't dare to let Jiu Er participate in a fight.

Once Jiu Er entered the battle again, this little money probably wouldn't allow them to survive until they reached the capital.

They simply made Jiu Er disguised as “the eldest daughter who ran away from home but found that she didn't have enough funds and was forced to return home.” The remaining three members of the squad

were disguised as a housekeeper, a priest, and a guard supporting the eldest daughter in her journey. Then, they had successfully infiltrated into a caravan.

It was probably because there were two of them capable of utilizing divine arts for healing, plus the four of them appeared civilized, unlike mercenaries or robbers. Moreover, Jiu Er was indeed the daughter of an affluent family (TN: In her real life), while Delicious Wind Goose was quite persuasive in his words. Under Delicious Wind Goose's careful negotiation, they had actually gotten a carriage on the condition of providing treatment (fee), and they were able to eat and live for free.

After the caravan reached its destination, Delicious Wind Goose realized that it was a good idea and soon contacted another caravan.

In the end, they turned into those "budget" content creators for traveling, and they didn't have to spend a penny.

Delicious Wind Goose was also particularly good at chatting. As he mingled around, he gradually collected some information and soon filled in the loopholes in the identities they adopted. Even the standard of food had improved to another level. There were a few merchants in the second batch of caravans who insisted on giving them some gifts.

But in short, it was much faster and safer than the squad journeying forward alone.

"Goodbye then, everyone." Delicious Wind Goose politely bid farewell to the second caravan.

They had officially left the North Sea Territory and arrived at Tasque, the Tasque County's capital.

There were 16 towns in Tasque County, which was the northernmost part of Count Shelley's territories, and it was also a relatively small one. After passing through four towns further south of the Tasque, one could see the northern suburbs of the royal capital.

Delicious Wind Goose had inquired that another name of Count Philip Shelley was the Supreme Court Justice Philip, the highest judge of the Noah Kingdom.

His younger brother, Sir Stilwell Shelley, was the Noah Kingdom's Chief of Police.

Tasque, where Noah Kingdom's primary prison was located, had strict security. Therefore, many caravans would choose to rest here.

"But how do we get out? That's another problem. This place is too close to the capital. Can we still use the previous excuse? The risk is too high."

Van Helsing asked helplessly on a deserted street corner, "Yokai Sensei and I can go to the local church to stay, and it won't be a problem for us to enter or leave the city. But what about the two of you?"

"The two of us will find a motel first and get two rooms to stay. Luckily, our previous efforts are not in vain. Our remaining money should be enough for the rest of the journey. We could just walk there in our worst-case scenario since we have covered half the distance to arrive at the royal capital. Anyway, law and order here are better. There is no need to worry about ambushes on our journey."

Delicious Wind Goose replied confidently, "Let's stay here for two days first. Then, I'll go and ask around for more information. If there is a convoy to take us into the capital, that would be great."

“I hope so...” For some reason, Van Helsing felt a little uneasy.