

Righteous Ps 421

The Righteous Player(s) C421– Annan's Real Nightmare

Chapter 421: Annan's Real Nightmare

So, that's the real main mission.

After the false dream collapsed, Annan finally entered his real nightmare.

What was presented to him was a world on the verge of being broken.

Looking down, it was a bottomless abyss.

A broken wall, like a vast ship, was slowly sinking downward.

The direction of gravity was unreal. There were even some horizontally flipped ruins that were turned upside down 180 degrees.

“Looks like the opening scene where a demon will pop out and chat with me.” Annan couldn't help but complain.

He was now near the bottom of the pit. Looking up, there were paintings of different sizes hanging on many broken stone walls of different heights.

But unlike “Nightmare: Gallery”, the content on each painting here was simple.

It was either the eyes, the ears, or the mouth.

The eyes and mouth opened and closed at varying intervals.

Those facial features should be extracted from people Annan had encountered.

Annan had figured that out just because he noticed Salvatore's trademark tired eyes with dark circles at a glance among the many portraits.

To be honest, Annan did not see many people who lacked sleep to this extent and had not died yet.

Annan looked up. The dark red sky had an icy blue eyeball replacing the position where the sun would typically be.

If Annan guessed correctly, that was his pupil.

An ice-blue light beam scanned the ground, following the direction of the eyeball. The ground struck by the light beam had a thin layer of the ice surface in the blink of an eye. Then, it quickly dissipated after the eye looked away.

“So, is this a parkour game?” Annan murmured somewhat unexpectedly, “Do I need to avoid this light? If I get hit, will I die or something?”

How do I collect these fear fragments?

At this stage, Annan had collected three pieces.

Two of them should be obtained from the two nightmare fragments. The third piece could be Annan's fears.

Suddenly, Annan noticed that two paintings in the distance were burned. There was also a painting with a dagger emitting a rainbow-colored light on it. He was assured that it was his "other eye".

"I got it now." Annan narrowed his eyes slightly.

If everyone's memory fragments would generate a sub-nightmare, there should be 63 nightmare fragments here.

Then, the mechanism of entering the nightmare fragments must be obvious.

The entrances were these paintings.

For the paintings made up of the eyes, ears, and mouths of people, which Annan did not recognize, there was a high probability of them being the fragments Salvatore added.

Could it be that because I had participated in the Gallery nightmare, its manifestations had also changed according to my subconscious?

"—Well." At this moment, the eye in the sky glanced over.

Annan did not take any chances and hid in the nearest cover immediately.

He glanced around, took two steps forward, and jumped up.

The inverted gravity was quite obvious.

Annan jumped halfway and was "sucked" to the left. In other words, he was falling toward the debris on the left with the wall in Annan's direction.

Just in case, Annan chose to flip his body dexterously like a cat and landed on the ground lightly in a posture on all fours.

He stood still, relieved his dizziness, and rushed forward again.

After a few jumps, Annan leaned against the wall behind him.

This was to prevent himself from being caught by the eyeball in the sky when he entered a nightmare fragment.

The problem now is...

Where the hell is Dream Stealer Danton hiding?

Could he be in a fragment? Well, there's no end to them.

Or do I have to collect at least seven fear fragments to find Danton?

But if I don't catch Danton, will he change the nightmare again?

Annan pondered as he quietly glanced at the painting in front of him.

If he guessed correctly, there should be an entrance to the escape room in these paintings.

“Are these Benjamin's eyes? Whose mouth is this? Looks like Kafni... But here are Kafni's eyes.”

Ah, it's this—

Finally, Annan noticed an unfamiliar pupil.

Annan had never seen such cold gray pupils. He would have memories of it if he encountered one.

Those gray eyes in the painting quickly sensed Annan's gaze.

The moment its eyes met Annan's.

All the paintings with “mouths” suddenly made sounds simultaneously.

Shouting, roaring, and crying assaulted Annan from all directions.

This time, there was no jitter like a TV with a poor signal, but his whole vision went dark.

By the time the light came back, Annan had gotten a new body.

This time it was a young woman with a good figure.

She wore a white turtleneck and slippers; it seemed Annan was in her home.

Annan glanced out the window, suddenly startled, a little lost.

Outside the window were a blue sky and white clouds.

Annan had never seen such a clear, jewel-like sky.

Noah's sky resembled those in industrial cities. Although the sky was visible, what you see after raising your head would be gray. That was due to the excessive factory.

There was only a whistling blizzard above the dome barrier for the Austere-Winter's skies.

But in this place...

Annan couldn't help but walk toward the window.

“Um...” She was not quite used to her new body, but fortunately, she still had no problem walking.

Looking out from the window, the beautiful scenery made her a little lost.

It was a spectacle that closely resembled the pattern of modern high-rise buildings.

At first glance, the buildings had at least ten floors. They existed in either a group of four or a duo. In the middle of each group of high-rise buildings, some things looked like elevators and glass straws.

Gold and silver tunnels protruded from these pipes, winding around adjacent buildings like blood veins while emitting light. Perhaps because of the color matching, it did not feel disgusting and gave a sacred feeling under the sun.

Annan also saw two massive statues. They were at least twenty stories high (roughly a hundred meters or so).

One of the statues was a heroic knight riding a red horse, wearing red armor and a red helmet. He held a massive, exaggerated six-bladed spear in his backhand, looking like he was about to smash the tip of the spear into someone in front of him at any time. That weapon was like a combination of a spear and a mace. It was highly deadly, whether it was a piercing attack or a slashing attack.

The other one was a barefoot child with white hair and white robes with long hair. From the view at the back, it was a little unclear whether it was a man or woman. He spread his hands forward, palms up, and bowed his head slightly as if he was saying something.

—Annan knew at a glance that it was Red Knight and Mr. Ray.

Is this the Papal Kingdom?

The Righteous Player(s) C422– Being Put In A Tight Spot

Chapter 422: Being Put In A Tight Spot

Annan had also wondered about how the mysterious kingdom built above the clouds, the Papal Kingdom, would be.

Unexpectedly, the first time he saw the scenery of the Papal Kingdom was in someone else's nightmare.

Although it was called “the Papal Kingdom”, the technology here was quite developed.

Annan saw steam airships hovering in the sky, tricycle-like vehicles moving swiftly on the streets even without horses, and the golden and silver pipes transporting items to every household.

Some tower-like buildings were hollowed out, with many complicated gears operating them. Many huge pipes about a meter thick warped those buildings like a snake.

This place looks much more prosperous than the Noah Kingdom.

No wonder people in the Papal Kingdom look down on people from other countries.

This explains it.

Just by taking a glance, Annan was confident that there was a technology gap reaching more than two hundred years.

“Bang!” Just then, Annan suddenly heard a loud noise from the door.

It was not a knock on the door but the noise of a drunk man kicking at the door.

Annan held her breath and instantly turned her attention to it.

[TN: Annan possesses a female in this nightmare. Thus we will be using “she”.]

But she did not ask “who is there” on reflex.

There was no need to ask someone kicking the door with that question.

Instead, it would be better to pretend not to be at home.

She closed her eyes and evaluated her body.

This body had a mana value about the middle level of Bronze Rank. She specialized in the Edict school. But she could not use the spells of the Energy Falteration School. At the same time, Annan did not know any Edict magic.

Besides, her body was frail. She had poor reaction speed, and her body hardly had any muscles. Thus, she might have never learned how to use a sword. Annan might not necessarily slay her opponent through this body.

Fortunately, there was a silver coin at the corner of the table.

Annan quickly grabbed the silver coin.

She noticed that the silver coin was wiped clean, and she was not someone short of money.

The coin seems to be often held in hand. Is it used for divination?

Will she still have Prophet school spells?

While Annan's thoughts were racing, she was not at a complete halt. She hesitated a little, took off her slippers, and hid them under the table carefully and quickly.

Immediately afterward, she ran to the closet in the bedroom.

No, wait a minute.

She hesitated, grabbed the upper level of the wardrobe, and tried to jump.

But, she failed.

“—Dong!” There was another bang at the door again.

Annan tried again and finally jumped on it this time.

She crawled inside in struggle, pushing the folded quilt to the outside while she curled up.

Luckily, she was short, allowing her to shrink in a small wooden cabinet.

Then, Annan closed the closet door carefully, keeping her breathing long and light.

“—Dong!” Finally, the third loud bang came.

Several footsteps came from the door.

“Activate the recording ball!” a man ordered.

A strong “hum—” noise resounded in the air the next moment.

The rustling sound was like many bugs crawling on the window, or the whispers of a big crowd repeatedly echoed in the air.

Someone responded quickly, “We have activated the clamoring psychic noise. No Edict spells will work now!”

The first voice whispered, "The target is not necessarily at home. Search carefully! But don't cause any damage to the place. Remember the items' original location before searching, and remember to restore it at the end."

"We spare no mercy. Repeat! Kill on sight!"

"Yes, Captain!"

Another voice replied.

Annan frowned slightly.

What are these people doing?

She initially thought this might be a group of villains attacking a young woman, but now it seemed like they were units dedicated to hunting down Edict Wizards.

Not even capture, but the order to kill?

Why?

If their goal was to kill Soul Snatch Wizard or Destruction Wizard, Annan could still understand it. Even a rigorous hunt on Idol Wizards still made logical sense.

But do you have such a big grudge against Edict Wizard?

They are just a group of obedient wage earners. Besides, she is a Bronze Rank Edict Wizard. Apart from the ability to distinguish real names, poisons, and curses, she doesn't have much spatial ability.

But blocking off Edict spells did not matter to Annan. After all, he did not know any Edict spells in the first place.

Suddenly, footsteps crashed into the room.

Annan held her breath immediately.

Unsurprisingly, the visitor looked at the bedroom for a while and then directly went to the wardrobe.

He slammed the closet roughly, then immediately stepped back a few steps and pointed his pistol into the closet.

"Tsk." He smacked his lips regretfully and closed the wardrobe door slightly.

As Annan expected, the space above the wardrobe was too small. It did not seem to have enough space for a person to hide there. Thus, no one had anticipated it.

"Eh?" But the next moment, the man exclaimed in suspicion.

Annan's heart tightened.

She reacted—the slippers under the table that were noticed.

Annan had to put her slippers at the door if she wanted to pretend she was not at home.

However, rushing to the door might not be a smart move under the pretense that Annan did not know how long the door would last, having someone kicking it.

It was plausible that the door was broken through as soon as she had just reached the door.

But there was no other way now. At that time, there was nowhere to hide the slippers. She did not expect there would be so many people assaulting this place.

After all, she only heard a knock on the door.

If there was only one person, she might be able to kill the target through a surprise attack using the curse "the Last Work".

However, it appeared that there were at least four of them.

Even if Annan could deal with one of them, she could not deal with the remaining three. Instead, she would be encircled in this small room.

It's better to wait for them to leave.

"Hiss..." After the man saw the slippers under the table, he contemplated.

He sniffed the air and wandered the room with his gun in hand.

Annan shrank in the tiny space, not even daring to take a breath.

After a while, a voice came from outside, "Have you found anything?"

"No, she doesn't seem to be at home."

The man replied, "Let's head back?"

"Oh." The person outside responded plainly, "Remember to restore it to its original state."

Then, the man began to recover his rummaging traces. As the man passed by the wardrobe, he closed the door, blocking Annan's sight completely.

His footsteps quickly moved toward the direction outside the door. Then, Annan heard the bedroom door closing.

Is this the end? Annan was startled.

Also, not everyone could react so quickly and hide like her. Maybe the other dungeon challengers would subconsciously ask "who".

Something is still wrong!

Annan's pupils shrank to the extreme in an instant.

He...

Why does he close the door?

The original state of the bedroom is that the door is not closed!

The next moment, the wardrobe was suddenly opened again.

There was no one in front of Annan.

Only a pistol gleaming with silver light and etched with spells pointed at the small space above the wardrobe.

The man hid on the side of the closet and pointed the gun at Annan through the quilt.

“Miss, can you please come out?” The man's gentle voice sounded, “We are not hostile, but we just want to ask you something.”

“Alright.” There was a pause before a soft reply was uttered.

Bang!

The next moment, the man thumped and closed the wardrobe door without hesitation.

Bang! bang! bang! bang!

The screams of a girl suddenly came from inside.

Without hesitation, the man fired at Annan's location, backed up, and shouted, “I found her. I need backup!”

The screams gradually grew softer and subsided quickly.

Soon, the sound of footsteps came.

Four people rushed into the bedroom with the ball that kept making noise. After entering the room, the group continued to shoot at the top of the wardrobe without any communication.

There had been no response, but they were still pouring bullets at it cautiously.

Then, there was another half-minute of silence.

There was no sound inside either.

“I'll take a look.” The voice of the man who took the lead came.

“No, Captain!”

Another young voice sounded, “Let me do it!”

The man walked up slowly and cautiously opened the wardrobe door.

He was already prepared. When he opened the door, he was mentally prepared to see the corpse of a woman who had died in a tragic state.

However, all he saw was a tall, middle-aged man with black hair and black eyes curled up there.

His eyes were burning with the fire of anger.

The bullet shattered his shirt, revealing the pale and robust muscles inside. Small holes were punched out on him—the bullets embedded in the epidermis of his torso, unable to penetrate the skin.

The next moment, a mighty fist stuck out, breaking the bridge of the young man's nose with one punch!

Like a fish jumping out, the powerful marble body lunged on the young man's chest. Annan opened his hand, grabbed the young man's head from the front, took advantage of the momentum to push his target down, and slammed the back of the opponent's head to the ground!

[TN: Anna took the form of [The Last Work – David]. Thus we will be using “he” pronouns.]

In just a moment, Annan had already killed one person.

He turned his head and looked at the remaining three with blazing eyes.

“David”, who kept his smile, had a cold expression at this moment.

“I hope you can give me an explanation,” said Annan calmly.

His left eye shone with brilliance—the curse light that belonged to the Silver Rank.

“Sir, this is a misunderstanding.” Seeing this light, the middle-aged man in the lead was silent for a while, but he still admitted his defeat.

He tried his best not to look at the man on the ground and said in a low voice, “We have no intention of going against you. We are just collecting some materials on the orders of our lord.”

“Whose order?”

“The Deity of Extortion and Promise Keeping, Protector.”

The man responded quickly, “He is the Silver Sire's subordinate deity. They requested us for some Edict Wizard's spine. We're telling the truth.”

His attitude is sincere, and he doesn't seem bluffing.

Spine?

Is it Sage's Stone again?

Annan nodded slowly.

Great.

Everything makes sense now.

He walked slowly toward the middle-aged man, his clenched fists gradually loosening.

“I see.

“But you attacked me for no reason and made me lose that woman.”

Annan walked over as he uttered his words slowly.

If the group ran into someone else, they might have deceived the person.

People in the Papal Kingdom probably did not know that the Protector had never left the Noah Kingdom.

It was not May yet. The Protector could not communicate with people abroad at all!

The remaining three hesitated and subconsciously took a half step back.

Although Annan could not use any spells now, it did not mean he did not have enough deterrence. After all, no matter if it was David or himself, they were genuine Silver Rank.

A couple of them should be ordinary people.

What a weak fear.

What she fears should be “being hunted and killed”.

Annan walked to the middle-aged man. Without warning, a silver blade protruded from the palm of his hand, piercing the heart of the leading middle-aged man.

“But I, David, don't believe your nonsense!” Annan grinned, showing a cruel smile, and slowly pulled out the silver blade.

Seeing that terrifying smile, the remaining two took two steps back in fear.

Although they had guns in their hands, they dared not confront Annan at all.

Annan was a Silver Rank Transcender.

But they obviously could not see it.

Annan's health was left at 9% after being shot by them.

Annan turned into David after being shot to lure his enemies. The purpose was to sustain a couple of bullets and scream to prove that he was hit.

Now there was a bullet embedded in his heart.

He would lose some health just by taking a couple of steps.

However, on Annan's face, there was an arrogant smile akin to the villain.

This expression made the two of them afraid to flee and dared not to attack.

The Righteous Player(s) C423– Are You Spying On Me, Danton?

Chapter 423: Are You Spying On Me, Danton?

“Hoho...” Annan narrowed his eyes and let out a low, arrogant laugh, “What about the truth?”

“Who is it? Who has asked you to trouble her?”

“The Last Work: David” was 180 centimeters tall, and his muscles were incredibly sturdy and burly. However, it was not that obvious when wearing a coat. But after bullets destroyed his shirt, it became intimidating.

Watching the two remain silent, Annan grabbed a bullet stuck in his shoulder into his left hand.

Under the terrified gazes of the two, he slowly clenched the bullet into a ball like he was playing with a walnut.

Annan's health dropped by 3% because of this action.

"Fine." Annan sighed and shook his head boredly, "I'm tired of this."

He punched over, knocking the person closest to him directly to the ground.

When he raised his fist, the man subconsciously crouched down.

However, Annan seemed to have predicted his movements from the very beginning.

The place where he initially punched was exactly where the man would squat!

From another person's point of view, it seemed as if that person had deliberately bumped his head into Annan's fist.

This body was like a marble statue — a stone statue of a sturdy man weighing more than 500 kilograms, and the strength of a punch could even parry an iron sword directly.

The punch hit the nose; the man fell to the ground with a muffled sound and passed out.

The last person raised his gun subconsciously and aimed it at Annan.

Annan grinned and stared back without fear.

"Why don't you try to shoot?" He said slowly with tremendous pressure, raising his right hand and holding the silver blade.

Annan stood there like a sculpture.

He pointed to his forehead with his right thumb.

"Try this place?" The husky voice was terrifying, exuding a terrifying murderous aura.

The opposing man was trembling, unable to hold the trigger.

Of course, Annan's movements were slow. It was because he had already felt his heart completely shattered by the previous blow.

His life force gradually dissipated even just standing there motionless.

"Give me the gun if you don't dare. Don't waste your time." The man hesitated for a moment, finally slowly inverted the muzzle's direction, and put the gun in Annan's hand.

"We are hired guns, my lord. I have no intention of going against you. Please spare me."

The man said in a low voice in clear logic, "I can answer anything you want to ask; I can also leave my contact information. If you need me to do something for you in the future, you can look for me."

Annan snorted.

If he knew at the beginning they were all ordinary people, and there were no transcendents, he would transform directly and kill them on the spot.

This was indeed his mistake.

The previous fear fragments were too biased toward solving puzzles. Thus, Annan subconsciously conformed to the previous thinking approach on “how to use what is already in the dungeon instance to solve the mystery”.

Unexpectedly, there was “the fear of being unable to ask for help”.

The fear of this female wizard was somewhat similar to Danton's fear. In other words, wizards feared being “unable to cast spells”, which was also normal.

But, these fear fragments were not a real nightmare after all.

Since it was not a record extracted from the Dream World, it must be the information that the dead wizard himself had.

Why are the people of the Papal Kingdom collecting spines?

Could it be that the crafting recipe of the Hermetic School Sage's Stone was leaked to the Papal Kingdom?

This is unlikely.

Or is it that Danton's fear is mixed in here again?

Thinking of this, Annan spoke in a harsh voice, “Before that, give me all your money.”

“What?” Hearing such a request, even the only survivor was stunned.

Annan growled impatiently, “Hey, what do you mean?”

“Are you letting me touch that dirty thing with my hands?”

Dirty stuff?

Do you mean the “corpses”?

The man was startled.

He quickly realized that this might have something to do with the curse of this formidable person.

“Yes, yes... please wait a moment...” He responded immediately, handing his wallet to Annan.

Annan opened it and found about a dozen banknotes and five silver coins. It seemed this was already a lot at the level of ordinary people.

He inadvertently took out a silver coin and said plainly, “That's all?”

“You intend to buy the wizard's life with this money?”

“No, no—of course not. There's more, but it's all with the captain.” The man whispered, lowering his head down.

In fact, Annan kept this victim alive intentionally.

When Annan killed the first person, and when he slowly approached them, this person took the most steps back. He was also the one with the most intense fear on his face. It was for this reason that he was at the back of everyone.

Annan was behind him and suddenly asked, "So, who is it?"

"Don't fool me with the name of the Protector. I have gone abroad. Answer me immediately while you look for the stuff!"

"Yes, my lord. We are just Austere-Winter's mercenaries. Old Bart the "Sore Head" gave us this list last month and the recording ball that recorded the [Mind Buzzer] spell. But we don't know who is the boss behind it."

"In other words, the other party doesn't necessarily want an Edict Wizard's spine? Or not necessarily her spine?"

"Yes."

While lying on the ground picking up things, the man explained in a low voice, not daring to look back, "He also provided additional methods to counter Soul Snatch Spells and Idol Spells, but we can only mute Edict Wizard's magic before seeing them. So it is safest to hunt Edict Wizards.

"And we will investigate the specific coordinates on our own."

As he answered, there was a vague doubt in his heart.

He suddenly began to wonder why the man hid in the closet, given his overbearing nature.

And, what about the female owner of this house?

At the very beginning, he only heard her screams. The place was so small that it was supposed to be impossible to hide two people.

He vaguely realized something and turned around.

"—Bang! Bang!" Two gunshots sounded without warning.

Annan, who had transformed into a girl's body, fired without hesitation.

However, the physical body was relatively weak. Annan was not confident about hitting the head, so the first shot was aimed at the back.

But the first shot missed. Originally, Annan wanted to hit the lungs or stomach and aim the second shot at the head. However, the first shot went directly to the shoulder, and the second shot went to the cervical vertebra.

"Why do you turn around?" Annan sighed, "Isn't it better to play dumb now?"

As Annan spoke, she immediately transformed back to the female body.

After that, she urgently used silver coins to repair the wound on her body. Before the silver coins were depleted, she had restored her health to 45%.

Originally, Annan wanted to fully restore her health before killing the man.

After all, David's body was made of marble. The Silver Sire's healing divine art was ineffective on it. If Annan wants to regain health, he must revert to the female body.

But if he changed back, there would be a cooldown period. He would not be able to transform right away. That girl had no combat experience, so it was impossible to fight with that body.

If it was the divine art used by Father Flint to repair machines or the Divine Art used by the Elegant Elder to repair statues, those spells might be of some use.

Annan's vision went dark. Then, he returned to that broken world again.

Annan's health had dropped to 45% while gaining another fear fragment. His body had many bullet holes, and blood slowly oozed out. It even affected his movements somewhat.

As for the painting that Annan entered previously, it had now been completely burned to ashes.

But Annan narrowed his eyes slightly.

Suddenly, he opened his mouth and said, "Are you spying on me, Danton?"

The Righteous Player(s) C424– Annan Seizing The Initiative

Chapter 424: Annan Seizing The Initiative

"You may have all my memories to create nightmare imitations, but you're a fool." Annan leaned on the wall behind him and said slowly, "If you had the same wisdom as me, you wouldn't leave so many loopholes."

Naturally, there was no response to Annan's words.

But that did not matter.

After exiting the nightmare, Annan understood Danton's logic.

Danton survived his nightmare because Salvatore underestimated the power of a Gold Rank transcender and added Danton's brain as a curse material to the elixir.

After the soul was "dyed", it had essentially surpassed the limit of the "human" race.

Danton was a real inhuman.

After all, only Danton's spine and soul were taken away. At the same time, his brain was still intact despite having his soul taken away.

For this reason, Salvatore used them as the main ingredient for the Dream Elixir.

Salvatore must not have expected that the final product retained Danton's fragmented will even when the soul was lost, the brain was whipped into a pulp, boiled, and filtered.

But luckily, it was just a fragment of his will.

Danton's actions were rigid like machines, probably because there was no soul.

In other words, Danton could not see through Annan's bluff in pretending to be strong.

All of Danton's actions had a clear goal.

He pulled Annan into a fake "Nightmare: Wolf's Kiss" to get Annan to accept the Wolf Kiss ritual.

Annan originally held the reversed Winter Heart, which deprived him of all negative emotions. Thus, what would he be left with if he was deprived of all positive emotions in the Wolf Kiss ritual in the nightmare?

Only the empty shell remained.

At that time, Danton's will fragment could take advantage of the void and occupy a corner of Annan's soul. Slowly, Danton would regain a body capable of thinking and have a transcended soul that could cast spells.

"But you don't realize how good my memory is. You can't read my mind in this space because you have lost your spell casting ability. Thus, you can only get information from what I say."

The corners of Annan's mouth rose slightly as he said calmly, "Otherwise, you should have known—

"I recognize more paintings than those I have named.

"So, I've seen through your petty actions."

Indeed, Danton did something behind his back.

Before Annan jumped over, he had already noted the paintings on the wall.

There were eight paintings on this wall: Two from Kafni, one from Kafni's dad, two from Old Bread, one from Yiyi, and one from Jiu Er.

The other one had a black pupil.

Instead, it was black but not gray.

But when Annan turned his gaze to the painting, it silently turned gray.

In other words, it became another painting.

But that only made Annan a little suspicious.

After all, he might be mistaken.

But when Annan left the nightmare, he found that Yiyi's mouth and Jiu Er's ears, which he had not mentioned, had disappeared from the wall.

"That is to say, you have a certain level of authority and can control my nightmares. The imitation nightmares you created before should also have this level of technology.

"But the part you can control is little. So, you're saving power, or you're worried that I'll see through it. So your strategy is to send your adjusted nightmares straight to me.

“I wondered why the two burning paintings were far from me. If I hadn't moved there, it wouldn't have been possible to see the paintings so far away.

“The answer is simple. It's because it doesn't matter which painting I look at. My nightmares are in the order you have arranged them.”

Annan replied calmly.

“In the first nightmare, you used your fear fragments to imply to me that 'Danton is indeed dead', trying to make me give up my [Vigilance] of you;

“And then you told me that logical reasoning would make me sluggish and stuck so that I could put aside [Reasoning] and walk down the hallway without hesitation. That's all the steps you have committed to making me accept the Wolf Kiss ritual.”

But at that point, Danton had failed.

Annan was too rational and calm.

So he realized the loophole in the false nightmare.

However, after that, Danton did not admit defeat.

“Then, you threw me into a dead end where I had to rely on [External Force] to clear the level. You must be thinking through my behavioral pattern. Your goal is to force me into using David's power, reminding me of this strength.

“In the previous two fear fragments, you leveraged the fast-paced nightmares and stopped me from remembering this power to eliminate redundant factors influencing the Wolf Kiss ritual. So the question is, why do you want me to use that power now?”

Annan said calmly, “That's because you want me to use 'David' too in this world, right? Or, do you want me to change my body to 'David' when we confront each other?”

“If it's a trap, you'll emphasize this concept to me in the next three fear fragments. You'll choose the nightmares that 'I can't get through without changing my body' to make me habitually think so. The purpose is to induce me to activate this ability when I confront you. Even though I can't figure out the reason, it should be related to your means for a comeback.

“You don't have a soul yourself, so you can't enter the nightmares. Like a creature who can't go into dreams, you won't be in the fear fragments. Thus, you must be in this place.

“Why is that eye in the sky my own? What am I looking at? What am I looking for?”

The answer was already evident.

The eye in the sky hinted at Annan to “look into” his heart.

That was to search for Danton.

Although it sounded strange, the broken stone ship should be Annan's inner world under the night sky before dawn.

Danton was the “virus” program of this world.

That eye was searching for Danton instead of Annan.

Then, let's walk through the procedure again.

Annan did not move, leaned against the wall, and sighed, “I've already said the whole story to this level. Do you still want to continue?”

Annan's voice echoed, but there was no response.

“Or, you don't even have an entity until the subsequent three small dungeon instances are over?”

“That would be too pitiful, right?” Annan mocked without hesitation.

Danton still did not appear in front of Annan.

“Fine, I will go through the process.” Annan leaned back and said, “I'm hurt and lazy to move.

“Which nightmare do you want me to enter? Go ahead and bring the painting to me. Move it yourself, got it?”

After a short delay, the painting in front of Annan that belonged to Kafni's mouth suddenly became the mouth of another person.

The moment they looked at each other, shouts, roars, and cries surrounded Annan again.

“Shut up!” Annan's cold voice fell.

At the moment when his voice fell, the noise suddenly subsided.

In a quiet atmosphere, Annan fell into a new nightmare again.

Then, he noticed that his left hand and right foot were handcuffed to the operating table. A small saw was placed beside his right hand, and directly above him was a huge rotating hacksaw, slowly approaching.

He understood well what this scene was and what he would do next.

Annan did not panic at all.

Recalling the previous scene, the corners of his mouth rose slightly.

As expected...

His guess was right.

“Although it's a nightmare, it's my dream after all.”

Unlike the previous nightmare, what Annan entered this time was his dream.

Danton was able to alter his nightmares, probably because of this. If it was someone else's nightmares, he might be unable to change them.

After all, he was the real [Dream Stealer].

He remained the world's first class in the operation of dreams even if he lost his mind, was muted from spell casting, and only relied on instinct to act.

Annan respected his technique.

"But, it's my world, after all." Annan closed his eyes slowly.

His body bulged up instantly and turned into a hard marble statue.

"Mr. David" knocked the shackles attached to his wrists from the operating table with just two punches.

However, the shackles were not broken.

Instead, he destroyed the operating table.

The Righteous Player(s) C425– Typical Pattern of the Saw Series

Chapter 425: Typical Pattern of the Saw Series

"Soul's mark?" Salvatore repeated the word, and his face gradually became unsightly.

"Yes." Alexander Robin nodded calmly, "After the soul is dyed, it can be regarded as an incomplete demi-deity.

"If the soul stays in a fixed place for a long time, the escaped elemental power can even unconsciously infiltrate the surrounding environment and gradually transform it into an environment suitable for itself. If the power of the element gathers, it may even leave a fragment of will there.

"For example, Noah's Blood Butterfly Valley or Austere-Winter's Storm Tower. The supernatural scene that distorts the world is the mark left after the death of a powerful transcender."

Hearing this, Salvatore took a deep breath.

He repeated, validating the information, "So, will the elemental power infest corpses too?"

"It's more accurate to describe it as a vessel. Even if the transcender doesn't die, whether a hand or a bone, it may gradually reshape the world around it.

"However, the power of the elements is mainly stored in the brain. Hence, it is not a serious problem as long as it is handled properly."

Captain Alexander replied. Then, he frowned slightly, "What are you trying to say? Or rather, what have you done?"

The former [Champion], the old knight captain approaching 60 years old, sat in the parlor of Noah First Bank in a white suit that looked very out of tune with him.

Alexander had a majestic face, sun-tanned skin, short reddish-brown hair that was well taken care of, plus those golden-orange pupils reminiscent of a lion and that iconic scar. Instead of a banker, the identity of the chairman was still more suitable to be called "warrior" or "general".

Typically speaking, Salvatore would not even dare to look at him.

Thousands of killings and battles had equipped the man with an aura of blood and war.

Salvatore had just advanced to the Silver Rank. In the state where his perception was sensitive but his will was inadequate, it became even more challenging to resist the intimidation exuding from the man.

If this matter had not directly involved Annan's safety, Salvatore would not have come here to communicate with this troublesome man!

But, he was also grateful to the Paper Princess.

Luckily, the Paper Princess had a sharp mind.

She issued Salvatore to consult Captain Alexander in his method of handling the "Dream Stealer".

Although the Paper Princess was a de facto deity, she was not a deity who ascended from the transcendent path. Instead, she was the "deity" created out of thin air by her creator and lover.

So the Paper Princess was not fluent in the path of transcendence.

Alexander was different.

Although he was only a Silver Rank Transcender, he was an [Champion] after all.

—He was undoubtedly the [Champion], a hunter of evil deity believers and dark wizards, and a senior executive of Silver Sire Church. For the secrets of the transcendence path and the Fallen path, there were not many people in Noah who knew better than him.

Salvatore did not hide anything.

He told Alexander what he added in crafting the Dream Elixir.

In the current state, he was quite regretful.

Benjamin's original recipe did not mention the extra step he had taken. Instead, his ability as a [Alchemist] guided him to make this amendment.

In fact, the crafting recipe was alright if the brain of the Gold Rank Wizard was not added or the power of Dream Stealer Danton's element did not affect the nightmare.

However, Salvatore's original intention of helping Annan to enter the nightmare more safely and stably brought harm to Annan instead.

"—You're such a piece of shit, Salvatore." The hoarse voice sounded grimly at the bottom of his heart, "The formula is already in your hands, and you can't even do it properly."

But it was just a mistake...

"Is it really just a mistake? Isn't this a mistake because of your arrogance and complacency?"

Shadow whispered like a demon to destroy Salvatore's sanity, "If you had consulted Alexander before crafting it or written a letter to the tower master and asked, would you make such a mistake? Please don't use time as an excuse. It won't take much of your time."

“Stop making excuses. It's your fault. After you became an alchemist, did you get carried away? Hmm? You have even started smoking. Do you plan to indulge in drinking too? Do you still want to create the special drug?”

“Seriously, Salvatore. Give me your body if you feel like you can't do anything right.”

The shadow is always stronger than me.

Indeed, Salvatore was well-aware of it all this time.

As long as he offered the body to the shadow, all problems would be solved.

He would not cause any mishaps because of his mistakes. At the same time, he got to make up for the mistakes immediately, even if they had already happened.

“I get it,” Salvatore whispered.

“Um?” The shadow paused and let out a hoarse and low sneer, “So, you finally can't stand failure? Do you want to give up? You can always leave your body to me.”

“—I'm going to take care of this matter myself.” Salvatore said slowly, “I want to save Annan.”

Looking at him, the relaxed expression on Alexander's face gradually escaped. He became stern and serious.

“I'll help you if you need me, Black Tower's Son.” The captain spoke in a reliable tone, “But, do you have a plan?”

“Some.” Salvatore replied, “Let's hurry back now. I will modify the 'Dream Elixir' access point on the way. This way, when we are by Annan's side, we can use the drug to enter his nightmare directly.

“As for defeating Danton, I'll leave it to you.”

“Relax, don't underestimate me. I'm a priest too. I know nightmares well. Even if we can't defeat Danton, we just need to help Annan escape.” Alexander said earnestly, “Danton's last will is trapped in a small pill and can't escape. We don't need to fight him to the death immediately. We just need to let Annan not fall into his trap unprepared.”

“I'll listen to your command, captain,” Salvatore responded.

However, contrary to what they thought, Annan did not fall into Danton's trap of becoming a mindless puppet.

Instead, Annan went on a rampage in the fear fragments.

Boom!

With one punch, Annan smashed the steel operating bed directly. At the second punch, he punched a hole in the bed.

Indeed, Annan did not destroy the handcuffs but the place where the handcuffs were connected to the operating table. Annan even swung the chain, cosplaying as the Syllas [1]. Considering that only the left

hand was connected to the handcuff and he smashed the bed at the end, he resembled Chang Koehan [2].

“That's it?” Annan sneered, breaking the chain at his ankle.

When he saw the chainsaw, he already understood what the fear was.

This was the fear of facing the “necessary price” and the “choice determining the life and death”.

In the storyline that Danton arranged for Annan, Annan should use the dull saw to cut off his left hand.

After all, this was just a nightmare. It would not lead to disability, and there was nothing that could not be done. It was only the difference between whether or not to bear the pain.

Would he suffer prolonged pain that he could not give up midway or a slow death?

That was the typical plot arranged in the Saw movies series.

Either way, it should be possible to escape from the nightmare. However, Annan chose the third way.

Are you asking me to pick the left or right hand?

Isn't the road in the middle wide?

[TN: Saying a road being wide is a Chinese idiom to indicate that the solution is easy.]

“It's a pity. I can't fix you up with my fists.” The fear fragment was resolved the moment Annan sat up.

Annan leaned against the wall, raised his head, and said calmly, “There are two more chances for you.

“Let's continue.”

The Righteous Player(s) C426– Humans, How Can You Go Up Without Your Wings?

Chapter 426: Humans, How Can You Go Up Without Your Wings?

“—Let's continue.” Annan was unwavering in his eyes.

It would be too naive to think this was enough to intimidate him.

He had made up his mind to kill Danton, and nothing could turn him back.

It was just a choice between death and pain. Wasn't that what life was all about?

Danton still did not show up.

The scene in front of Annan's eyes changed again.

This time the world quietly changed without the painting emitting disturbing noises.

When Annan opened his eyes again, he realized that he had entered a dark world that looked like a colossal pen holder. There were densely packed human heads below, and what laid above him was the only light source.

At the same time, he was crawling upward, clutching a thin rope.

The rope seemed to be on the verge of breaking.

Annan seemed to feel something.

He looked down and saw that there were still many people under him clutching the slender rope.

The crowd gave off an impression of Detective Conan's silhouettes [1]. Annan was unable to discern their gender and age. What he could see were dense silhouettes gathered under him, like densely packed ants lined up along the honey.

Annan did not react at first.

But after looking down at this familiar scene, Annan realized in the blink of an eye.

Is this "The Spider's Thread" by Akutagawa Ryunosuke [2]?

"I see." Annan had understood the basic rules of the current fear fragment.

The moment he fell into a deep nightmare, he realized what the fear involved.

It was either a savior's or forerunner's "despairs of ignorant mortals", or "desperation to fail when one step away from the finish line".

Danton wanted to see Annan's rage when he broke the spider thread or see Annan's despair when he climbed to the highest point and saw the spider thread suddenly break.

"Ah..." Annan burst out laughing.

He shouted at the bottom of his throat, "Those below me, be careful!

"If you continue to climb up, the spider thread will be broken!" After issuing the warning, Annan ignored the people who followed.

Instead, he just focused on climbing up.

Although this nightmare was the spider thread, Annan was not Gandhara.

He would naturally give the people at the bottom a chance, and it was not mercy but "fairness".

Of course, they had the right to climb up.

Annan did not want to stop them from pursuing their light of hope if they did not go down on purpose or hindered others.

—Even if their doom was impending when the crowd had gathered.

Annan did not order them to give up on their survival or stall their right to do so.

Annan knew what he should, could, and needed to do.

These people were not his subordinates or his servants. Annan was not their savior, their parent, or their master.

Annan did not have to crawl out of this hell, either. He did not have such a strong desire.

Instead, he did what he was supposed to do.

Going up was better than going down.

Thus, he climbed up.

If Annan fell with the crowd, it was their fate brought about by their choices.

Annan would love to see others pay the price of their stupidity... or rather, retribution.

However, he would never interfere.

That was because he should not be their retribution.

Annan looked up at the light, crawling intently on the spider thread.

Unsurprisingly, the spider thread snapped when Annan was nearing the top, just as he had expected.

Many people fell back into the abyss.

Annan was no exception.

When falling in the air, Annan's mind came to such a thought, "Ah, I failed."

"Can I get out of this fear like that?" While Annan kept falling back into the abyss, he did not lose any health points.

He fell into the stench of blood, and a thought suddenly appeared in his mind:

Now, a second has passed.

The next moment, the silver thread was condensed out of thin air again.

"Ha, that's what it is."

Annan laughed suddenly, "Every time you fail, only one second will pass. So, is this 'the fear of repeating the same failure forever'? It is indeed a powerful move. For ordinary people, it may break them.

"It's strange. Is there something going on outside? You're suddenly quite desperate in your move. Are you worried that someone will save me from my dream?"

The corners of Annan's mouth rose slightly while being submerged in the pool with a blood stench.

But Annan's voice was so indifferent.

"Don't think about such a piece of good news, Danton.

"Don't expect anyone to come. That's supposedly for you."

He turned his head and looked at the "silhouettes", keenly capturing fear and loss in their eyes.

Do I need to repeat failure many times here?

Toward the third time, or the fifth time?

There couldn't be more. Their will had started to disintegrate. Any more, and they would lose their minds.

Forget it.

Let them suffer.

Let them fail.

Let them fall into despair.

“—But you can climb up with me as long as you lift your spirits.”

Annan slowly reached out his hand, held the highly fragile spider thread, and shouted, “Then let's go together!”

Then, the second fall.

It was followed by the third fall.

The fifth attempt.

The tenth attempt.

Fewer and fewer people followed Annan crawling up the spider's thread. Annan was the only one left to crawl up on the twelfth attempt.

But in the end, Annan would still fall just one step short.

But unlike those who looked up to Annan, he would climb again no matter how many times he failed.

Annan's persistence did not come from the Reversed Winter Heart.

It was the trait that Annan possessed before soul-crossing to this world.

A minute had passed unknowingly.

It was not that Annan failed because of his mistakes.

The reason was the mistakes of others, the unprovoked suffering, and the so-called [Fate].

If it were an ordinary person, he might have been furious by now.

“Great.” Annan muttered.

His pupils shone brighter.

His life had been a smooth sail over the past few months.

Annan was about to forget the feeling of disciplining himself.

He used to never laze on the bed, smoke, drink, overeat, and laze around while working. He would stop playing with his phone after going to bed and stop eating three hours before bed.

The reason for him living such a regulated life included his rationality.

Another reason was that Annan enjoyed “self-restraint” — like an ascetic.

It was not easy to be ascetic in modern life. However, just being logical and abstinence was already considered ascetic in modern times where there were so many temptations.

However, Anana did not expect that just living an ascetic life (disciplined study, work, and even games) had already made him a fantastic person before he realized it.

“For that, I have to thank you, Danton.” When Annan fell for the hundredth time, the light in his eyes shone brighter.

Let's continue.

Yup, it's another fall.

Continue.

I'm falling.

Again.

Annan's mind came up with the phrase he had seen thousands of times in a certain game.

“Human...”

Annan murmured, gripping the rope again.

Without wings, how can you go up?

“Probably because I'm abnormal.”

Maybe Annan did not even notice it.

The corner of his mouth showed a big, bright smile.

His pupils were brighter than the stars.

“Let's continue!”

The Righteous Player(s) C427– I'm Sisyphus

Chapter 427: I'm Sisyphus

There was no light and only an abyss of rancid blood.

The so-called “companions” could not even speak.

It was a hell of nothing.

Apart from the fragile spider silk, there was nothing to leverage on.

The situation was absolute, inescapable desperation.

Only one second would elapse every time you “fall and fail after giving your best”.

Other than that, there was nothing to interact with and nothing to investigate; there was no power to leverage on, and not even a main mission was given.

The process only pushed Annan to fail repeatedly.

Just like what Sisyphus [1] had suffered.

Annan was convinced that this was indeed a superb trap.

That was because the process would wear down a person's spirit even when he was blessed with unlimited physical strength and if he would be resurrected after falling from such height.

It was not sleepiness.

Instead, it was numbness and despair — mental damage capable of destroying the soul's consciousness.

The difficulty of this fear fragment laid not in the fragile spider silk itself but the unknown.

The unknown would bring endless fear.

It was the fear of “how many more times will I fail here”.

The current fear fragment had a different set of rules than the previous fear fragments. Other fear fragments only required Annan to “escape decisively” or “brave into” that fear then he would have resolved it.

No matter if it was “sudden invalidation of own power”, “unstoppable sacrifice”, and et cetera, they were just momentary and short-lived fears.

Only the “fear of constant failure” could last a lifetime. It could not be resolved with the idea of “hold on and it would be over”.

After the failure, would you not continue to fail?

“It's impossible after thinking about it rationally.”

This was merely a fairy tale for adults: To add value to one's failure, to make it appear less of a “failure”, or to comfort oneself as a placebo.

Annan did not need that kind of thing.

Failure was a failure.

It was the fact of being unable to succeed and thus fail. It was limited to that and would not expand more than that.

There were no excuses, reasons, or false values attached to failure.

After all, Annan believed that people shouldn't be afraid of failure.

“We shouldn't stand still in the face of failure.” Annan gripped the spider thread again.

Once again, he struggled to climb up the thread alone in the abyss that was absent of light and sound.

Those people had long since given up following Annan.

They were just silent, looking up at Annan — looking at Annan, who kept failing.

Would they wish him to succeed?

No.

Most of them were looking forward and waiting for Annan to give up.

However, there was no pain or despair they wanted to see on Annan's face.

Instead, only happiness was shown.

Annan stayed focused on his objective.

He would do his best — to fail again.

“I'll do the deed that no one does.”

It was already the 200th attempt.

“If no one tries, it's up for me to make the sacrifice.”

The 400th attempt.

“No one persists, so let me persist to the end.”

Then, the 600th attempt.

That was no longer the perseverance that a normal human being could muster.

Annan was cultivating like an ascetic. Although the path would lead to victory, failure was also one of the precious gains.

Those who rejoiced in misfortune.

Those who waited for Annan to give up.

They had even given up on this sentiment, gradually looking forward to and worshipping Annan as a deity and symbol.

Annan remained the same.

It was not suffering when Annan enjoyed the pain.

In this hell that seems to last forever, Annan gradually captured his essence eventually.

To be precise, he enjoyed “being alive”.

Just like when Annan was bored, he could read the script and the advertisements in the newspaper carefully several times.

He did not know how long he had been in this place.

Even his original purpose, his intention to kill Danton, faded over time.

It was as if he had lived through a hard life in a dream.

Even in the most desperate of times when Annan had turned entirely into a blood-dyed man, the brilliance in his icy blue pupils remained shining.

“Have you had enough rest?” Annan shouted again, “As long as you can lift your spirits and climb with me, just follow!”

There were no lofty promises.

There was no warm atmosphere.

There was only silence and silent followers.

It was not everyone, but it included dozens of people.

But after Annan fell again, new people joined him, and some stepped down from the thread.

That was not meaningless following and imitation.

It was just that they could not turn a blind eye to it even though it had long been known that the end of the path was a failure.

But looking at people with such bright eyes who were trying to climb up, how could they stop in place and remain motionless?

Annan attempted failure too.

Trying to get used to failure.

Adapting to failure.

Then—

“—to overcome the defeat.”

This was the fate of humanity.

Annan slowly grasped the silk on his 666th attempt.

“Is someone coming with me!” His eyes shone brightly.

More than ten minutes had passed in the outside world.

But in Annan's mind, there was no thought of “buying more time for Salvatore” at all.

He was like a captain who started an expedition with a laugh at the sea of defeat.

From the first few times, Annan had not looked down at those who followed him.

Or, Annan was convinced from the beginning that someone would follow him.

Striving for greater heights was enough to fill a person's heart.

Annan never needed someone to follow to provide the determination and confidence to move forward.

But Annan noticed no one followed him to climb up this time.

It was not like they had given up again.

Instead, they raised their head and watched Annan leave silently.

It was as if they had a premonition of something.

It only happened at this attempt.

Annan climbed out of the narrow mouth of the pit alone.

He woke up again between the rubble and the wall.

Everything he had experienced previously seemed to be just a dream.

But that bright smile remained on Annan's face like a scorch mark left by a flame.

Then, Annan opened his eyes slowly.

The bright brilliance also shone from Annan's eyes.

“666, is that the number of beasts [2]?”

Annan finally climbed out of hell and completed the impossible mission. Of course, he was delighted.

However, what pleased him even more was that Danton had admitted defeat.

Indeed, there was no end to this nightmare.

Instead, it just repeated meaningless failures.

Annan, who had experienced many failures constantly, did not flinch. However, Danton, who designed this dungeon and tried to murder Annan here, was afraid in front of Annan, who had remained unchanged and even more excited.

He was afraid of Annan's fearlessness.

For him, Annan was simply a lunatic.

However, it seemed to have some divinity.

Annan was like a butterfly that had just broken free from its cocoon. It struggled to lift its wings.

“You have conceded again, Danton!” Annan laughed loudly and happily, “You have all my memories, and you still can't defeat me!

“Do you think you can kill me?

“I am a loser! I am a madman! I am Sisyphus!”

What doesn't kill me makes me stronger!

Annan had a firm belief in that.

He was different from before being tortured by the infinite fall.

Although the change might not seem significant, there was indeed a growth.

“You have one last chance, Danton.” Annan opened his eyes and looked at the portrait in front of him. His eyes were as bright as stars.

Brilliant, thin flames ignited at the bottom of the frozen lake.

The series of death traps were like trials to cleanse Annan's heart.

“What kind of gift will you give me?”

The Righteous Player(s) C428– The Final Trial

Chapter 428: The Final Trial

The former Annan decisively gave up his memory for a particular purpose.

Annan believed that his determination and unwavering resoluteness were aligned with his character.

However, Annan would never give up everything at will because of some small things.

For Annan, the details in the memory were an asset in themselves.

That was because he had such a talent for looking into people's hearts.

So, what else was there that Annan would instead give up and pursue?

Undoubtedly, that intense and fiery positive emotion had never been frozen by the [Winter Heart].

Annan had a better idea at this moment.

— Annan's original disposition: a pure desire to embrace asceticism.

—A heart without fear brought by the reversed Winter Heart.

—Making him unstoppable in the repeated failures.

The ascetic heart that had not been frozen by Winter Heart would only have enthusiasm and perseverance when facing the torture of failure. On the other hand, the reversed Winter Heart burnt away Annan's burnout, despair, and fear when facing defeat. The never-ending, infinitely repeated failures prevent Annan from seeking a second answer. After all, only fools would repeat the same thing but crave different results.

Under the intertwining effect of these three elements, the painful torment had turned into absurd happiness.

The greater the pain, the greater the happiness.

This was a dungeon level that only Annan could pass.

This was not a test that could reach the end with persistence but a dead end that would forever exist.

If Annan did not have the heart of asceticism, he would only think about how many times he would have to repeat it to be saved by Salvatore; if Annan did not have the reversed Winter Heart, he would have committed suicide in despair in the endless failure. Faced with such a desperate situation, he would inevitably use his brain and seek another solution.

Danton never imagined that his designed traps had turned into the best whetstones.

This was an experience powerful enough to rewrite personality. Annan was never alone before this nightmare and even at the current moment.

“For that, I have to thank you. Danton.”

Even if the previous memory had been blurred like a dream.

Annan would never forget the ecstasy of climbing up from the abyss.

“I've never felt I'm in such good shape.”

Annan felt the joy and excitement in his heart.

His soul was so bright.

He vividly felt the splendid power awakened in the depths of the soul.

Annan was also quite confident.

Danton's attempt to murder him in the dream world was meaningless.

“Come at me, Danton!” He laughed. The brilliance in his eyes was so bright, “I want to see what else you can bring me!”

“—It will be as you wish.” Finally, a dull voice sounded in front of Annan.

Sitting in front was the portrait of the young child with the same posture as Annan.

That was Annan's mirror image, having the same ice blue pupils, the same clothes.

However, Annan's hair was black, and the opposition was white.

The most significant difference was that Annan's pupils were as bright as the stars under the night sky.

On the other hand, the pupil of the other party was a deep ice lake that was as calm as water and without emotion.

Although the two never met, Annan was immediately convinced it was Dream Stealer Danton.

In other words, it was Danton's will, a virtual image of the soul reconstructed with the help of Annan's memory.

It was not entirely accurate to refer to him as Danton.

Instead, it was born from the combination of Danton and Annan's memories.

However, having more memories did not make Danton superior.

Instead, the former Annan was willing to give up his memory and start again.

“So, you're just trying to take over my body?” A radiant smile came across the corners of Annan's mouth, “Interesting. You dare to appear in front of me!”

Although it was a delightful smile, it unexpectedly put shudders in the onlooker's heart.

Facing Annan's question, "Danton" was silent for a moment.

"I have greatly underestimated you." [Danton] said slowly, "In my original plan, even if this pure fear can't trap you, it should at least make you feel hopeless. You are a hedonist, a willful, and a reckless madman.

"You're stronger than you in your memory."

"Isn't that natural?" The smile on Annan's face did not fade, "I am stronger than the next me at every minute and every second. I'm not old yet, and progress is a matter of course. You had me a few hours ago, but I'm different now."

"Is this the power of the Book of Divine Transporter? The path of ascension and change..." Danton muttered.

"You're wrong, Danton." The smile on Annan's face gradually faded.

He said earnestly, "This is my strength. It is the result achieved through my willpower.

"It is the past me who chose to abandon all the feelings and memories that have been frosted. Now, I have no weakness in my heart.

"It's like adding 'Danton' to make me less pure."

"Purity. Does it work?" Danton asked calmly.

In the face of Danton's expected rhetorical question, Annan laughed even more, "As expected of you! As expected of me! This level of conversation. It's great!

"Give me my last nightmare." Annan stared at "Danton" and said calmly, "Or I'll kill you now."

"It's already been prepared for you."

"It's not something you've played with, is it?"

"Of course not, and it's straightforward and fairly brief." Danton closed his eyes.

The painting near him disappeared again and turned into the pupil of an old man.

Annan looked at the painting without fear.

The flame-like madness that had just awakened in his heart urged him to take risks.

The closer Annan was to death, the more he experienced failure and the more power surged in his heart.

The scene in front of Annan's eyes changed again.

He was lying on the hospital bed.

His body was fragile. When he opened his eyes, he could only see incomparably vague things, and it was difficult to speak when he opened his mouth. The small voice heard in his ear was as noisy as a chisel digging into his brain.

He was surrounded by strangers which he could not see clearly.

He felt someone sitting beside him, holding his old hand; he also felt some sobbing in a corner, some pacing outside the house, some were looking at him, and some were afraid to look at him.

Annan felt inexplicable when his time had come.

Death was already standing by his bed. It might be his end the next time he breathed out.

Annan suddenly understood.

This time, the challenge was not a time-limited escape room, not a role-playing game of wrestling with others and earning more time, or even a platform jumping with repeated failures and malicious creators. It was a simple game of "going forward".

As long as Annan accepted his death, this short, directionless petty game would be over.

But, if Annan accepted the fate of his death, could he still wake up?

The Righteous Player(s) C429– The Madman's Heart

Chapter 429: The Madman's Heart

Annan felt the suffocation growing intense with phlegm stuck in his throat.

He could not open his eyes at all and could only move his eyelids slightly, even when he mustered all his strength.

Annan felt pain all over his body: under the skin, internal organs, and bones. Luckily, his curse was still working.

This had weakened the pain countless folds. However, the pain was still vividly haunting Annan despite the pain relief effect.

All the curses could do was to make Annan calmer.

It was an unprecedented sense of being weak.

Not to mention chatting, Annan did not even have the strength to groan with each breath becoming more debilitated, closer to death.

I see.

Is this what it feels like to age and die?

Annan had an insight in his heart.

That was not a life that could be terminated suddenly after exhaling the next breath.

Instead, Annan died little by little. It was like the light of a fire that gradually went out.

Suddenly, Annan saw something—

The most eager, middle-aged woman held her hand. She seemed to be the body's daughter, and her body suddenly lit up.

Even Annan did not need to open his eyes to see his image.

(Is this finally the end? It's such a hassle. Is the old man finally going to die?)

As Annan's left eye warmed slightly, a faint whisper sounded in Annan's heart.

Is this the [Angel's Left Eye]?

Annan was stunned for a moment before realizing it.

The next moment, the young woman who had been sobbing in the corner finally cried out loud.

It was a sob that came out of her throat when she could not hold it back anymore.

The man beside her sighed deeply, hugged the woman in his arms, gently patted her shoulder, and comforted her silently.

At this moment, the young man also suddenly showed light.

(Damn, die quickly. Jenny hasn't slept for several days. Her body will not be able to take it.)

While the girl named Jenny was sobbing loudly, the sadness spread around the room like a curse.

People who did not intend to cry could not help but choke with sobs.

Tears flowed from their eyes subconsciously, but they did not seem to realize it. Those who shed tears became sadder.

Even Annan had wet the corner of his eyes.

A middle-aged man suddenly stood up, lowered his eyes, sobbed, reached out his trembling hand, and wiped the corner of Annan's eyes with a handkerchief.

"Teacher." He spoke in a low sob.

He appeared saddened with that solemn attitude.

In Annan's eyes, the man was suddenly highlighted.

(Great, I finally found an opportunity to express my [Filial Piety]. The teacher's family now sees my sincerity. When I use the teacher's name to sell paintings to make money, they probably won't point it out of concern for me.)

Immediately afterward, one person after another in the house gradually lit up in Annan's eyes.

A rustling, malicious whisper resounded in Annan's heart.

(I don't think I have a share of the teacher's legacy. Then, I'll take the painting from the studio tomorrow.)

(I wonder if the second uncle's inheritance can fill Little Marlin's gambling debts. This is a terminal illness. Why did you waste so much money on him previously?)

(It's retribution. He deserves it. If Grandpa didn't stop me from marrying Justin, he wouldn't have ended up with no money to find a priest now.)

(I have wasted more than a month of my time, but he will finally die. Great, I don't have a job anymore.)

As Annan got closer to death, the more mournful those around him became.

But the malice that ignited in their hearts became more and more intense.

That might not be called malicious.

Instead, they just looked forward to Annan's death.

The old painter, who had been hospitalized for a long time, had already burned away the grief of his family and students in the long and near-death journey.

The noise in Annan's head faded away.

Everything around him suddenly became quiet, the pain in his body disappeared, and he fell into complete silence.

Then, he remembered.

They were not like that for a while when they first fell ill, and neither was he.

“Don't waste money on treating me. My disease can't be cured.”

“Don't say that! We have to treat the elderly with money.”

Like flashbacks, the events four months ago flashed before his eyes.

Their eyes were filled with anxiety and urgency in words and actions. There was eager and real “love”.

But not long after that, the love wholly burned out.

The vicissitudes in life and the commitment of energy, mental and financial resources consumed the overflowing “love” before the sickbed.

It happened unknowingly. The desire to “survive in the end” gradually turned into a desire to “die sooner.”

The sentiment amplified between 10%, 30%, and 50% across time.

What they showed was still the love of the past, but what they were thinking was clear as day in the eyes of the old man.

The only way to revive that love is to die.

To wash away the exhaustion, irritability, pain, and sadness and turn them into sweet nostalgia.

Only when I die can I not be hated and stop troubling them.

Death is my only way out.

Is that what you want to show me, Danton? Annan watched the flashbacks of the body's life in the studio, and this thought came to his mind.

Danton did not want Annan to die in the nightmare but to confuse Annan's perception of "life" and "death".

Danton wanted to plant the thought on Annan that "It's wrong for me to live", and let Annan have the idea that "people are expecting him to die".

What is Danton going to do?

Is he trying to detonate the desire to seek demise?

"This is so boring." Annan sighed deeply, "It's not as interesting as the last trap."

The nightmare suddenly fell apart.

Then, Annan reopened his eyes.

The brilliance in his eyes dimmed a little, but the glow overflowed again immediately.

"It's underwhelming." Annan sighed, "How is this your ultimate trick? Who do you think I am?"

"This level of fear is negligible. I don't even have the slightest thought of 'I should die'."

The white-haired youth opposite Annan frowned incomprehensibly, "How? Don't you have a heart?"

"Don't you have a shred of guilt when the people who loved you hates you? You don't even want them to give up on saving you."

"That's natural. Their hate for me has nothing to do with me. I don't live for them." Annan sighed and stood up.

The broken wall beneath his feet suddenly shook.

The seven fear fragments were collected, and the nightmare suddenly trembled.

The ruins spun and gathered together; buildings were outlined in the void, filling the gaps in the broken walls.

The ship, which was initially broken into pieces, was reconstructed in the blink of an eye.

Finally, Annan recognized it after having a full view of the ship.

This was the first nightmare he had ever experienced.

An artificial nightmare created by Benjamin with John's soul and all the curses of Don Juan Geraint.

That ship.

"Hey, make no mistake, Danton." Annan looked down at the white-haired youth leaning against the wall and said calmly, "I am not a saint, a deity, or a king."

“It doesn't matter to me how the outsiders are. There's a limit to what I have control over. All I can manage is myself.

“Like the spider thread nightmare, I told them to follow me. But did I turn around and wait for them? Did I expect them? Did I give orders and direct them?”

“Am I stipulating that they have to follow me? Did I demand them not to betray me? Did I say a word when they backed off?”

Annan laughed heartily, “Stop it, Danton!”

“I'm not your average madman. They do what they like. I won't sacrifice myself because I want to answer their request but because I want to get something. Thus, I don't need any remuneration. Then, when I'm hated and not needed, I forget about them.

“They like to play this game called 'life', so I lead them in the game. But when I don't want to, no one gets to force me to help them; if they don't like it, they go back and live their own lives. After all, their expectation has nothing to do with me.”

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Annan ended his sentence.

The vast, ice-blue pupil finally came over and stopped in the captain's room where Annan and the white-haired youth were.

For some reason, Annan had a strong hunch in his heart.

He chose not to move but calmly accepted that light's basking.

The icy blue light shone on Annan's back, casting a long projection that shrouded “Danton,” crouching on the ground.

As predicted.

Annan was unharmed under his own “scrutinizing” gaze.

The damage he suffered in the nightmare previously had rejuvenated.

As Annan's vigor gradually stabilized, “Danton” opposite Annan slowly curled up, and his presence weakened.

Annan had collected all seven fear fragments.

There was a saying in this world that a person would only be unlucky seven times in a row. The reason being “seven” was the number of luck and accidents. Danton only had seven chances to launch offenses directly at Annan.

After seven times, the “accident” was over.

At this moment, this place was Annan's home base.

The self-seeing eye on the sky was a mechanism like a firewall.

It existed to seek out and kill the invader in the consciousness: "Danton".

In a sense, "Danton" was a "Trojan horse" [1] – he combined Annan's memories. Naturally, some belong to Annan's emotions, and some belong to Annan's will.

He would be determined as the "changed Annan".

Originally, the "self-seeking" eye would not be able to detect Danton.

When Danton invaded other people's minds previously, he had never failed once when he used this method.

However, Annan was unique.

Annan had incomparable confidence and affirmation of his form and soul.

Annan was sure his trajectory would not change deep down in his heart. If there were any growth and changes, he was well aware of the direction he would be heading.

Even when there was an impurity in the process, Annan would eliminate them immediately.

His self-belief and self-discipline were not human-like.

"You have failed." Annan raised his eyebrows and looked down at "Danton" with his hands in his pockets, "Do you know why you have failed?"

"The chef doesn't look at the recipe but read the art of war!" "Danton" responded subconsciously.

[TN: A Chinese saying that someone is being scammed terribly and he has to resort to out-of-the-box aspects to counter the scams.]

"—Ooh, as expected of me!"

However, Annan was not surprised or stunned by this comment. Instead, he reached out his hand and applauded excitedly and happily, "That's a good saying!"

"Aren't you wanting to kill me?" "Danton" looked up from the shadows and looked at Annan with complex eyes, "Now you can."

"I can." Annan replied, "But I don't believe you."

"I don't think you will perish so easily even if I kill you here. I want to eradicate you." With Annan's voice, the world around him trembled again.

The world had changed again.

The captain's cabin gradually collapsed and was flattened. The three-dimensional world slowly turned into a plane and a high mountain later.

That icy blue pupil became even bigger and penetrated the sky's veil.

But this time, Annan and Danton were thrown into a new world.

Danton was powerless in front of Annan and was fixed on the guillotine.

The shape of the guillotine was precisely the same as what Annan had seen from the Pale Princess.

It was the place of judgment for the immortals — powerful enough to end everything.

“You modified other people's memories without authorization for your selfish desires.” Annan's voice rumbled in the sky.

“You stole others' status and identities.

“You bullied the weak, confused the mind, and toyed with others.

“You live by stealing. You're a thief of the mind, Danton.”

“What is this? Are you putting me on trial?”

“Danton” couldn't help but laugh out loud, “But that's what our Soul Snatch school is all about. I've been taught this way since I was a kid.

“It's all about 'having everyone to serve me'. We are weak and limited, and I can't do anything alone. So we must make good use of the power of others to survive and progress further in this world.

“Since the purpose is to take advantage of others, does the outer shell have a moral value?”

Danton argued slyly like Annan's sophistry.

Use confusion as the knife and plunge at the core like a spear.

However, Annan wasn't being dragged around by his nose.

After all, Annan also possessed this sophistry.

“Indeed, there's nothing wrong with using the power of others to achieve your own goals. It's a life choice, and there's nothing wrong with that.” Unexpectedly, Annan did not deny the matter.

He replied softly, “It's just that you are accustomed to stealing for a living, and you are accustomed to the life you can readily get your hands on. This will make your soul lazy, not thinking about progress, and not trying to change;

“You think that you are a strong person, and you play with the fate and mind of the weak at will, which will make you arrogant and less cautious;

“If you don't respect other people's past, that weakens your will and resilience.

“In every challenge you have faced in the past, you have chosen the most inferior and simplest answer. Your truancy from the life lessons will send you to the grave you dug with your own hands.”

That would be this moment and this place.

“Your failure is inevitable. You will encounter the same fate even if you don't meet me. In the end, you will still fail.

“That's because you were originally a loser, and that's why you came to this place.”

Thus...

Failure...

All the fears Danton instilled in Annan were various scenarios and types of [Failures].

That was because Danton had an intense fear of failure.

He was a complete failure himself.

He was terrified of his failure, particularly Bernardino, who defeated him with an unstoppable force. This fear was deeply engraved in his brain and had not been overcome even to this day.

He had a fear of his identity being discovered, the fear of his strength being nullified, the fear that made him indecisive, the fear of being powerless, the fear of sacrifice, the fear of repeated failure, and the fear of death.

Ahhh.

I see.

Everything is clear now.

Danton took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

They weren't Annan's fears all along.

Instead, his fears were turned into nightmares.

It happened because Annan's and Danton's memories were mixed when Danton absorbed them.

Although Danton wanted to murder Annan and trap the sentience, Danton instinctively created nightmares that came from his fear.

That was how Annan overcame some levels so easily.

It was not that Danton's dream control became inferior.

Instead, the fear of [Failure] in his heart had not dissipated.

"Yeah, I failed..." Danton smiled wryly and slowly lowered his head to the guillotine.

He had been playing with dreams for decades. However, Annan, who was not even a Soul Snatch Wizard, had a much more thorough grasp of human hearts.

What an...

At his life-and-death moment, the cordless beheading blade hanging high above his head slammed down.

It easily cut off Danton's neck.

"What an irony."

No mind reading was required.

Annan calmly continued Danton's last words.

The world in front of Annan instantly turned into darkness.

Nightmare: Dreams Within A Dream—

—Perfect Clear.