

## The Righteous Player(s)

Chapter 451: No Casualties

The spirits descended above the blazing Swamp's Black Tower like missiles.

Annan was the first to face off against the enemy.

His eyes were as bright as stars. It was the manifestation of the [Brilliant Sword] skill during the charging phase.

In this state, Annan possessed damage immunity BUFF of  $\frac{1}{3}$  incoming damage. Undisputedly, he was a reliable defender.

Annan kickstarted the battle with [Frost Sword]!

It was the swordsmanship ability enhanced by the "Will" attribute. It finally showed its true might after Annan reached the Silver Rank.

Pure white frost marks spread across Annan's blade.

Without hesitation, he sent a frost-colored, translucent arc-shaped sword energy toward the sky.

After the sword's energy was sent about 30 meters away from Annan, its power began to decrease, and its form began to dissipate and expand.

However, the spirits having their maximum prowess reaching Silver Ranking, could not resist the attack despite having the frost element diluted.

Among those spirit bodies that swooped down from the sky, 30 spirit bodies were condensed into ice because of Annan's sword energy.

They changed from their translucent illusory state into ice sculptures, condensing at a rate visible to the naked eye. Then, the frozen spirits shattered on their own.

An empty area about twenty meters long and three meters wide was particularly conspicuous amid the spirit bodies' army.

But these spirits were not afraid at all.

They continue their offense on the players at the expense of their companions.

At this distance, Annan could deliver two or three slash attacks at most.

Each time Annan harnessed [Frost Sword], he temporarily increased all frost damage by 10% and reduced his frost damage resistance by 10%. Considering that many of Annan's skills were harmful to himself and his attacks would spread, he could only send out five slashes at most.

After entering the melee, Annan could not unleash AOE attacks because of the players behind him.

Luckily, the players did not hold Annan back.

The players were more organized than Annan imagined.

“Let's unleash the ritual!” Delicious Wind Goose followed Annan along with Lin Yiyi. He raised his sword and guarded the flanks. At the same time, he turned back and shouted orders to the other players.

“Got it!” Wandering Child responded immediately.

This was the strategy they had discussed offline previously. Previously, they had no enemies to test it out. Strictly speaking, this was the first battle in which the ritual was used.

Delicious Wind Goose posted the ritual he had mastered on the forum in photos and drawings, allowing players to copy the ritual without mastering the skill.

On the other side, the Child could manipulate the terrain at will.

If it was only a small-scale battle, these terrain factors could only play the role of interference, hindrance, and follow-up attacks. However, in a group battle, the walls summoned with magic might hinder the teammates. Of course, the Child was aware of it.

But what if he used these earthen walls to form an altar?

Layers of earthen walls rise from the ground, outlining a perfect circle.

Four players proficient in the Agility attribute quickly go to the five corners of the altar to form a pentagram with Delicious Wind Goose. As the players ignited the rosin, myrrh, frankincense, dried rose, and thyme in turn, five flames fell on the earth wall at the same time. The Child and those who participated in the ritual tapped the ground with the weapons in their hands and shouted at the same time: “This is the place where all things are buried—”

The five groups of flames soared wildly.

A dim stream of light approached the flames. Immediately after, the gray-white streamers of light surrounded the circle.

A hemispherical phantom gray barrier rose.

When the spirits passed through the barrier, they couldn't help but roar in pain. Their movements also seemed to have become a little slower.

And more importantly, the players' weapons were dyed with a light grayish-white color.

It was a color reminiscent of bone and lime.

“Your Royal Highness Annan, we will take a defensive stance!”

Delicious Wind Goose immediately said to Annan, “We're using the Requiem ritual to suppress the speed of these spirits!”

“Great.” Annan nodded solemnly, “Then, I will focus on attracting the enemy's attention.”

He recognized that it was the Requiem ritual originated from Bone Burying Grandma.

In the magic circle, burn multiple different spices. After tapping the ground once in the middle and reciting the name of “bone burying”, it would bless everyone in the magic circle with Requiem ability for an hour.

—That was the ability to attack spiritual bodies with ordinary weapons.

Bone Burying Grandma's “Requiem” and Mr. Ray's “Purification” were the two most effective abilities for spiritual bodies.

Annan never thought that the Child's ability to transform terrain could be applied this way.

“That's a great help, Child!” Jiu Er shouted and slashed her belly with an axe.

After her Health Points dropped by half, her curse turned red and hot, fully activated.

After the second batch of players entered the fray, the three players who adopted the [Berserker] profession immediately used self-harming methods to activate their curses and rushed to the frontline of the battlefield.

Their attacks were working well.

The weapons used by Berserkers were mostly polearms. Only such weapons could fully exert their strength in use.

It also enabled their offense to be efficient.

Weapons under the effect of [Requiem] were quite unhandy to unharness. It felt like having a cushion full of air or cotton on the hardy weapon.

It was probably like a massive bridge-shaped balloon at the mall entrance.

If the Berserkers were to strike a little harder, it would smash the spirits away.

Instead, the Hunters and Lurkers fight more efficiently.

The most troublesome thing about these spirits was that physical contact had to be avoided.

Upon physical contact, the skin at the point of contact would be razed by negative energy, leaving a purple bruise. At the same time, the spirit would also absorb a considerable part of the Health Points from it.

But other than that, the fighting style of these spirits was simplistic.

Even the spirits with long-range attack methods fly to the faces of the players foolishly and then start to chant the spells — the spirits could not use divine art and other abilities. Only the spirits that were wizards in their lifetimes could use spells after death. The magic was limited to the Order Mana too.

The body used to carry the Chaos Mana was gone. It was just like how demonization manifested in the physical body, not the soul.

The mage spirits chanted spells in a head-on confrontation instead of kiting the players at their maximum spell-casting distance.

The players were familiar with this state.

It was apparent that the Spiritual Monk could not micro-manage all of them.

—Obviously, it was an F2A operation [1].

Delicious Wind Goose couldn't help but complain, "This reminds me of someone..."

As he spoke, he raised his round shield to block an attack firmly and then slashed over with his sword backhandedly, slashing the spirit body approaching Annan's back.

Lin Yiyi, on the other side, quickly spun the long staff in her hand. She could perform four consecutive attacks and slam four spirits away in a second. For foes she could smash away, it made it easy for her to wield the weapon. Aside from the magic caster at melee range, she did not face any pressure.

The duo guarded Annan with one on the left and the other on the right. Then, the group slowly advanced counterclockwise in the barrier, using Annan as the main damage output, who could instantly destroy all the spirits they encountered.

A few Silver Sire Priests took off their heavy armor, held a money pouch in their left hand and many silver coins in their right hand, and quickly roamed the battlefield. They promptly recovered the combat power for the wounded players and prevented the spirits from breaking through their line.

Among the players, "Dove" had the highest shooting accuracy. She stood with the Child in the center of the magic circle, blasting the spirit bodies capable of casting spells and interrupting their magic with precise shooting. The real Dove used the Chocolate's body to hide in the shadows and lurk among the players dexterously, helping those with their backs vulnerable and killing the spirits who want to sneak attack them.

Although it was the players' first time cooperating, they showed extraordinary teamwork.

Annan even felt that the free resurrection privilege he granted was wasted.

The battle lasted ten minutes until the formation stabilized.

There were no casualties.

[1] F2A. It's a game acronym that stands for clicking all enemies (by pressing F2) and selecting attack (by pressing A). Usually referred to as an F2A bot in winning war strategy games.

## Chapter 452: A Well-organized Cooperation!

"We're all done here, Your Highness Annan!" Delicious Wind Goose looked around and quickly said to Annan.

As a veteran warrior and core MT player, he knew it very well. In the typical monster clearing dungeon instance prioritizing "overwhelming the enemy in numbers", the most challenging part was to receive the monsters' assault at the beginning. There would be surprises of having a sudden decrease in members or having the tanks annihilated.

[TN: MT stands for Main Tank.]

However, without the ability to taunt and attract the enemy's aggro, this world did not have a tank profession in the strict sense.

Instead, the melee professions took on the excellent role of interception, interference, and controlling the foes.

While it was right to say that there was no tank, it was accurate to say that everyone in the melee profession was a tank.

The front line was stabilized. The first defense all the spirits could engage was of melee profession, and there would be no multiple spirits attacking the same player on both sides. Since Annan had gotten rid of the entanglement of these spirits, he managed to enter the Swamp's Black Tower.

Compared with Annan, who was alone, these spiritless bodies would prioritize the player group.

It had become a battle with soldiers going up against the soldiers and the generals having a showdown.

Annan had achieved an overwhelming victory on the "soldiers vs. soldiers" battlefield.

If Annan came here alone, these spirits would swarm and drown him here.

After all, Annan lacked the AOE skill to vanquish the spirits.

In the best-case scenario, Annan would utilize the [Brilliance] element to vanquish all spirits by relying on the Sage's Stone.

But Annan's activation on the Sage's Stone would only last him a total of three minutes.

Cleaning up the spiritual bodies and advancing would delay him at least one minute. That was equivalent to shortening Annan's boosted period by half to two-thirds.

Annan believed that this should be Bernardino's original plan.

Bernardino took advantage of these spirits and traded the disposable "resources" for Annan's trump cards. This was not a conspiracy but a forced "exchange" imposed on Annan. Even if Annan knew the opponent's goal, there was no way to go about it.

However, the players cooperated well and resolved Bernardino's tactics despite having a disadvantage in quantity and level.

This was something that Bernardino could not do.

He couldn't return the will to the spirits he controlled.

Bernardino knew very well that those spirits would rebel against him immediately if he did so.

This also meant that although he had a large number of spiritual bodies, there were only very few who could exert 100% of their power.

That was why he only brought two Gold Rank spirits and then assaulted the Swamp's Black Tower. The reason was not that he did not have other Gold Rank spirits, but he had to control those Silver Rank wizards simultaneously. That was already his limit of multitasking while he had to cast spells.

This was the theoretical limit of the Soul Snatch School.

The Soul Snatch Wizardry was a school whose core idea was to nurture oneself by relying on others.

They were bound to excel in the early and even the middle stages compared to the wizards at the same level.

However, the situation wasn't necessarily the same in the later stage.

The Soul Snatch School focused on absolute control. However, their upper limit was the lowest in comparison to the others.

There was a limit to having perfect control over the other's minds or spiritual bodies, which solely depended on the individual's "capability".

How much strength robbed from the "others" could you control?

How much of the mind could you snatch from the others?

The players were different.

Although they were smaller in numbers, they had freedom of will without Annan interfering with them.

Bernardino couldn't be distracted just to control weak spirits.

However, the players displayed far superior fighting power than usual for Annan in the name of justice, revenge, and many other factors.

This difference in "heart" was the foundation for players to defeat the strong while being the weak.

"—I will leave the rest to you." Annan said solemnly, "Can you keep up?"

"I will need 15 minutes."

Delicious Wind Goose took a rough estimate and replied in a deep voice, "However, the resurrection skill you activated is probably not going to be expended here."

“That’s for the best. This shows that you are becoming really strong.” The corners of Annan’s mouth rose, revealing a gratified smile, “Then, I can rest assured to have you all adventure on your own in the future.”

“Go, Your Highness Annan.” Lin Yiyi replied, “Old Goose and I are in charge here. So you should conserve your energy and mana.”

“You still have a strong enemy to defeat.”

“Then, I wish the best for all of you.” Annan finally nodded.

He then walked in the “twelve o’clock” direction, which was the ritual’s location closest to Swamp’s Black Tower.

Then, he bounced off the ground and sent a frost-colored beam forward. Finally, he leaped out of the gray barrier!

Annan landed precisely in the opening he made available and withdrew the blade into the sheath around his waist.

Immediately after landing on the ground, he supported himself on the ground with his left hand and exerted force on his hands and feet at the same time.

Shua!

Annan’s movement stirred up whirling air around him. At the same time, he was like an agile fish, flying just above the ground as he darted through the spiritual bodies floating above!

That was because the spirit bodies feared the earth.

If Annan were alone, he would never dare to rush in like this. He might stand no chance to stand up later on.

However, Longjing Tea, who spectated the battle for a long time at the 12 o’clock location, had played a vital role after Annan launched himself:

“—Truce!” The “Edict” spell was activated.

Those spirits in the sky who wanted to chase Annan were instantly pushed to the other end of the battlefield by Longjing Tea’s spell. They were launched away from the Swamp’s Black Tower at six o’clock direction.

As for the ally spell target, Longjing Tea only picked himself. This meant that Longjing Tea “shot” a large area of enemies to one side without disrupting the players’ formation.



To conserve mana, the invisible wall in the middle was only maintained for a moment before Longjing Tea disbanded it.

But even so, his positioning skill played an outstanding group control.

Given the speed of these spirits, they missed the chance to chase Annan, and it was no longer possible to catch up.

“That looks like Tathagata's Palm attack!” The Child exclaimed excitedly, “That's beautiful!”

[TN: Reference to the Monkey King's inability to escape Buddha's palm.]

Then, Longjing Tea irritated these spirits. Scorching hot fireballs, laser beams, fatal poisons, reactive acid, and the invisible attack concussing the soul drowned Longjing Tea instantly. Spirits without long-range ability also flew toward Longjing Tea.

He was also the first player to die.

However, as soon as his body was reduced to ashes, it gathered and appeared again. Like turning back time, he appeared in place intact.

“It's Overtime!” Longjing Tea roared, “Neckless, quite screwing with me!”

“I'm coming!” Delicious Wind Goose shouted.

He leaped forward and slashed with excitement, instantly beheading a spirit body. It was a contrasting swordsmanship approach, like how he had fought reservedly just now. Instead, the swordsmanship was wild, wide open, and full of flaws.

Then, Delicious Wind Goose caught the attention of other spirits.

Since the spiritual bodies were displaced, they needed time to return to their previous formation.

Longjing Tea reached out to him when Delicious Wind Goose was about to be besieged.

“[Dodge]!” An Edict spell came.

Delicious Wind Goose seemed to have eyes behind his back—or rather, his body had 360-degree perception. His body moved flexibly, and he dodged all the attacks smoothly.

Then, Longjing Tea pointed to Jiu Er, who was about to be besieged again, and ordered again, “[Dodge]!”

Jiu Er also became flexible and avoided several attacks that were in the blind spot of her vision but could be seen by Longjing Tea.

The Child standing in the center of the ritual also used the Aero Strike to send out a few invisible air blades and pull several spiritual bodies over.

Soon, with incomparable cooperation, the players stabilized their lineup again.

Annan kept jumping upward from the outside of Swamp's Black Tower.

After all, he could not fly, so efficiently climbing up the wizard tower was challenging. Who knew if the collapsed debris blocked the stairs?

So Annan was outside the wizard tower, breathing out frost air. After the frost burst from outside the tower, he stepped on the place where the flames were temporarily extinguished and jumped upwards again.

After about five minutes of climbing, Annan finally approached the upper floors of the wizard tower.

The brilliance in his eyes has grown brighter.

He held the dagger around his waist with his right hand and touched the bonding knife with his left. Then, he took a deep breath.

He did not use Sage's Stone right away.

But when he reached the tower's roof, he leaped high into the sky.

Without hesitation, Annan blessed the [Frost Sword] magic on the bonding knife.

Then, he immediately hurled it toward Bernardino!

It was followed up by Annan pulling his rapier out.

A meteor-like bright frost flashed by.

Annan activated [Victory Will] for a frontal charge attack!

Then, activating [Victory Will] again to launch a heavy blow!

Annan's Strength and Agility increased sharply from 14 to 36!

He appeared in the Bernardino perception range under a quarter of a second.

Annan had already launched a swift surprise attack!

His figure was like a comet hitting the moon, following the dagger he sent to attack Bernardino!

#### Chapter 453: Annan's Avatar

In just a split second, Annan was already approaching Bernardino.

The moment he swung his sword, the surrounding sky gave off an illusion of being lit up.

When Annan was less than five meters away from Bernardino, he suddenly felt an unprecedented resistance.

He rushed forward for two steps with the help of his inertia. However, the invisible resistance became stronger and stronger.

It was like being swallowed up by transparent glue.

Annan felt pressure coming from his chest. In just a moment, his body went to a complete halt, and even breathing became difficult.

His movements became extremely slow... Annan even felt the bones of his right arm creaking and breaking.

Annan realized this seemed to be some kind of defensive barrier, or the restriction and imprisonment magic afflicted toward one single individual.

It did not seem to be from the Energy Falteration School, but more like the Edict School or Idol School.

But the next moment, Annan noticed something.

While the invisible force restrained his movements, the boning knife thrown from behind him passed through Annan's armpit with unabated speed and pierced straight into Bernardino's right shoulder!

It only restrained me but not the bonding knife?

Annan squinted slightly, noticing this detail.

After the boning knife pierced into Bernardino's body, it shattered into pieces of nothingness. As it exploded, the wound tore further. A vicious and hot liquid with an unusually bright red color immediately flowed down Bernardino's injury.

The massive impact made Bernardino sway and stagger, almost falling over.

“Annan?” Bernardino did not respond in pain. It was like the pain sensation was void from his body. He frowned and looked back with a complicated expression, “You actually came at this timing...”

He did not attack Annan right away.

At this time, Annan gave up the idea of continuing to move forward.

He could not recognize what spell he was bound by.

At this point, the best thing to do was to get out first.

Annan sprung his legs and jumped back against the ground.

During the confrontation just now, the bones of his right arm were afflicted with tiny cracks. His muscles were also strained heavily, and his entire right arm swelled abnormally at a rapid pace.

Annan immediately checked his health.

88%。

88%.

Although his right arm was injured, his health value did not drop significantly.

As Annan retreated quickly, he took a powerful healing reagent out of his bag, bit off the stopper, and chugged it into his mouth.

In addition, he also took out Sage's Stone at the same time.

In the end, I still have to use Sage's Stone. Otherwise, I won't even have the power to fight Bernardino.

I can't even see where and when the Gold Rank spirit bodies guarding Bernardino are attacking me without attaining the Gold Rank.

Annan injected Sage's Stone into his heart without hesitation.

He planned to drag it out and wait for the player to come over.

However, it seemed that this plan was invalid.

“It's actually Sage's Stone.” Seeing Annan's actions, Bernardino smiled slightly and said in a pretentious tone, “You actually want to use Sage's Stone to defeat me—”

“You are wrong.” Annan denied it.

“I didn't intend to use Sage's Stone to defeat you.”

“Then you—”

“I'm going to use the power of Sage's Stone to give us a fair fight.” Annan said slowly, word by word, “Then...”

“I will kill you with my power.”

He felt a strong heartbeat.

Even the eardrums were pumping to the rhythm of the heartbeat.

A strange power boiled his blood.

There was a burning sensation surging in his blood circulatory system.

However, it shouldn't be confused with pain.

The sensation was like being huddled in a warm bed on a winter night. It was so warm that it put him sleepy.

Runes, shining with golden light, flowed from his heart and quickly spread throughout his body.

Wrists, shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, cheeks, forehead, legs...

[Your level is rising. The current level is LV 26.]

[Level continues to rise. Your current level is LV 31,]

The texts flowed through rapidly and eventually slowed to a halt:

[Your level has increased. Your current level is LV 48.]

[Extracting elements—]

[Bloodline element(s): Frost (100%)]

[Soul element(s): Brilliance (100%), Wisdom (45%), Glory (10%), Beauty (13%), Strict (6%)]

The information flashed past in seconds.

His level and the extraction of his elements were much better compared to the last time.

Level 48... Isn't the limit of the Truth Rank Level 50?

Does Sage's Stone really have this kind of power?

Or, is it just me that I'm special?

Such doubts flashed through Annan's mind.

An intense glow rose from his brain. In Annan's eyes, the whole world became brighter.

[Element Manifestation: Frost, Brilliance]

[Perfect manifestation.]

[The Truth is manifesting—]

[Book of Divine Transporter 3/6]

[Available truths: the Undying, the Way to Rise and Change, the Beasts Number]

Annan exhaled suddenly.

This time, his clothes were not entirely torn by that power.

However, there were still tattered “tears”.

Behind Annan, a pair of wings was pierced from his shoulders and waist each.

One pointed to the sky proudly while the other pair draped.

Those runes had also “opened their eyes”.

This time, there was a subtle difference from the previous transformation.

Not only had the number of eyes doubled to eighty, but all eyes had also become silver vertical pupils.

There were more traces of silver connecting them.

Even the rapier in Annan's hand had an extra eye on the sword.

Ah, I see. Annan blurted.

No matter if it was Danton's spirit or the man he had never seen before...

Or the black clay figurine in the void that was madly slaughtering, or the monster with half of its body ablaze with crimson flames, hands like canine, heads like eagles, and straight backs...

—They were avatars.

Everything became clear.

The relationship between the two, the remaining power, the nature of Black Tower, the nature of the elements of both parties...

Even if Annan had not opened his eyes... He “saw” it.

Although it was still vague and the information was incomplete, Annan did receive the actual data with the help of his eyes.

Three minutes is enough.

There is a chance to win.

The moment Annan opened his eyes again, the sky was entirely obscured by the dark clouds summoned out of thin air.

Whether it was sunlight, moonlight, or starlight...

It all darkened in front of Annan.

Even the blazing fire above the Black Tower had dimmed at least three folds.

The only bright light source between the sky and earth was Annan.

Annan's vertical pupils had turned entirely silver and emotionless.

His silver hair fluttered backward even without wind.

“Bernardino...” However, Annan's mouth didn't move. “So, you want to escape your fate?”

An ethereal voice sounded out of thin air between sky and earth.

The black, oil-like half-body monster tried to retreat from the frontline as if instinctively felt threatened.

Annan's avatar was much better than the last time he saw it.

It was no longer a blurred, half-human silhouette.

The outline of the facial features and the muscles on the body was faintly visible. Annan's avatar was superior to the half-human, half-eagle, half-dog monster burning with the flames belonging to Tower Master Hugo.

Suddenly, Hugo's avatar suddenly hugged Bernardino's avatar as if he had realized something.

The next moment, the pouring freezing rain fell!

The white ice mist, condensed above the burning Black Tower, formed many dense thorns. It enshrouded Bernardino's body.

The white ice fog built with countless sharp ice crystals covered the sky above the Black Tower.

Then, behind Annan...

A dragon head that shone from the inside out and was composed of ice, like a work of art, was silently generated in the ice fog.

It flew in the fog and bit Bernardino!

#### Chapter 454: Fight

Bernardino's pupils contract suddenly.

Annan, how could he have an avatar?

The most basic avatar can only be awakened when the elements are perfectly extracted. It isn't a power that can be obtained by merely holding a page fragment of the Book of Truth!

Even if there was a complete Sage's Stone, it was impossible for Annan to immediately grasp the power of the elements and attain full awakening upon them!

Due to the surprise factor, Bernardino could only control Isaac Flamel to use [Atmospheric Aegis], condensing the air into a solid magic crystal. Then, he borrowed Danton to cast the Soul Snatch magic of [Forbid Attack] on Annan.

Just now, the ray of [Forbid Attack] struck Annan while he could not see Danton at all.

His will to follow through with the desire to attack caused his arm to be injured.

However, Annan could see it all in the current state.



When Annan's awakening of the “Brilliance” element had reached 100%, the ray didn't even get close to Annan and was deflected straight out.

Even the brilliance of the Sun, Moon, and Star became dim in front of Annan.

Unauthorized light could not get close to Annan at all.

That shield, which was strong enough to resist the blow of the Gold Rank Destruction Wizard, was gnawed on by Annan's [Exalted Avatar]. It shattered in the end!

[TN: Previously, Exalted Avatar was translated as Sublimed Avatar in Chapter 399.]

After the dragon's head bit, it continued to slam forward and knocked Bernardino straight out!

The spirit body had no elemental power to speak of.

Although the elemental power was obtained by burning the soul, it needed to be stored in the brain. Without having both the soul and the body, it was difficult to use the power of the elements.

Without the spiritual body, the extraction of the element would be halted; without the physical body, the end product could not be stored.

The elemental power that Issac could extract was deadly enough for mortals.

However, it could withstand a single blow from the dragon's head composed of elements of light and ice.

Exalted Avatars could only be in the environment of their relevant element and could only move within its related elements. That was why Bernardino had to start setting up his surroundings before releasing his Exalted Avatar. Likewise, that was why Hugo could only call out his Exalted Avatar after setting the Swamp's Black Tower ablaze.

Fundamentally, they could only move on the ground — especially on their “own” territory.

Therefore, although they were entirely made up of elemental power, they could hardly be stopped by any spells and abilities. However, they could not directly attack enemies with the same power.

But Annan was different.

With the transcended power of Chill of the Winter Sun, he sprinkled ice crystals in the air. With this as its track, he could let his dragon head fly freely in the air.

Just then, Annan felt a sudden sharp pain in his head as if his soul was being torn apart—

Danton must be looking at me.

Annan's pupils shone in eerie azure blue.

“... Lily Wreath... Azoth's Power...” At this time, Issac uttered his chant swiftly.

The surrounding air turned poisonous.

That was the [Hermetic Poison Dust]!

Using the pure-hearted Fallen as the raw material, it was a fatal poison dedicated to otherworldly beings!

The ancient formula that “Hermes II” was trying to reproduce and improve. It was easily generated out of thin air by his mentor using “air” as a raw material in his alteration magic.

However, Hugo's voice sounded at the same time:

“Love of Dianthus. Noose of Orchids. Azoth's Power. Resurrection of God. Face of the Sun... Lily Wreath...”

Although he finished the chant a little later than Issac, it didn't delay too much since he reacted fast enough.

“Hermetic Poison Dust”, which had just been brought over by Issac's alteration magic, was returned to its original state; it did not last long!

“You are familiar with my spells... On the other way round, I am familiar with your spells too.” Hugo sneered, “The times are different, old man.

“And now our situation is different!” Two Alteration Wizards with similar strengths and levels were hostile to each other. In the end, no one could complete their Alteration spell that took a long chant.

Hugo completed a few Alterations relying on the advantages of the Exalted Avatar. However, after being entangled, Issac reverted everything.

After Annan arrived, there were two Exalted Avatars on this side.

Issac, the only one who could effectively damage Annan, could not do anything under Hugo's intervention!

The dragon head that knocked Bernardino out had already flown back at this moment.

The dragon bit toward Danton's spirit body again from the back.

However, Danton, who looked directly at Annan, remained unfazed.

That was not the confusion of the spirit after being manipulated by Bernardino.

It was a complex expression.

Pleasure, jealousy, stunned, lost... and finally turned into gentleness.

From the very beginning, Danton was not fully controlled!

It was just that he managed to interfere with Bernardino's memory, allowing him to ignore this part of the dissonance.

After seeing Annan's curse, Danton seemed to understand something.

Thus, he did not follow Bernardino's control.

He did not run away but just stared at Annan.

It was bitten by the dragon head that came from behind!

[You have killed a Gold Rank spirit in battle. 6800 Shared Experience points are granted.]

A prompt appeared in Annan's eyes.

He raised his right hand, and the dagger with an eye floated in the air.

The Frost Wheel came about in his hand.

It was unlike a regular Falteration Wizard, which summoned an illusory light wheel composed of energy. Instead, it was an actual "wheel" that was somewhat rustic and slightly worn.

Annan threw it like a boomerang.

The wheel ignored Issac's spirit body and attacked Bernardino directly!

There was light in Bernardino's jeweled eyes.

The swarming spirit bodies quickly poured out of his eyes to fend off the wheel!

—The spiritual body swarm that attacked the player previously was not all the tricks he had left!

“How many people did you kill?” Annan sighed deeply.

There was no anger and no compassion.

The tone was condescending, like the deity-like indifference.

In the freezing rain, Annan's body became illusory.

He held his rapier.

It was the same attack as before.

Annan activated [Victory Will] once again for another frontal charge!

If the previous attack could be described as a meteor, it was like a brilliant light stream this time.

Annan dashed toward Bernardino from the other side with his rapier wielded.

At this time, Hugo's Exalted Avatar had also become tattered.

Its neck was broken, and it shrunk in size.

Bernardino's Exalted Avatar was finally able to return.

The spinning Frost Wheel and Annan came in person.

Without hesitation, Bernardino controlled the Exalted Avatar to block the Frost Wheel first.

The burly man with the blurred face looked at the plain wheel seriously and solemnly.

It quickly smashed many spiritual bodies, but it was only a little slow compared to the torrent of spiritual bodies.

The Exalted Avatar pushed his hands forward together to firmly clamp the wheel!

But even so, the wheels were spinning fanatically!

It felt more like a chainsaw than a wheel.

However, the Exalted Avatar managed to hold the wheel tightly, restraining it back from returning as well!

The black mud and cold currents rushed violently all around the surroundings.

Hugo's avatar, composed of "Endless Fire", slowly recovered. It was about to be resurrected again.

Bernardino inhaled a spirit body in the air into his hand and turned it into a short sword.

He blocked Annan's surprise attack with exceptionally skilled movements!

That powerful body was not inferior to Annan's strength during his second-form period. On the contrary, it was the ever-moving body that continuously extracted Sage's Stone for energy!

Based on his curse, the memories of all those he killed would flow to him from dreams.

Thus, he grew more powerful when there was more death.

At this moment, Bernardino made himself a Gold Rank Swordsman.

Annan had formidable might and a sharp blade.

But it would be meaningless if Annan could not land a hit.

On the other hand, losing Danton was a massive loss for Bernardino.

But at the same time, he regained a lot more mind power.

He controlled the black mud and attacked the head of the ice dragon like a torrent.

On the other hand, his muscles swelled. Instead of retreating, he advanced and fought Annan in close quarters!

This was clearly an opportunity.

The best chance to kill Annan!

Hugo and Issac confront each other;

Hugo's avatar had not been resurrected;

With the manifestation of the elemental power, he stopped Annan's avatar;

On the other hand, his avatar halted the Frost Wheel Annan summoned— The wheel was not merely a projection but the actual [Frost Wheel].

Only at this time could he fight Annan fairly.

Annan was so eager for it, so why wasn't Bernardino so?

Sage's Stone only lasted for three minutes. He knew it very well.

He just had to hold on, and he could get through it...

However, Annan did not choose to brawl with him.

He had the will to win at all costs—

Annan did not block Bernardino's attack.

Puff—

The short sword of spirit bodies sank straight into Annan's chest!

#### Chapter 455: The Death Of Bernardino

Annan's ferocious sword slashed a wound in Bernardino's neck as another eye of his closed.

The wound instantly frosted, and the chill eroded into his body.

Still, Bernardino was unfazed.

This sword was considered a mortal item, after all.

It did not carry the same weight as the Frost Wheel, which had witnessed the beginning of the world.

Bernardino retorted with a slash, attempting to behead Annan directly.

On the hand, Annan maintained a strict offense disregarding his safety.

That displayer the Truth of the [the Undying]!

Bernardino glanced over.

Although there were 80 eyes on Annan, only 45 eyes were opened. At this moment, there were 44 eyes left.

This meant he had to kill Annan 44 more times!

He faintly noticed that Annan's other elements were too far from awakening. [Way to Rise and Change] was temporarily unavailable; [Number of Beasts] required the support of the players to keep running.

The only thing Annan could utilize was the truth of [Undying]!

With one eye closed and the wound on his body healed, Annan pointed the blade at Bernardino's chest again, leaving a scar deep into the bone!

Neither of them committed any probing attempts.

Except for the first blow, there was no parry or dodge.

Every slash was a deadly attack.

Every time the sword was swung, the opponent did not die.

The two wizards finally chose to fight each other with swords.

It was a literal "life-and-death battle".

Annan would die once every second.

But his fierce onslaught made Bernardino's movements more and more sluggish.

Even though the sword in Annan's hand was only a mortal weapon, the elemental power left by the Frost Sword was substantial!

Annan had long ignored the damage Frost Sword would inflict on himself. Under the Sage's Stone state, Frost Sword could hardly cause any harm to him, and he had already stacked ten stacks of the [Frost Blood] buff.

This was almost the strongest state Annan could have before becoming a deity!

Even if the opponent had a body approaching immortals because of the Sage's Stone, he could not last too long under Annan's fanatic assault!

The more Annan attacked, the more timid Bernardino became.

Does he put no value in his life?

I don't have any grudge against him—

His body became increasingly rigid, and his reaction gradually slowed.

At first, he could kill Annan once per second, but later, he couldn't even attack Annan. Instead, Annan would frantically slash him dozens of times in a row.

Even the black mud on the ground was gradually frozen and hardened.

His Exalted Avatar was also covered with a layer of frost marks, like a frozen corpse. It became highly stiff.

Bernardino felt an unprecedented fear of death.

Until 3 minutes passed where the Sage's Stone's time limit expired, he couldn't kill all of Annan's 45 lives.

28 eyes were still open.

Bernardino couldn't even help but laugh when Annan lost his brilliance and became mortal again.

It was a sorry laughter for feeling relief after a troubled state.

His Exalted Avatar had been frozen into an ice sculpture.

The black mud turned into a hardened black slate, and no more surging souls could rise from it.

All his souls were exhausted, and he had no more tricks left.

The Sage's Stone coming from converting the wizards of Swamp's Black Tower, had almost exhausted with the "bloodshed".

Bernardino would really die if he were to sustain a few more attacks.

"Finally, finally... I won!" Bernardino's eyes widened, staring at Annan almost frantically with his voice cracked.

It was ecstasy for he who had won his battle against his fate.

He was not a mirror of another person. He should never be.

All the destined fate should end at this time.

He roared and thrust the blade into Annan's chest.

"Die! Annan!"

Pfft—



Annan did not retaliate.

He slowly raised his head and looked at Bernardino.

There was an incomparable brilliance in Annan's eyes.

That was the light that could sear even the soul, which only came from those who dared to burn everything!

Annan clenched the Frost Sword that was already on its limit, and his hand was already frostbitten.

However, Annan still slashed the sword firmly and with great strength at Bernardino!

His right hand holding the sword was torn off in the process.

The fracture was splendid — like dead pork that had been frozen for a long time.

“Wait! No!” Bernardino finally lost his composure.

With the complete exhaustion of Sage's Stone power, the rejuvenated Spiritual Monk had his skin begin to wither and age again.

“Why aren't you dead yet?!” He was in a sorry state and desperate cries. He wanted to avoid Annan's attack, but he couldn't.

His body had also been filled with frost elements.

“Fate is like a cobweb, the more you struggle... the tighter it gets.” Annan just grinned, even a little sour about it.

“Grandma really gave me too much, and I don't need them at all.” He still had the two more cards he hadn't unleashed.

Bernardino had fallen in Annan's third trump card.

Annan took a deep breath, “I won't give you a chance to resurrect.”

He whispered, “Face your end.”

Then, he blew out a frigid gust of wind that enveloped Bernardino entirely.

Bernardino had wholly turned into an ice sculpture, and it then cracked.

The enemies killed by Chill of the Winter Sun would be led to the end of all things by the power of “Austere-Winter”, and there would be no chance of resurrection.

[You have defeated a Gold Rank enemy in battle and given 12800 Shared Experience points.]

However, Bernardino's Exalted Avatar and the frozen black mud on the ground did not disappear.

"Your Royal Highness Annan..." Hugo's voice sounded tired, "It's not over yet. His Exalted Avatar must also be destroyed."

"Got it." Annan nodded.

For Gold Rank enemies, just destroying their bodies was far from over.

Learning from Danton's lesson previously, Annan took a few steps back and came to the Exalted Avatar, which was frozen into an ice sculpture and still folded his hands like a black Buddha statue.

"The pain of killing me so many times... I will return the favor to you here." Annan's heart was still bleeding.

However, he raised his rapier solemnly.

This was the first time he had used this skill.

Even he did not know how powerful the ability would be.

—[Brilliant Sword].

It was an ability that unleashed all the absorbed damage to form a splendid ray of slash; the lower the user's health, the more robust the ray slash would be. It would reach its maximum state when Health Point was lower than 30%. It was a great comeback mechanic.

Indeed, an ability effective for a turnaround.

It was just that Bernardino had died before experiencing its might.

"Let it be your funeral, the last Spiritual Monk of the world," Annan murmured in a low voice.

The skill was then blessed with [Victory Will]—

A dazzling brilliance spewed out from Annan's hands.

Then, the attack was delivered!

There was no whistling noise or explosions.

Only the bright and brilliant surging light quietly spewed out from the blade's tip, destroying everything in front of Annan.

Bernardino's Exalted Avatar finally fell apart after lasting about six seconds in the basking of the brilliance.

Then, a beam of light tilted towards the sky, breaking through the obstacles of the white fog and flames and reaching the sky!

Until the beam of light dissipated, a white page with a jade-like textile was quietly suspended in the air.

The mirror finally ushered in its end—

Ushered in its fate.

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Chapter 456: 456

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

Chapter 456: Book Of Divine Transporter, Page 4

[Book of Divine Transporter, Page 2]

[Type: Truth Fragment (1/6) (Locked)]

[Remaining fragment holders: 2]

[Spawned: 4]

[Description: A freshly-born Truth Fragment. Gather all the fragments to grasp new authority.]

Annan did not tap on it in a hurry.

Instead, he first drank a bottle of healing agent and recovered from his injuries. Then, he notified the players that the main mission was completed. Only then he reached out and touched the page suspended in the air.

Like a phantom, the page shattered out of thin air and merged directly into Annan's body.

The collection progress of the Book of Truth had also increased by one level.

It also displayed a new special effect.

A long-awaited feature for Annan:

[Book of Divine Transporter (4/6): Summon or dismiss a specified number of players from another world (80/400).]

[Current special effects (4/6): Allow players' resurrection. Shared Experience Pool (3%). Teleportation Keystone. Unlock friends and party features.]

[Shared Experience Pool: 3% of the experience points (increased from '2%') obtained by players whose level is not higher than the user from any way ('dungeon instance') can be deposited into the Shared Experience Pool. Experience points stored in the Shared Experience Pool can be allocated to any ally unit (not limited to players).]

[Friend and Ally: Players can add friends. After adding friends, they can check on each other's level, health, and city location at any time. The players get to restrict information access from friends too. Friends can form teams of 4, 8, and 20. After defeating a monster, the other teammates will share 50% of the additional experience, and the initial benefactor will gain 50% of the original experience. The feature will invalidate friendly fire, but the controlling effect on teammates persists.]

—Equal distribution of experience points!

—Friendly fire negation!

This was the feature that Annan had been waiting for.

Without an equal distribution of experience points, the players would not adopt the support profession. If the profession stopped them from gaining the last hit, they would rather focus on damage output.

Would they perhaps hope for the other teammates to be merciful and let them take the last hit?

After the experience distribution mechanism was activated, team play would be encouraged.

At the same time, when friend fire was turned off, players could be more inclined to form a fixed team rather than going solo or jumping from team to team. These two conditions were complementary.

Players would be motivated to form a team when it would not interfere with their growth, and they did not have to worry about attacking an ally out of accident.

After collecting a substantial player count, the players had the ability to explore and act in an unfamiliar land. There were only so many things to put in the luggage, and the hassles of an adventure encouraged them to stay put in the original city.

When the “game” was too real, these problems were bound to arise.

Being realistic did keep the realistic hassles persisting.

After all, playing the game of life directly did not have the fantasy element.

With the experience points sharing mechanism, the ability to disable friendly fire, and the previous teleportation ability that Annan unlocked, the players could finally go out and explore without fear and worry.

“Your Highness Annan.” After everything settled down, Hugo Blacktower stepped up and whispered slowly to Annan, “Thank you so much for coming...”

“It's just a pity... We, Swamp's Black Tower, have nothing left to give you.”

“I didn't come here for the rewards.”

Annan tightened his white clothes, which had become looser, and responded earnestly, “I'm here to help my friends.”

“Yes, I heard Salvatore mention you.” Hugo's voice was soft, “I just didn't expect you to come.”

“To be honest, I didn't expect it either.” Annan smiled, “I'm actually an impulsive person too.”

“I can tell.”

“Is it obvious?”

“It's not a bad thing.”

Hugo said slowly, “Let's forgo the chatter, Your Highness Annan. I need to return to the Black Tower's center immediately. Otherwise, the flames in the Black Tower will be difficult to extinguish.

“Although my disciples are already... as long as the Black Tower is still there, the legacy and hope are there.”

“What about the books?” Annan asked with concern.

With such an immense flame, I wonder if something will happen to those books — no, something terrible must have happened.

But Hugo didn't pay much attention to it, “The meaning of the wizard tower is to continue the legacy. Those books are only their outward appearance. Even if they are burned, they can reappear as long as we desire.

“As for the rest of the wealth, they are not a big deal.”

Hugo smiled. The young man spoke in an optimistic and flat voice, “I live alone here anyway. Those tables, chairs, beds, etc... I can't use them either.”

“Um.” Annan looked at Hugo with complicated eyes.

If he was the Tower Master and the fire engulfed his family, he would definitely not be able to maintain such a calm attitude.

Hugo was more open-minded than an old man.

As if he understood Annan's doubt, Hugo just smiled, “I won't live for long.

“It's not your problem. You came on time. Thanks to you, I can last for a few more years. At least I can last until Salvatore advances to Gold Rank and protects him while he completes his inheritance.

“At that time, my mission will finally end...”

He sighed deeply.

It was not sorrow but the calmness of letting go of the burden.

Before leaving, Hugo handed Annan two pale yellow crystal balls the size of walnuts.

“What is this?” Annan asked.

When he came into contact with this thing, a prompt appeared in front of him:

[Soul Crystal (Clarence Freddy)]

[Type: Raw material/Consumable/sacrifice/mystical item (Purple)]

[Description: The soul crystal made by Hugo Blacktower contains the complete soul of the dead. There may be other uses for it.

[Description: You have never heard of it being used as a sacrifice in rituals (the "Advanced Mysticism" check failed).]

[Effect: When crushing it, it will be regarded as killing the person stored in the crystal. You can also extract curses for it or bring about a nightmare. The time of death is regarded as the moment when the crystal is crushed.]

The properties of the other crystal were exactly the same as the previous one, except that "Isaac Flamel" was marked in parentheses at the back.

"Are they Clarence's soul and Sir Issac's soul? To resist your Frost Wheel, he consumed almost all the other souls... Only Clarence's soul survived.

"But after that person dies, the soul that relies on him to exist will collapse."

Hugo laughed at himself in a low voice, "That's the only benefit of dying in a Spiritual Monk's hand. At least the soul is still intact... There may be a possibility of resurrection.

"He did not kill Sir Issac, and his soul has long since dissipated. This artificial spiritual body is made of 'stuffing' other spiritual bodies and his remaining thoughts. However, an artificially created spirit body like him can come in handy sometimes.

"I remember Benjamin researching something like that, or you can find someone else to guide you. Anyway... I'm sorry I can't give you any reward. It's the only gift I can give you."

Hugo replied calmly.

Annan hesitated momentarily, then said, "So, what about his nightmare?"

"Will his nightmares still exist after I kill his soul?" Annan was concerned about these nightmares that granted access to the elements.

Hugo nodded, "If you're interested, I'll purify this nightmare for you. I'll purify it to the limit, but I won't take anything from it. Then, I will give you the key and the relevant information. This way, you can easily inherit all the power in the nightmare.

"It's not in a hurry for the time being. So come back at the end of June."

"Ok, no problem." Annan agreed, slightly relieved.

Bernardino was dead.

Next, Silver Sire would help Kafni ascend to the throne. It could have been better timing for Annan to be involved. Otherwise, it was conspicuous to have the leader of other countries supporting the new king to ascend the throne.

Anna would leave it all to Silver Sire. Even though it could be a hassle for Him, He seemed pleased to do it. Annan would have avoided suspicion for a few months before Kafni came to power.

But what would he do for these few months?

Annan was a little dazed after recognizing he was pretty free.

Should I go back to Austere-Winter Dukedom?

But Maria is there. Can I really come back after returning?

Especially with a Kafni waiting for him on Noah's side, would his sister let Annan go?

However, Annan had completed the Old Grandmother's mission. Sooner or later, he still had to go back.

On the Underground Federation side, Annan was a little concerned too. The main reason was that Annan wanted to meet Mysterious Lady and ask what happened at the end of his previous life.

Of course, there was the most crucial mission.

—Annan could not teleport across barriers, which made it temporarily impossible for players to teleport across borders.

But this was not wholly unavoidable.

They could take the subway and insert teleportation waypoints underground. As long as they enter any subway, they could be teleported to the underground of any country.

It sounded like a Skaven [1].

“Let's go back first and explain the matter to the senior,” Annan whispered.

The deficit of 20 points in the Constitution gave Annan the illusion of being extremely weak.

It will take twenty days to recover...

The elixir granting one extra life is potent, but...

I should have my senior continue to study alchemy, at least to reduce the side effects of this drug.



Looking at the hurried players, Annan stood at the top of the burning Black Tower and looked from above at them.

He smiled and waved to the players.

Annan shouted, "I won—"

"—We are victorious!"

[TN: End of first Volume: Rays of Seven Luminaries]

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Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 457: False Tome

[TN: Beginning of next Volume: Book of Divine Transporter]

February 1st was the Holy Day of Mysterious Lady. Therefore, it was also when Her ritual was at its strongest.

The followers of Mysterious Lady, who were accustomed to holding various rituals on this day, would head out and buy books. This did not include the ritualist.

February 1st to 7th was called the Reading Festival. During these seven days, booksellers would sell as many books as possible, and the price was often only 70%, half or even lesser than their usual price. The requirement was that the buyer had to finish the books.

On February 8th, Mysterious Lady would give a certain amount of holy light engravings as a festival reward based on the spread of knowledge in these seven days. It worked regardless of whether the person was Her priest.

It was not limited to the booksellers. Teachers, mentors, and instructors would be rewarded as long as they passed down new knowledge to others. Some strenuous occult knowledge could only be acquired in a relatively simple way during that week.

These holy light engravings could be used to buy all kinds of occult knowledge and rituals no matter if it was for prolonging life, curing disease, or strengthening physical fitness. There were all possible gains.

You could buy various Inscriptions after accumulating a certain amount of holy light engravings too.

“I never thought that Noah's Kingdom would also hold a book festival,” Annan said casually while holding the book he had just bought in his hand.

With the Spiritual Monk Saga resolved last week, Annan still needed time to recover from his injury.

Due to the side effects of Salvatore's reagent, his body was weaker than ever.

Annan did not intend to help Kafni with Silver Sire on her side. Instead, he planned to leave for a while. After all, the king selection only started in May.

Annan's current plan was to leave after his attributes were restored to their original value.

Unexpectedly, he just happened to catch up on the reading festival, thus encouraging the players to buy more books.

Books in this era were already relatively cheap. The prices of newspapers were a clear example.

Initially, the elves had a more complex papermaking technology. Then, Father Flint optimized this technology. In this world today, paper was not expensive. Portable type printing technology was already developed more than two hundred years ago.

This had significantly reduced the price of books, and even civilians could buy some books after saving money. This also greatly promoted the development of art — poetry and novels. It was only after the printing technology took shape that it began to develop formally.

It was just that some expensive books... For example, books that record “cumbersome knowledge” could only be spread by handwriting. There were only two ways to document knowledge carrying a substantial weight properly.

One was to know the “full picture” of this knowledge wholly. Only when the understanding was correct could it be recorded smoothly; the other method would be having a transcender who was at Gold Rank and had a “dyed” soul create a record of the transcendent knowledge. However, the latter option often led to errors or deviations in the description due to personal interpretation or malice.

For example, the Venerated Skeleton's ritual.

Occult knowledge itself was “restricted”. It was a secret kept in the Light Realm.

Even after getting to know a fragment, the person could only replicate it if he possessed the strength to separate the knowledge. In other words, it was like “copying the shortcut file to the disk instead of the program itself”.

In essence, the mechanism was designed to “keep the secret”.

It was just that the person keeping the secret was not a living person but a particular book.

When the secret keeper still survived... In other words, when the body corresponding to the shortcut still existed, even if the user only knew a few words of the knowledge, he could summon this part of the power from the Light Realm through “automatic association”.

However, since the user only knew a fragment of the knowledge and could not record it, it was depleted after being used.

However, in addition to these two methods, there was a way of forcibly writing down the transcended knowledge.

That was to add his understanding, replace the original reference with some metaphor, and disrupt the order of the original sentence. Then, the person would write a “mystic book”.

That book was the so-called “false tome”.

The value of a false tome depended entirely on the author's reputation. There was indeed a conscientious author who created a false tome and then created the corresponding “key”.

But some influential storytellers crafted nonsense and translated two hundred thousand words in two sentences.

Most of the occult knowledge that could be purchased came from the false tome or “remnant tome”.

Annan suspected that Sire Sire might be involved when he found the book that previously recorded Mr. Ray's real name. During the Reading Festival, Annan and the Paper Princess searched several bookstores and could not find any originals.

On the contrary, Annan bought a lot of valuable false tomes and remnant tomes.

“Iffac's translation of the [Song of the Iris] is not bad.”

Annan held the book and was amazed, “There is actually a package of “Iffac's Key” for sale.”

“Iffac is a well-known occultist who lives up to his fame.” The Paper Princess threw her remarks casually, “Mysterious Lady is optimistic about him. She may turn him into Her monster when he dies.”

“So, even you know his name?” Annan looked at the Paper Princess in surprise.

It meant something to have a deity remembering his name. He was not even a painter in Her corresponding field but an occultist—what a rare sight.

“Part of the reason for that is because Marquis Iris is not a taboo in Noah.”

The Paper Princess glanced at Annan and said, “He also wrote a translation of “The Analect of Paleness”, but no bookstore dares to sell it.”

“Is it about the Pale Princess?”

“Yes. Deities too close to Silver Sire or contradict Silver Sire will not have their tome sold locally. But if you are in the south, you can buy Silver Sire books. This is also an unspoken rule.”

The Paper Princess glanced at Annan's bag and said with a vague dissatisfaction, “Didn't you still buy that book?”

Annan coughed lightly and said nothing.

[Dragon, Snow, and Magic Painting]

It was a false tome.

It told the story before the birth of the Paper Princess in a fairy tale tone. Ordinary people would only think it was a fairy tale with a tragic ending. Only those who knew the Paper Princess understood what the metaphor was.

However, the book that carried actual value for Annan was the false tome called the [Last Elegy of the Grand Duke].

It seemed to be a personal biography, but it hid many secrets.

There were so many secrets in the “Last Elegy of the Grand Duke,” which was also the Venerated Skeleton's secrets.

“So, you're concerned about the Venerated Skeleton?”

“His current state is so bizarre. I tend to investigate all who might be my enemies.”

Annan nodded and spoke rationally, “To be on the safe side, I must study the Venerated Skeleton and the Rotten Man.”

“Is that so?” Hearing Annan's words, the Paper Princess nodded thoughtfully.

She said slowly, "There's something I didn't know if I should tell you. But I must tell you, since you're used to the current pace."

"What's wrong?"

"Nicholas escaped."

The Paper Princess replied calmly, "It was Father Stone who let him go on purpose."

#### Chapter 458: Going With the Flow

"Is this where Nicholas lives?" Annan looked up, squinting slightly and looking around.

It was the Noah Kingdom's St. Bernie District and the location with the most intensive underworld transactions in the royal capital, commonly known as the "Underworld City".

"Daddy's General Store" and "Alberta Used Bookstore" were here. Annan had bought books with the Paper Princess nearby, not far from Nicholas's residence. After hearing the Paper Princess's words, they went straight to this place.

Their destination was a two-story low stone-walled villa. The surroundings were deserted, and the vegetation in the yard was not taken care of. One street away from this place was a high-rise residential area being leveled and rebuilt. The smell of stone materials would occasionally hit this place.

The environment here was relatively poor.

Moist, dark stone walls with layers of ivy were right outside. There were cracks in the old stone bricks too. It was an incredibly old house.

Generally speaking, it was difficult to imagine a researcher living in such a house.

Although Annan did not know much about Alchemy and Alteration Wizardry, he knew it would disrupt the experimental result. In addition, there could be problems with the reagent storage. They usually encourage "storage in a cool, dry, and ventilated place".

But such thoughts disappeared as soon as Annan entered the house.

When he entered the room, it was evident that he had entered a certain septum. There was a slight resistance to his footstep walking into the house. It was like advancing against the wind but only for a brief moment.

In that instant, the air spontaneously formed a filter membrane, which directly filtered out the impurities and excess moisture on his body.

The air inside the room was exceptionally fresh and dry. Even the odor was eliminated after entering the room.

—Most notably, Annan and the Paper Princess did not detect the barrier before entering through the door. It was intricately designed to “trigger instantly when someone enters”. If it was a trap, they might have stepped in.

“As expected of Nicholas.” Annan was not irritated but praised, “Such a delicate barrier can still operate on its own after he leaves.”

“Indeed. This self-purification filter barrier alone is not something ordinary people can do.” The Paper Princess glanced around.

She was surprised to realize that this barrier was actually a composite barrier with a test tube rack as a fulcrum. It was complex enough but not cluttered. Nicholas' approach to handling these details could even inspire the Paper Princess.

The Paper Princess also gave Nicholas high evaluations, “I didn't need an intuitive understanding of his alchemy abilities before. But now...”

“I'm afraid he has completed the [Supreme Crown].”

“He has definitely done it.” A heavy and deep voice resounded in the room.

Annan and the Paper Princess looked over.

A plaster statue of the same height as a man was found sitting cross-legged on the ground.

Its eyes were slightly closed and deep as if it was thinking about something in silence. The distressed expression on its face gave the impression of a philosopher. At the same time, he appeared like a monastic monk who strictly observed the precepts and had no desires.

“Father Stone.” The Paper Princess nodded to Him.

Father Stone just replied calmly, “You know, you shouldn't come. Especially not with Annan.”

“But you gave me the address. You also knew I was with Annan, and you didn't stop me.” The Paper Princess countered, “I thought that's your attitude.”

“Maybe.” Father Stone did not say much.

He did not seem to be a talkative person. Instead, he merely raised his head.

Those eyes carved out of marble met Annan's eyes as if they were living things.

“What do you want to know?” Father Stone replied plainly, “I might tell you according to the situation.”

He implied that there were certain words that he would not say.

“Did you let Nicholas go?” Annan cut to the chase.

If Father Stone could not even talk about this, there was no point in having a conversation.

Father Stone answered, “I did it on purpose. But Nicholas shouldn't know about this. His escape plan was thorough.

“He used the opportunity of his soul being out of his body to create a ritual area in the sewers two kilometers away. He gradually severs the connection between his soul and his body and uses very little material to cultivate a temporary area for his prosthetic body. Then, he projects his soul into it in batches. Next, he combined the soul into soul-purifying medicine to reinforce the reagent, making up for the emptiness in his soul.

“In the end, he managed to escape.” “Warden,” Father Stone replied calmly.

“...But?” Annan knew Father Stone had something to add.

Then, it went as predicted.

Father Stone nodded and said calmly, “But he doesn't know. All 'palaces' are my body, and all 'sculptures' are my eyes and ears. The royal city is a huge palace... His operation was exposed to my watch from the beginning; if I wanted to, I could make the sewer collapse instantly. I was in the same barrier as him. It was that simple.”

That was why Father Stone would be Nicholas' watcher.

This was actually why he brought Nicholas to Noah's capital.

As the Deity of Palace and Sculpture, his power could only be raised to the maximum in the capital. Then, he could monitor and control the palace at will and use sculpture as his “surveillance guard”. After all, only in the capital would he get enough palace with sculptures.

Even the body Father Stone was in now was not his main body.

That was because Father Stone existed in all sculptures. They were mediums in which He could be revealed to the world.

Unlike the Paper Princess, Father Stone was not a creation of the Elegant Elder that “gained sentience”. Instead, he was a student of the Elegant Elder... and one of the very few students who the Elegant Elder applauded. As a mortal, in just fifty years, he mastered the sculptural and architectural skills accumulated by the Elegant Elder over thousands of years. Then, he made almost trivial innovations to become a deity.

He was the only deity to become a Deity of Art in mortal form.

“But, why did you send him away?” Annan stared closely at Father Stone.

Father Stone replied calmly, “His talent can't be used in Noah because of the lack of material here. So his hands will be tied.”

That's a lie.

At least He did not speak the whole truth.

But Annan did not reveal it.

He just asked slowly, “So, Nicholas...”

“He knows that he is a 'mirror', right?” Hearing this, Father Stone was silent for a long time.

After about half a minute, he spoke again, “It's not something you have figured out on your own.

“Did the Faceless Poet tell you?”

“That's right.” Annan replied in a deep voice, “But because of this, I managed to figure out some clues.

“For example... This is a fake Nicholas. He doesn't have Nicholas' soul, nor is he Nicholas's artificial human. He just got a body with Nicholas's thoughts.”

The Paper Princess on the side immediately shuddered and blurted out, “I didn't say that!”

“I know. This is what the Faceless Poet told Annan. It seems that even Nicholas's escape was fate itself.”

Father Stone replied calmly, “I can't peep in the area where [Secret Keeping] is involved, but you only have a little time away from my sight. Only Faceless Poet has the opportunity to tell you this.



“[His] behavior is dangerous. You shouldn't know you're chasing a mirror because it's your destiny. [TN: The Faceless Poet]

“As we all know, [Fate is the Wheel of Divine Transporter]. You will leave traces after you have passed it. If you chase your destiny, it becomes a paradox in itself. This will cause you to chase the mirror with your own will. You can't get your mirror that way. It only appears in front of you when you don't crave it.”

So, Henry VIII, Nicholas, and Bernardino appeared when I did not know about them?

When I chased Bernardino, it was to seek justice for Salvatore, not to find my mirror. That was why I caught him!

Annan came to a realization.

So when Annan was thinking about when to find Nicholas, the “Fourth Mirror”, Nicholas suddenly disappeared.

So new questions emerged from Annan's mind:

Why would the Faceless Poet tell me such a thing?

Why did Father Stone let Nicholas go?

...Unless.

These two things were originally aimed at the same purpose.

The two deities acted according to the situation without communication but formed tacit cooperation.

“So, you intentionally make this false 'Nicholas' think he is Nicholas who has lost his memory and lives in the world as Nicholas?” Annan keenly captured their thoughts.

But... What's the point?

Chapter 459: In Short, Let's Install the Teleportation Waypoint

Suankou looked around and couldn't help but sigh in a low voice, “It's actually a subway.”

He was in a wide underground space that was only accessible by going down four flights of stairs from the subway station. Since the roadbed was unstable, lamps lit by the product of alteration magic, “Green Fire”, were installed at this place.

Although there was a unique sense of the steam era in the architectural style, this was indeed the subway station in his memories.

Apparently, it was not a subway powered by electricity but an underground rail train with a magic-modified, elf-style engine with alteration devices. It operated by extracting the Gray Mists as energy.

Otherwise, it would be almost impossible to develop subway technology hundreds of years ago. Recently, various countries had begun to study how to create a subway that could be used effectively without using the engine technology of the Underground Federation.

On the Noah Kingdom's side, they planned to use an improved version of the steam engine with more power — at least to be able to drive the train. For this, the Black Fire made by Swamp's Black Tower was used as the power fuel.

The biggest problem with ordinary steam engines was that the waste gas they produced could not be discharged, and the windows could not be completely sealed. Eventually, the conductor and passengers would be killed by the exhaust gas in the carriage. There would be excessive steam appearing in the waiting hall too.

In response to this problem, the Noah Kingdom technicians intended to use the technology of Swamp's Black Tower to create an advanced exhaust fan to extract the exhaust gas into a gas tank. Then, the disposed gas would pass pipes leading to the surface to discharge exhaust gas at deserted ground.

Another by-product of this technology was the so-called “overground rail train.”

With the addition of a powerful steam engine, the only downside was the exhaust.

So as long as it was used on the ground, would there be no problem with it?

Salvatore did not need to return to Black Tower to teach recently. Instead, he was invited and stayed in Noah's royal capital to participate in the construction of the ground railway. As a result, there was significant progress on the project. The officials predicted that it would be opened to use within this year. A large-scale overground railway centered on the Noah Kingdom would be built, allowing the transportation from the east of Noah to the west directly.

If the outcome were great, they would proceed to expand the railway, which was a simpler task than developing subway lines. They could even use some rituals to speed things up on a massive scale.

What they planned to do was to get rid of the status quo where the Underground Federation had complete control over freight and passenger transport.

Even though it was Noah's underground...

“Strictly speaking, they are no longer Noah's land.”

Lin Yiyi, who had already taken the subway once, explained, “According to the “Underground Act”, except for the mining area and the coal area, the area 40 meters below the ground is under the Underground Federation.”

“But isn't it less than 40 meters deep?” Jiu Er keenly felt where they were now, “It should be about 33 meters.”

“That's because we're in the capital, the royal city of Noah.”

Annan, who was wrapped in a cloak, tried his best to control himself not to look around. Instead, he said in a low voice, “Only this place is a special case. Under the royal city, it belongs to the joint rule area of the Noah Kingdom and the Underground Federation. I will take the subway later. At that time, we have to take the 'deep well' to dive further.”

“Deep well?” Jiu Er repeated.

“Unlike the world overground, the underground living space is wide. There are areas labeled differently according to their floor level.” Annan explained.

In fact, this was what he had just learned from the book.

He had never seen the subway in this world or been to the Underground Federation. But, this was not suitable to say to the players.

Until the end, Father Stone did not tell Annan where Nicholas went. Was it the Austere-Winter, Underground Federation, the Papal Kingdom, or the United Kingdom? There were no hints given.

But if Father Stone was right, he might run into Nicholas if he roamed around aimlessly.

As a result, Annan was not in a hurry.

Instead of looking for a needle in a haystack to find Nicholas, it was better to stick to his plan first.

First, let's set up the teleportation waypoint in the Underground Federation.

There were currently only four teleportation waypoints: Freezing Water Port, Roseburg, Noah, and Swamp's Black Tower. Except for the teleportation waypoint of Swamp's Black Tower that only allowed departures, the others met the corresponding requirements and were directly “activated”.

Still, activating the teleportation waypoint was not hard.

In a medium-sized and above the city, the players needed to have a local residence and a stable job, living there for more than a week and completing three nightmares. Then, they would be regarded as “residents”. As long as an area had three residences there, the teleportation waypoint there was activated. After the residents left, others could still be sent over.

Although Annan's Constitution had not fully recovered, it was no big deal. In his plan, not only would he not have conflicts with people these days...

He wasn't even going to continue using the “Annan” identity.

Annan's identity and secrets had been disclosed to a considerable extent to support Kafni ascending the throne and to reach a deal with Silver Sire.

Noah Kingdom was unlike Austere-Winter. The Three-eyed Crows were not Winter's Hand either. Their job was surveillance, not assassination. This made it difficult to prevent the leak of some intelligence.

What's more? If Kafni outperformed Princess Royal, Annan's identity must be semi-disclosed in Noah's royal city. Only when the top and middle managers from all walks of life could understand the relationship between Kafni and Annan could she use her power to defeat Princess Royal.

This was equivalent to the fact that “Annan Austere-Winter is about to succeed Austere-Winter's Grand Duke, and even will be the future deity”. Not only would it spread in Noah, but outsiders would also get this piece of intelligence soon.

Thus, Annan's identity restricted his actions.

His status was noble, and the underground world was too chaotic. No matter what others thought of him, or afraid of something happening to him... In short, it was not easy for plots against him to take place secretly.

It was not a big deal for Annan.

He planned to use Annan's identity to take the three players through the subway ticket checkpoint. After leaving Noah's royal city, they would pass through the deep wells of subway stations in other areas, dive into the second-floor urban area, and find a relatively stable and large-scale city.

Then, Annan would leave them and let the three players build the teleportation waypoint. With that, he could send the other players down in batches. After all, it was complicated to gain access to the subway in Noah. However, it was only a matter of

money for the residents of the Underground Federation if they wanted to take the subway.

This was equivalent to smuggling the players out of Noah Kingdom. In this way, players in the Noah Kingdom could be secretly transported to other countries. However, re-entering the Noah Kingdom could prove to be challenging later.

It was difficult for unofficial transcendents to enter other countries.

That was why Annan needed immediate power instead of summoning new players.

When the players just arrived in this world, their default level would be Level 5.

In other words, when the players first arrived, they had yet to embark on the path of transcendence.

This was equivalent to having more than 300 undetectable spies. Annan could use them as his eyes and hands to infiltrate other countries.

Then, the best time to summon players should be in Underground Federation when the teleportation waypoints were almost finished.

At that time, Annan could summon a certain number of players in the underground areas of major cities in different countries and let them enter different countries.

To provide players with the motivation to activate the teleportation waypoints, Annan also delegated rich experience points to each player who performed the task. Of course, these experience points were distributed equally to the players.

That was the essence of having players form teams of four.

It would avoid players moving in a conspicuously large group, thus increasing the efficiency of setting up the teleportation circles.

Jiu Er's group was selected because of their reliable capabilities. They could keep their daily life undisturbed while adventuring new parts of the game as quickly as possible.

At that time, Annan would find a place and switch to another identity. Then, he would get to seek out treasures in the Underground Federation.

—Why are you looking for Annan Austere-Winter and “Ghirlandaio David Buonaro”?

The conditions for subway access differed across various countries, where the Underground Federation managed distinctive authority levels.

Austere-Winter Dukedom could only use the subway for cross-city transportation in the "Winter Year" due to its small temperature regulation barriers. In addition, the Winter Hand responsible for surveillance, counter-espionage, and assassination work had a higher privilege to take the subway.

Except for a few monitored targets, which were not allowed to enter the underground, most civilians could take the subway as long as they had the money.

However, it was different in the Noah Kingdom.

In Noah Kingdom, almost 90% of the subway capacity was used for freight and cargo.

As the world's most prominent grain, minerals, and timber exporter, the Noah Kingdom owned four subway lines, which transported goods to foreign countries almost daily. They would buy livestock products in large quantities from the Papal Kingdom and luxury goods and artwork from the United Kingdom. At the same time, the Noah Kingdom purchased Frost Beasts via the Underground Federation from the Austere-Winter Dukedom.

The shipping route on the Dukedom side of Austere-Winter was completely terminated after the Noah Kingdom had a war against Austere-Winter. It had not yet reopened until now.

However, Austere-Winter Dukedom still had various exports to the Papal Kingdom and Underground Federation.

In addition to the Frost Beasts, there were high-quality stones, chilly iron ore, lead ore, gold ore, and non-melting ice. However, due to the limitation of transportation capacity, most of them were sold to underground folks directly, and these people were responsible for transporting them away. Therefore, if the Noah Kingdom wanted to buy the Frost Beasts' blood, they had to go through the underground people.

Thus, it was vital to control the price.

If unaudited people were allowed to go underground, there would be many smugglers, which would disrupt the market. In other words, the Noah Kingdom controlled the right to use the subway not for political purposes but for economic purposes.

Subway access was only granted after getting the signature of the Minister of Transport. Even if the local nobles had the signature and could use the subway themselves, they could not give away the permission to use the subway to others, let alone grant others the right to enter the subway station.

The signature was not the end of it. After getting the signed pass, the applicant had to apply to the local subway hall a few days in advance. In this process, the application letter would be sent to the royal capital through a ritual. After checking and confirming that the applicant's identity was alright, the designated time for the subway usage would only be approved.

It was a troublesome procedure.

Annan felt a headache just by listening to it.

This was probably why the Noah Kingdom urgently needed to build an overground railway.

However, if Annan reopened shipping to Freezing Water Port, it would also reduce the demand for overground rail in the Noah Kingdom.

“Welcome, Your Highness Annan.” The receptionist in the subway hall took out a booklet, put Annan's access card on it, and validated the password. He then politely handed it back to Annan and replied respectfully, “Your Excellency Yiyi, Your Excellency Suuankou, Your Excellency Jiu Er... The deep well is ready to be used.”

He could only speak so calmly because he could not understand the meaning of the players' names.

Annan thought to himself and nodded calmly, “Alright, Viscount Horatio. Thank you for your hard work.”

“No, no... You're pulling my leg...” Viscount Horatio apologized in a panic and even wanted to take Annan and his entourages to the [Deep Well] in person.

Indeed, the receptionist was a viscount. Although he was a relatively marginal viscount, he was still an aristocrat.

—But, it was because he was a noble that he could comprehend what Annan's identity signified.

Although he was the viscount of the royal capital, he was not qualified to participate in the king's funeral. Therefore, although he knew the existence of His Highness Annan, he had never seen Annan.

When he saw Annan for the first time, he was still attracted by the splendid appearance close to a deity. Even though he knew it was a bit rude, he couldn't help but glance at Annan a few more times.

Of course, it was not his fault.

After Annan had adopted Frosty Hair, he appeared closer to Old Grandmother and the Paper Princess.

As the Paper Princess who controlled the element of “Beauty”, Her appearance was the highest standard of “Beauty” for the humans in this world. Although Annan only had his hair color changed, his presence was at another level since he was closer to the Paper Princess.

This was why Annan decided to temporarily not use this identity to operate underground.

Boys should protect themselves when they go out so that some strange ladies don't kidnap them.

Of course, they have to be wary of strange middle-aged men too.

The group went to the [Deep Well] with their luggage.

The so-called “Deep Well” was a steel structure shaped like a hydraulic elevator.

The group stood on an empty shock-proof board of at least 50 square meters and signaled to the staff.

The staff pressed a button. The group descended quickly alongside with slight vibrations and creaking noises.

“It's too extravagant.” Suuankou whispered, “They only transport four of us, even with such a large space.”

“Don't flatter yourself. This should be used for unloading goods at usual times.” Lin Yiyi replied casually.

Annan nodded and added, “Noah Kingdom does not have many people who can take the subway. The number drops further for those who can actually bring their man along. Thus, only a few of us will be on this journey.”

Before he finished speaking, the Deep Well had already reached the next floor.

In front of them was a strange man in his fifties with short brown hair carrying a large luggage bag, hunched slightly and alone on the platform.

When the man saw Annan, he was slightly startled.

Annan was keenly aware that it was not just an ordinary gaze. Instead, he noticed a hint of surprise.



Does this person know me?

Before Annan spoke up, the person turned around and greeted him. He asked in a low voice, somewhat nervously, "Hello, Your Excellency. I'm Nigel Elliott. May I take the liberty to ask you a question?"

"Please speak. But I don't promise I'll answer it." Annan glanced at him and replied calmly.

Annan did not say his name.

In front of Kafni, Senior Salvatore and the players, he occasionally acted cute and harmless. However, in front of outsiders, his mannerism and aura were imposing.

However, the person's question startled Annan, "Excuse me... Are you acquainted with 'the Paper Princess'?"

Nigel asked respectfully.

He did not know I'm Annan Austere-Winter, but he knew I was related to the Paper Princess.

Annan was silent. He suddenly remembered where on earth he had seen this name.

Shortly after Delicious Wind Goose arrived at Noah, Old Goose had seen a portrait of the Paper Princess in the newspaper. There was a painter having a brief encounter with the Paper Princess. With a fleeting "fuzzy impression", he roughly restored 90% of the true appearance of the Paper Princess.

But, the last 10% was beyond common sense and incomprehensible, "the Truth of Beauty".

In fact, the painting that he expressed was more like Annan compared to the Paper Princess.

It was expected of him to be shocked when he saw Annan.

Annan thought so in her heart. He said with an amiable tone and a smile, "You are the 'famous painter'. I heard the Paper Princess mention you. You are a diligent person and have a good talent."

He had emphasized the word "famous painter" specifically.

The person waved his hands again and again, ashamed, "I don't live up to that yet. I know that the Paper Princess I painted is really too ordinary, far from the thrilling and

fantastical beauty. The painting is on display, but... the money the newspaper agency gave is too much..."

"Well, I understand." Annan nodded and comforted in a warm voice.

Hearing Annan's consolation, the middle-aged painter was so grateful that he almost held Annan's hand. However, when he looked up to see Annan's face, he lowered his head subconsciously and forcibly withdrew his approaching hand in embarrassment.

"By the way," Annan threw a question to dispel the painter's embarrassment, "Where are you going? Maybe we can journey together."

"I'm visiting the province of St. Felix in Austere-Winter Dukedom, Your Excellency. Coldwind Fortress in the province of St. Felix."

The painter Nigel did not ask Annan's name or whereabouts but directly stated his destination.

Surprisingly, we're on the same path.

Annan and the others were heading to the Razor Territory of Bloomfield Province. That place was two stops after Coldwind Fortress and three stops after the Frostwhisper Province.

Of course, that was the destination they would disclose on the surface.

Their real destination was the underground city under the Razor Collar — the Sporeggar Mill.

But there was no need to tell this passerby.

"We are heading toward the same direction."

As Annan said so, the train had already rumbled from a distance.

He closed his mouth and glanced at the entrance.

Annan turned to Nigel and smiled, "Let's get in the carriage first, Your Excellency Nigel."

He added, "I still have some things that I want to ask you for advice."

Annan had realized something.

Nigel Elliott rubbed the corner of his shirt nervously, opened and closed his mouth, then nodded again and again.

