

Endless Debt

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"This is the 'Key of the Crooked Path', capable of opening one door through another. The key is engraved with the 'Alchemy Matrix', which tends towards 'Narrow and Sharp', so it can only open fixed doors."

Geoffrey explained to Bologue, watching Bologue's bewildered expression, he chuckled.

"There's a lot of information, isn't it? Don't worry, I'll explain it to you slowly later."

After speaking, he opened the door.

Beyond the door wasn't the familiar living room but a pure darkness that swallowed all incoming light. At the moment the lock was opened, this door no longer led to Bologue's home but to some unknown dimension.

"Let's go, remember to close the door."

Geoffrey pulled out the so-called "Key of the Crooked Path", smiled mysteriously, and stepped directly into the darkness, disappearing.

Bologue stood still for a good while, as a look of excitement gradually appeared on his astonished face.

This door no longer led to a familiar room, but to that unknown New World.

He stepped into the darkness, closing the door behind him.

The darkness completely enveloped him, a nausea similar to motion sickness surged up in his heart, but such a strange feeling only lasted for a few seconds before disappearing.

Bologue strolled in the endless gloom, soft and faint light fell from above, clearly illuminating the particles floating in the air.

The surroundings were overwhelmingly quiet, maintaining an absolute silence. For a moment, Bologue couldn't even feel his own breathing and heartbeat.

The massive silence pressed against his eardrums, bringing an eerie pressure beneath the tranquility.

In the darkness, there was an inexplicable feeling that something seemed to be moving around, slowly circling him, or standing still, observing him. Yet, Bologue couldn't see them, no matter how he focused, there was only a mass of fog-like darkness, like a veil that obscured the faces of those unknown existences.

Spine-chilling.

Unknown and darkness, nothing else can more awaken the most primal fear in human hearts.

"Bologue!"

The familiar voice broke the silence, shattering it into thousands of fragments.

Bologue's body slightly trembled, breaking free from the oppressive emotions. He took a deep breath and looked to the side; Geoffrey was standing there.

"It feels awful, doesn't it? I looked just like this when I was first brought here."

Geoffrey grinned, seemingly having predicted Bologue's reaction.

"This is the 'Transfer Station', a buffer zone set up by the Order Bureau to prevent our enemies from obtaining the 'Key of the Crooked Path' and directly infiltrating our stronghold."

As he spoke, Geoffrey waved his hand, signaling Bologue to turn around.

Turning around, in the hazy darkness, Bologue could see the door he had entered through, and the outline of the door was constantly dissipating until it completely vanished.

"Your 'door' wasn't recorded, so after closing the door, the 'Transfer Station' will directly delete your 'door'. Look to the side."

Listening to Geoffrey's voice, Bologue looked in other directions.

As the eerie sensation of silence departed, he noticed his vision was much clearer. He could see countless doors in the darkness, one after another, densely packed, thousands upon thousands, chaotically arranged in the darkness. But they didn't dissipate like his door; instead, they stood eternally here.

"Those doors have been recorded?" Bologue asked.

"Yes, their relationship is like a tree. Countless doors are the extended branches. They pass through the trunk, which is this 'Transfer Station', and finally reach the roots where we need to go."

"Where do these branches, these doors, lead?" Bologue asked.

"Anywhere that's been recorded; some are employee dormitories, some are frequent mission locations, some are bars or entertainment venues," Geoffrey smiled, "I must admit, this thing is really convenient... chaotic, everything you can imagine, for specifics, you need to ask the 'Gatekeeper'."

"Come on, the sightseeing isn't over yet."

Geoffrey said and continued forward.

The Transfer Station was vast, and due to the enveloping darkness, Bologue couldn't clearly see the specific form of the place. He could only vaguely see countless, diverse doors standing upright.

"Although the 'Key of the Crooked Path' is convenient, not every employee has the right to use it. Even my usage today required prior application."

Along the way, Geoffrey explained to Bologue, dispelling Bologue's idea of obtaining a "Key of the Crooked Path" after joining.

After walking for about ten minutes, they arrived at the end of the Transfer Station... if this place could be considered an end.

A massive black wall barred their way. The wall emitted a chilling aura, the falling light reflected a damp and stern feeling, and from around, the black wall extended into the darkness, unseen to the end. Below the black wall stood several large doors.

A heavy iron door faced them, covered with rivets, and the door panel was engraved with six crossed longswords, entwined and bound by chains, forming a shape reminiscent of a round shield.

The distances between the doors were vast, and Bologue could only make out the appearance of the door in front of him; the other doors were hidden in the hazy darkness.

"Remember this sigil, it symbolizes our Order Bureau."

Geoffrey tapped on the steel relief.

Bologue looked at the Order Bureau's sigil, chains and sword, and curiously asked.

"Why is it called 'Order and Security'?"

Bologue gently touched the relief, feeling the cold and hardness of the metal.

"Is it just literal meaning?"

Upon hearing this, Geoffrey slowly lowered the key in his hand, not immediately opening the gate, but instead pondering for a few seconds before asking Bologue.

"Do you understand devils?"

This question stumped Bologue. Although he had traded with devils before, his memory was completely lost, and he couldn't recall anything useful. It could be said that he had numerous ties with devils, but his understanding of them was a blank slate.

"Devils are real, they've existed since ancient times.

They possess incomprehensible power, fortunately, this power seems to be limited, allowing the human world to continue."

Faced with Bologue's silence, Geoffrey began speaking on his own, his voice echoing in the desolate dim space, fading away without a response.

"They usually lurk in the shadows, using various tempting desires to attract mortals, then make mortals sign heavy blood contracts, sacrificing precious souls.

Interestingly, devils are a group of wicked and cunning, yet extremely rule-abiding monsters. They play within their rules, watching mortals fall into despair, then harvest their souls."

As Geoffrey said this, his voice paused, then he continued.

"But also because these creatures adhere strictly to rules, unlike greedy demons, these devils can actually be 'communicated' with, and their rules are not absolutely perfect. It's said someone once found loopholes in their rules and turned the tables on them."

"What happened afterwards?"

Bologue asked.

"Afterwards? There was no afterwards. Devils are extremely rule-abiding beings, even if tricked by mortals, they can only suffer the consequences and acknowledge everything."

"Sounds not too bad."

Such trustworthy beings are rare, even if they are devils.

"It is not too bad, but don't let your guard down because of this. Many people face devils with a gambler's mindset, and devils usually don't lie. They only speak one truth after another, but these truths will lead you into deeper despair."

Geoffrey maintained a high level of vigilance regarding devils. Even in conversation, there was a sense of tension, as though such enemies were right beside him.

"Through a long period, we've figured out some characteristics of devils. Besides being extremely rule-abiding, they rarely actively interfere with this world. More often, they use awful desires to deceive mortals, then influence world events through mortal hands.

Because of such behavior, records of devils in history are very rare."

"Yet devils seem to be everywhere."

Bologue said inexplicably, trembling slightly afterward, not knowing why. Looking at Geoffrey, he met the same cold gaze.

"Devils are intervening in the progress of human history."

Geoffrey said.

"We suspect that behind many significant historical events, there is the shadow of devils. The more turbulent and bloody the era, the better their 'wishing' trade, resulting in more souls gained.

But we still don't know why devils do this, why interfere with the course of history. Is it really just for souls? If it's for souls, why do they need so many? What do souls mean to them?

Food? A source of power? Or something far more mysterious?

No one knows."

Geoffrey's voice gradually weakened, as if he too fell into contemplation about devils, but he quickly regained his clarity.

"The significance of the Order Bureau's existence is to minimize interference from devils on the progress of human history. To put it in simpler terms, it is to keep everything related to devils out of the human world.

Those that can be killed will be killed, those that can't be killed will be locked away."

Geoffrey's words carried a rare chill, which Bologue deeply felt, for he indeed was one of those 'locked away.'

"Maintain order in the Extraordinary World and ensure the safety of the human world."

Geoffrey looked at Bologue, their eyes meeting. This kind-hearted fellow exuded an unusual pressure as he seriously and solemnly told Bologue.

"This is the meaning of the Order Bureau's existence, what it is currently executing, and what you must adhere to in the future."

Chapter 22 - 10 Lebius Lovisa

In the silent and profound darkness, Bologue and Geoffrey stood before the door of chains and swords. It was just a simple conversation, yet it felt like the declaration of loyalty from an ancient knight. Bologue faintly felt something binding him, perhaps something called "duty."

After explaining everything to Bologue, Geoffrey inserted the "Key of the Crooked Path" into the door.

A familiar scene unfolded once more: arcs of azure light extended from the lock core to the front door, the resonation of metals producing piercing shrieks.

This time, opening the door was evidently more laborious than before. Geoffrey used every ounce of strength to turn the key, as if pushing a heavy stone door, with creaks emanating from the gaps, as dust and gravel were ground into finer powder.

Light seeped through the door crack, then the door opened entirely.

"Welcome to the Order Bureau."

Geoffrey, panting heavily, gave Bologue a push, propelling him into the light.

The disorientation of crossing the "door" appeared again. After a brief sensation of nausea and dizziness, Bologue regained his senses, his vision gradually clearing. Simultaneously, noise broke the silence in his ears, surging like a tide, completely engulfing Bologue.

He found himself in a vast and bustling Central Courtyard.

The buildings in sight were mostly made of pristine white bricks, each stone enormous, with no trace of cutting or joining. There were faint patterns on them, which, without careful observation, seemed ordinary.

Folding and extending staircases were located in the four corners, resembling spiraling High Towers leading to places beyond Bologue's sight. The courtyard was bustling with people, whose clothing styles seemed to be categorized, likely based on departmental uniforms.

The pneumatic logistics copper tubing crossed overhead, densely arranged, extending from the Central Courtyard to other spaces. Occasionally, muffled sounds could be heard as enclosed transport capsules swept through, reaching different departments.

Above was a Dome bathed in light, its appearance indiscernible to Bologue. Soft white light cascaded down like a sun suspended overhead, yet when the light touched his skin, Bologue felt no warmth, as if the luminescence was a deceptive daylight.

Bologue turned around; the door he had entered through was closed. It stood on a stepped platform within the courtyard, seemingly designed exclusively for access to the Transfer Station. Beside this door were several other towering doors, and in the corners, many green plants were grown, with benches provided nearby for resting.

Contrary to the mystery he anticipated, the Order Bureau was far more modern than Bologue imagined. Had he forgotten what he knew before, he would have thought he had entered a grand corporation.

Their arrival garnered little attention, or rather, people had become accustomed to it.

Everyone walked briskly, holding heavy documents, coffees in hand, talking as they moved. A few acquaintances passing by waved to Geoffrey, greeting him.

"Hey! Geoffrey, is this the newbie?"

"The newbie who made Yas lose three hundred Weng Coins?"

"Not many can get the better of him."

Geoffrey responded with a smile to each, waved goodbye, apparently well-liked, and suitably fitting his image as a nice guy.

"What next?"

Bologue asked, maintaining a facade of calm, while inside, curiosity brimmed. In mere minutes, he felt his understanding refreshed several times.

A new world had opened its doors to Bologue, and like a newborn, he couldn't wait to ingest everything, swallowing it all voraciously.

"For job paperwork and such, just sign your name when it's time. But first, you need to meet your boss."

Geoffrey took out an itinerary, scribbling on it to confirm their next destination.

"Lebius Lovisa."

Geoffrey raised an eyebrow at Bologue, "That's his name."

...

The Order Bureau was vast, befitting the headquarters of an Extraordinary Organization. Bologue felt like he had entered a zoo, guided by tour guide Geoffrey, sightseeing while listening to his explanations.

Along the way, people greeted Geoffrey, casting curious glances at him, likely because he was a newbie and not wearing a uniform, making Bologue particularly conspicuous among the crowd.

Geoffrey fully demonstrated his dedication, not wasting travel time, as he narrated various aspects of the Order Bureau to Bologue.

Although it dealt with extraordinary events, contrary to the mysterious and traditional image he anticipated, the Order Bureau was quite modernized. Apart from dealing with peculiar matters, it was no different from an ordinary company.

Office areas, break areas, cafeterias... everything one would expect.

Bologue originally thought the Order Bureau would be a place where stern individuals, battle-scarred, sat in corners, gnawing jerky, by fires, exchanging information about where Demons appeared and how many people were needed for subjugation and such.

Upon hearing Bologue say this, Geoffrey laughed heartily, teasing him for reading too many strange novels, remarking, "That kind of work efficiency would be too low" and other such things.

"We not only have medical insurance but also housing allowances, meal stipends, bonuses, and holidays for rest—provided there's no emergency, of course..."

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After speaking, Geoffrey added with a rather mischievous tone, "Oh, by the way, we even offer burial services, depending on your needs, whether to mail the body back home or to join the Order Bureau's cemetery."

The service was indeed surprising, yet it made sense.

Bologue nodded while observing the surroundings. Contrary to the imagined sweatshop, the Order Bureau seemed... unexpectedly nice.

If everything was as Geoffrey described, working here until death didn't seem like a bad idea. Bologue uncharacteristically began to like going to work.

"The Order Bureau is really big... so big that it's a bit eerie."

Bologue followed Geoffrey, looking around, murmuring to himself.

After leaving the Central Courtyard, there was a long corridor leading to one area after another. Along the way, Bologue frequently saw those thick and massive white bricks, imagining the construction scene, Bologue felt this was an impossible task. Moreover, the Order Bureau was too vast. The further he went, the more Bologue realized the depth of the Order Bureau.

This was no longer just a building; it was a grand fortress, a labyrinth built with massive stones, filled with gray-white concrete and bearing traces of brutalist architecture.

"Where is the Order Bureau located? I mean in Opus; once employed, I can't keep using the 'Key of the Crooked Path,' right? You mentioned I currently don't have the right to use it."

Having arrived at the Order Bureau through the "Key of the Crooked Path," Bologue didn't know the exact location of the Order Bureau in Opus.

"Linna District No. 117."

Geoffrey responded briefly.

Linna District is in the north of Opus, one of the major districts in Opus. Its geographical location is excellent, with trams directly to the city center and cable cars to the Great Rift, and it's close to the industrial area, with swarms of workers passing by daily.

Previously, when wandering around, Bologue had passed Linna District a few times, but in his impression, there was no building there that could be called a fortress. It wasn't prosperous, and the few tall buildings couldn't possibly accommodate the vast Order Bureau.

Underground?

Is the Order Bureau located underground?

Such a thought arose in Bologue's mind, considering the mysterious nature of the extraordinary organization. It didn't seem impossible for this grand structure to be hidden underground.

Geoffrey didn't say anything, but he seemed to know what Bologue was thinking, sporting a meaningful smile as if preparing a surprise.

"Okay, we're here."

Geoffrey brought Bologue to the end of the corridor, unlike the sections they had just passed; it was quite plain, with no decorations, just neatly piled white bricks, square and spotless.

The end of the corridor was blocked by bricks, cubes overlapping each other, deeply recessed in their misalignment, the interior dull and dark.

They formed a somewhat eerie geometric shape. As Bologue approached it, he could hear faint sounds emanating from within as if the bricks were slowly moving, rubbing against one another.

"Hold on a moment."

Geoffrey searched his pockets, taking out a badge. Without any unnecessary actions, the moment the badge was withdrawn, the overlapping geometric bricks started to tremble, moving in an extremely smooth manner, shifting in all directions, restoring as they went, and opened the blocked path.

Bologue stood in place, stunned for a few seconds before looking at the badge in Geoffrey's hand.

"Is this a pass?"

Pass, security key card... call it whatever you like; by the looks of it, these shifting bricks were the Order Bureau's internal security measures. Still, Bologue couldn't fathom if the movement of bricks wouldn't cause architectural changes?

Bologue recalled the previous assessment, buildings sealed with gray-white cement, remembering that the Order Bureau was entirely constructed of these bricks. An incredible thought arose in his mind.

"Yes, take it, don't lose it. This thing is as hard to apply for as the 'Key of the Crooked Path.'"

Geoffrey said, handing the badge to Bologue.

A round shield-shaped badge, with the embossing of a meteor, twisted at a steep angle, looking more like a twisted vortex. It captivated Bologue's gaze, bearing an indescribable magic power. In a trance, the vortex seemingly rotated slowly.

Twisting, devouring, annihilating...

With effort, Bologue averted his gaze, breaking into a cold sweat. The badge seemed alive, consuming his consciousness, yet calming down, everything returned to normal as if it had been just his illusion.

Turning the badge over, there was a short inscription engraved on it.

Special Operations Group, Bologue Lazarus.

This was meant for him.

After the corridor, there was another massive central courtyard. According to a sign nearby, this was the "Field Operations Department."

The Field Operations Department's layout was similar to the central courtyard Bologue had arrived at, but with subtle differences, such as the staff being noticeably fewer, the atmosphere not as relaxed but rather carrying a bit of oppression and severity. The air faintly filled with the scent of blood, and from the depth of another corridor came pained whimpering.

This time, Geoffrey didn't show Bologue around but went directly upstairs, left and right, the light gradually dimmed. In a remote corner, he found an office with a nameplate on the door.

"Lebius Lovisa."

Bologue read the name aloud, and at the same time, Geoffrey stepped forward, knocked on the door, and after a few seconds, turned the doorknob.

Behind the door was an ordinary office; a mahogany desk faced the door, with a few chairs on the side, and a few green plants were placed in the corners. It was very ordinary, showing no hints that the matters handled here were all about supernatural events with the Devil.

Bologue carefully observed, finding this office had no windows. Walking through the entire Order Bureau, there seemed to be no windows, as if the space was entirely enclosed.

A few seconds later, another door in the office opened, and a wheelchair slowly entered the room.

It was a middle-aged man with a neat appearance. His hair and collar were meticulously tidy, and even seated in a wheelchair, he kept his back straight like a tenacious sword. Yet, his complexion was as pale and sickly as Bologue's, with faint veins visible on his cheeks.

Bologue had been in the Black Prison for too long, leading to the lack of sunlight. The man before him appeared more consumed by illness, resulting in a sickly pallor. Bologue even found it hard to gauge his exact age.

A brief gaze exchanged with the man, his eyes dark, emanating a chill, leaving Bologue with a feeling of being pricked by a sharp blade, quickly causing him to avert his gaze.

The man clasped his hands in front of him. Looking at Bologue, his somber expression lightened considerably, though it carried a smile that brought discomfort.

Geoffrey didn't need to introduce him. From the first glance at the man, Bologue clearly knew his identity.

"Lebius Lovisa, head of the Order Bureau's Field Operations Department and Special Operations Group."

The clear voice spoke, Lebius introduced himself.

"Finally, I meet you, the resurrected Lazarus."

Chapter 24 - 11 Rupert's Tail

This was not the first meeting between Bologue and Lebius. As early as during the assessment, he had confronted Lebius, but at that time, Lebius was controlling the Blade-Biting Wolf. It was merely a puppet, but this time Bologue saw Lebius's form with his own eyes.

Somewhat surprising.

In Geoffrey's words, Lebius should be an extremely frightening and unfathomable character. Coupled with the eerie feeling during the assessment, Bologue had already painted a picture of Lebius in his mind.

A cunning and sly figure, yet the real Lebius was unexpectedly a sickly cripple.

"Lebius..." Bologue whispered the name, dragging a chair from the side and sitting down at the other end of the office desk.

Bologue looked at Lebius warily.

He did not underestimate Lebius because he was disabled; on the contrary, he was more vigilant towards Lebius. After all, to become the head of this so-called Special Operations Group with a crippled body, Bologue did not think Lebius was as he appeared.

This was a group wielding Extraordinary Power, and no one could predict what kind of cards they held in their hands.

"You're my boss, and I'm your employee... what do I need to do next?" Bologue asked first.

Lebius paused for a few seconds, unlike Geoffrey, who was adept at human resources. He was not much of a talker, something Bologue could sense.

"No tasks for the time being; the Special Operations Group is still under construction," Lebius said with slight regret, "The group mainly comprises debtors, and finding reliable debtors is not easy."

"Why are you so keen on debtors?"

Bologue asked, sensing from Yas's attitude that the Order Bureau was very wary of debtors, but Lebius was adamant about using debtors to form a task force.

"Because of your 'Blessing,' it's a deceitful force independent of the 'Alchemy Matrix,' and in action, debtors can be unexpected soldiers, the winning hand in perilous situations."

"Sounds like what I'll be executing are suicide missions." Bologue remarked.

"Indeed, to be precise, all mission groups within the Field Operations Department execute extremely dangerous tasks; otherwise, Geoffrey wouldn't have applied to transfer to the Logistics Department."

Lebius said, glancing at Geoffrey, who smiled awkwardly.

"Of course, trustworthy debtors are extremely valuable resources, and we will use you cautiously," Lebius stated earnestly.

"Aren't you afraid I'll lose control? After all, it was you who personally locked me in the Black Prison," Bologue's voice chilled, "or made deals with the Devil, unable to bear Bulimia Nervosa, starting to devour others' souls... and the like."

He wanted to know, given the danger of debtors, how the Order Bureau planned to control him.

"Not afraid, because if you lose control, it means being an enemy of the Order Bureau, and even if you have an Undying Body, you can be neutralized, can't you? For example, by being poured into cement and sinking to the depths of the ocean."

For Bologue's question, Lebius responded calmly, as if he had expected it all along. His emotions seemed to have not fluctuated since the meeting, like a cold mechanical being.

"That's not enough of a threat."

Bologue said, wanting to understand what kind of restrictions the Order Bureau would impose on him, whether a collar or shackles, as this would determine their future relationship.

Geoffrey appeared somewhat panicked, sensing the tension in the conversation, trying to mediate, but these two were somewhat insane, making it impossible for him to join the conversation.

After a few seconds of silence, Lebius's lips slightly curled, looking like he was smiling, but paired with his sickly face, it only sent chills.

"Bologue Lazarus... you're a man of 'desire.'"

Lebius murmured to himself, opening a drawer, taking out a document, and scanning it.

"People with 'desire' are rather easy to control... no, this is not even control but mutual benefit."

He handed the document to Bologue, continuing.

"From the beginning, the Order Bureau did not intend to impose any restrictions on you, no shackles, no chains, only a need for alignment in the general direction.

We need you as a debtor to execute our missions, fulfill our 'desires,' and correspondingly, we will satisfy your 'desires.'"

We don't even require you to agree with our philosophy, because if you are full of ideals and justice, it will make us suspicious. All we need is that at critical moments, there is a Sharp Sword to cut off the enemy's head, that will be enough.

As long as... you are willing to follow our rules, not to break our order."

It's like a fair trade, mutual satisfaction between both parties. Bologue needs freedom to do what he wants, and the Order Bureau can grant him freedom, but requires Bologue to kill for them.

"People without desires are the ones who need shackles, because nobody knows whether these idle souls will settle for silence or do something absurd to stir their decayed hearts."

Lebius added, seemingly recalling some unpleasant past events, frowning slightly.

Bologue did not respond. From the moment he took the document, he stopped speaking, his eyes locked onto the information in the document, his breathing slightly quickening.

"What... is this about?"

Bologue glanced at Lebius with a somber expression.

"I reviewed your action report and noticed you were investigating an extraordinary crime, so I took the liberty of checking the relevant files," Lebius smiled, "I take great care of my subordinates."

"What is this so-called 'Man-eater'?"

A voice filled with malice squeezed out between Bologue's teeth. Geoffrey, who heard "Man-eater" nearby, also showed a change in expression, as if the term held a deeply unpleasant meaning.

"A group that has risen in Opus in recent years; their main business... you should understand from their name, right? They secretly perform Condensation on ordinary people, harvest souls, forge them into Philosopher's Stones, and sell them at high prices to Demons hidden within the city."

Lebius spoke slowly.

"The manpower of the Order Bureau is limited, and coupled with Opus's chaos, countless strangers arrive here daily, bringing new disasters. Initially, we didn't pay much attention to this group until recently when their scale began to rapidly expand."

Bologue remained silent, continuing to peruse the files. Many familiar pieces of information appeared before him, the majority of people had become deceased, including a photo of Priest Doron.

Turning to the last page, a black-and-white photograph, a name, and some scribbled text met Bologue's gaze.

"The Order Bureau also faces opposition from enemy organizations. We suspect 'Man-eater' is funded by our adversaries, allowing them to continue their growth unchecked, they will inevitably disrupt the balance of Opus, so we have decided to act against 'Man-eater' in the near future."

Lebius shifted his gaze to Bologue, observing his reaction, speaking step by step.

"Bologue Lazarus, I've been watching you for a long time, just like when I asked you during the assessment why you are obsessed with the moral justice, and you called it an immutable axiom."

Sharp eyes scrutinized Bologue, as if attempting to devour him, greedily encapsulating Bologue completely within their vision.

"I like your explanation; many things require no reason."

Bologue stared directly into those sharp eyes without evading.

The office sank into silence, and such silence did not last long. Bologue leaned back against the chair, fully relaxing, exhaled deeply, picked up the file, flipped to the last page, and looked at the photograph and name on it.

The myriad events within the Black Prison flashed before his eyes, the Devil's debts, unknown enigmas, fiery revenge...

"It's truly an irresistible invitation."

Bologue chuckled.

He stared at the photo in the documents, "This person... do you need him alive, or dead?"

"Alive," Lebius added, "we need him alive; we need to pry more intelligence about 'Man-eater' from his lips."

Bologue took a deep breath, his attention towards Lebius changed.

As stated, the Order Bureau doesn't need to control him; their purpose aligns perfectly.

Bologue must make the greedy Demons pay the price, and this is exactly what the Order Bureau desires as well. Bologue needs to find that damned Devil, redeem his soul, and the Order Bureau shares this intent, swearing to banish the Devil from the human world forever.

In this way, their interests are almost entirely aligned.

"What kind of actions will we be responsible for once our Special Operations Group is established?" Bologue asked.

"Has Geoffrey given you the badge?" Lebius didn't answer the question.

On hearing this, Bologue took out the badge from his pocket, engraved with a meteor twisted into a vortex.

"This item is called Rupert's Tear, it's molten glass dripped into cold water, forming tadpole-shaped glass upon solidification, resembling a tear."

Lebius said, extracting a Rupert's Tear, its transparent tear with a slender tail, a trace left from before solidification.

"It has a peculiar property: while the 'tear' part can bear much more pressure than regular glass, the moment you touch its 'tail,' the incredibly tough 'tear' will instantly shatter."

Lebius lightly pinched the tail of the tear, and a scarcely audible cracking sound was heard. In the blink of an eye, the tough transparent tear was filled with countless cracks internally and collapsed.

"'Rupert's Tail,' that's the code name of our Special Operations Group; we will be the sharpest sword, striking precisely at the enemy's 'tail.'"

Lebius explained.

Bologue watched the powder that shattered into dust on the table and turned his gaze to the badge, only then realizing that it was not a meteor carved on it, but a Rupert's Tear being swallowed by a vortex.

"I guess I have no more questions."

Bologue pondered for a moment, looked at the scattered papers on the table, and the pen beside them, he asked.

"So... where should I sign?"

Chapter 25 - 12: Equivalent Exchange

Pushing open the door, Bologue and Geoffrey walked out of Lebius's office, and once the door was closed, only the two of them were left in the empty corridor.

Unlike the initial unease, Bologue felt he was gradually blending in here; at least it wasn't so unfamiliar to him anymore.

"'Rupert's Tail' Special Operations Group..."

Bologue glanced at the badge in his palm and murmured softly.

"Honestly, I'm starting to like my new boss."

Bologue said to Geoffrey.

He liked such people, these smart individuals. Lebius knew what Bologue needed and didn't mind lending him a hand. Instead of verbal exchanges, Lebius was now more eager to take action.

Cutting out the awkward pleasantries, the two were like indifferent hunters, efficiently and succinctly exchanging information about the prey.

There was no need for mutual ideology agreement, just a consistent general direction.

As long as Bologue was willing to abide by their order, it didn't matter if he was a debtor or a darker monster; Lebius didn't care.

Bologue never imagined his joining to be so smooth; he had expected to sign numerous terms and swear some declarations.

After considering all this, Bologue's gaze quickly grew bleak as he picked up the documents tucked under his arm.

Man-eater.

Adelle's death was related to the "man-eater". Knowing such information was enough for Bologue; now he only needed to knock on the door with weapons, crush their bones one by one, pull out their teeth, and pry out what he wants from their whimpering gasps.

"Is this your mutual stench?"

Geoffrey noticed the change in Bologue. He had thought since early on that the two would get along, but seeing such a scene still made him uneasy.

One who only cared about results and didn't mind the methods—a "Negative Power User", and another full of vengeful fury—the Undead, two extremely obsessive individuals coming together was indeed unsettling.

"When are you planning to pay a visit to that unlucky guy?"

Geoffrey glanced at the documents; this could count as Bologue's first task since joining.

"I'll go whenever I'm ready."

Bologue said, the restless feeling in his heart was urging him, anger waiting to be vented. Bologue couldn't wait any longer.

"You're somewhat hard to comprehend, you... but still, you're the Undying Body, and I'm this weak mortal flesh; understanding is destined to be elusive."

Seeing Bologue's impatient demeanor, Geoffrey could only sigh repeatedly.

"I applied for transfer to logistics because I couldn't stand the fighting and killing of field duties," Geoffrey recalled, "You really love your work, Bologue."

To this, Bologue just smiled without saying anything.

There were many reasons he loved this job: avenging Adelle, understanding the truth of the Extraordinary World, and also, by hunting demons, he could accumulate soul fragments, which might patch up his missing soul.

"But... I still hope you'll consider more; though you see yourself as an expert, you're actually just a newbie who's been on the job for a day, unaware of the dangers in it."

Geoffrey became serious and said solemnly.

"But no matter how dangerous, I won't die, right?" Bologue said.

The Undying Body, Bologue's greatest reliance for now; regardless of the perilous environment, it meant nothing to him.

To this, Geoffrey could only sigh helplessly, he was at a loss for words, and then he said, "Forget it, I'll bring you to meet those 'idlers' later when we have time."

"Who?" Bologue asked.

Geoffrey didn't continue to explain who the "idlers" were in his mouth, but started talking about something else.

"Let me introduce some related matters to you, such as this task you've taken, you might face more than just demons."

Bologue had a lot of knowledge to learn, but Lebius was obviously not suited to be any kind of teacher; this work inevitably fell onto Geoffrey because he had done it many times, and Geoffrey was adept at it.

"Not just demons... what else?"

As soon as the words left Bologue's mouth, he suddenly remembered something, looking at Geoffrey with a few traces of joy.

"Condenser."

Geoffrey said a word both unfamiliar and familiar.

Bologue knew what "Condensation" was, a method of condensing souls into entities, but he hadn't heard of "Condenser".

Seeing Bologue's puzzled look, Geoffrey nudged Bologue's body, indicating him to move forward.

"Let's go, it's time to eat; we'll talk then."

...

"They've left?"

Yuriel pushed open the door, sidestepped and peeked in, glancing around the room; only Lebius remained in the office, sitting behind the desk and looking down at the document in his hand.

"Mm."

Lebius responded coldly without raising his eyes to look at Yuriel, but kept staring at the file, or rather the name on it.

Bologue Lazarus.

"You seem really interested in him."

Yuriel walked beside Lebius. As Lebius's assistant, she knew well what kind of person Lebius was and understood that it had been a long time since anyone had caught Lebius's interest like this.

"No, I'm not interested in him."

Lebius rejected Yuriel's words, furrowing his brow as if pondering something extremely important.

Yuriel remained silent, standing by to wait for Lebius. She knew better than to interrupt Lebius at such times.

After several minutes, Lebius let out a long sigh, put down the document in his hand, propped his head with his hand, and vigorously massaged his temples.

Several times he was about to speak, but Lebius remained silent, and finally, he asked hesitantly.

"Yuriel, have you ever met the people from the 'Undying Club'?"

Undying Club.

Upon hearing this term, Yuriel appeared somewhat confused, but vaguely recalled something, her gaze hidden with caution.

Seeing Yuriel's reaction, Lebius smiled self-deprecatingly and shook his head helplessly.

"Yeah, how could you have met those people? But surely, you've heard of them."

Lebius gritted his teeth, his words filled with disdain for those people.

"A group of beings, who have lived for unknown durations, devoid of 'desires', with hearts as cold as ice, and to stir any dying feelings, they would always do some crazy things, in the name of seeking fun."

Lebius loathed that group of undead. In Opus, they counted as the most idle people, so within the Order Bureau, they are often referred to as "idlers". Many times, the trouble for the Order Bureau comes from these "idlers" seeking amusement.

"I have met those undead. Like Bologue, they received the Gift of Immortality from the Devil, but their immortality is flawed, a 'twisted wish'.

"What... do you mean?" Yuriel was confused.

"Equivalent exchange.

All transactions with the Devil are absolute exchanges between 'value' and 'value', even debtors favored by the Devil."

Lebius recalled that those undead had lived too long and were eccentric. He seldom dealt with them.

"If the wish-maker cannot pay the price required for the wish, the transaction will fail... but the deal can also be forced. If forced, the transaction will be 'corrected'.

Yuriel's face slightly changed; she knew about the "correction" part or the "twisted wish".

"Yes, just like a fair trade. If the buyer cannot pay enough value, the product sold by the seller will also be appropriately 'degraded'.

Lebius whispered.

"Those 'idlers' couldn't pay the high price, thus their immortality was all twisted, even for the Villeries, immortality must be repaid with the endless future of their family.

Lebius looked at Yuriel and questioned.

"Haven't you noticed the clue?"

Yuriel's gaze was rigid. She had already sensed it from Lebius's account; it's just that the information brought forth was too terrifying.

"Bologue Lazarus... his wish, his immortality hasn't been twisted, it's nearly a perfect 'Undying Body'," Yuriel's pupils contracted, her words trembling, "What price did he ultimately pay?"

What kind of "value" did Bologue Lazarus pay to obtain such a perfect "Blessing"?

"I don't know, I'm afraid even Bologue himself doesn't know. I even doubt whether he truly had the ability to pay such a price."

Lebius contemplated, then affirmed.

"I have researched Bologue's profile. From his birth to when he was housed by the Order Bureau, it's certain he had absolutely no ability to pay such a high price."

"Then you mean..." Yuriel dared not continue to think.

"The problem isn't with Bologue, but with the entity that granted him immortality."

This was a terrifying and unsettling conclusion. Yet, under current deduction, it was the only reasonable result.

Lebius stated as calmly as possible.

"Ten Weng Coins can exchange for stuff worth ten Weng Coins, but Bologue exchanged a single Weng Coin for something worth ten, a hundred Weng Coins..."

It's the Devil, the one who traded with Bologue. It granted Bologue an 'Undying Body', and it was willing to make such a loss-making deal.

Why then?"

Lebius murmured to himself.

"Why would that Devil make such an exchange?"

He couldn't figure out why the Devil would make such a decision, or what its purpose was?

After pondering for a long time, Lebius's gaze sharpened once more.

"I need to have a chat with the Minister.

Chapter 26 - 13 Condensers

"In fact, this world doesn't just have the Extraordinary Group led by the Devil, but also the Condensers led by humans."

At the dining table, Geoffrey explained to Bologue.

Bologue nodded, picked up some bread and dipped it in gravy, eating while listening to Geoffrey's words.

The surrounding chatter filled the air, lunch-goers were seated everywhere, devoid of the mystery one might expect from an Extraordinary Mechanism; everyone chatted casually, and occasional arguments broke out from one side.

"Why are these same dishes again? Does the cook still want to work or not!"

"Auntie! Keep your hand steady!"

"Don't shake! Don't shake! If you can't do it, let me do it!"

Such phrases were heard continuously.

Bologue's expression was stiff, unsure whether to laugh or to marvel at the everyday life here, especially considering the conversation with Geoffrey. They were discussing mysterious Extraordinary intelligence, yet there was no hint of mystery at all, more akin to discussing what to eat after work.

Thinking about it, being a clueless newcomer, the issues that puzzled him probably seemed like basic common knowledge to these employees.

Geoffrey glanced around at the people, swallowed the food in his mouth, and said, "Don't mind it. To maintain such a large organization, the people in the Logistics Department are far more numerous than those in the Field Operations Department."

Based on the known information, the main structure of the Order Bureau is led by the Director of the Order Bureau in the "Decision Room," which is the command core of the Order Bureau, under which several departments are subdivided, delegated by the Decision Room.

Geoffrey is in the "Human Resources Department," which sounds rather ordinary, but to sift through countless candidates and select those who can join the Extraordinary World, the composition of this department is quite complex.

The "Field Operations Department" is an extremely unique department, as it is responsible for external missions. It's fair to say that aside from the Field Operations Department, all other departments are considered "logistics." According to regulations,

all departments must prioritize cooperating with the Field Operations Department due to its special nature, and its head is directly appointed by the Deputy Director of the Order Bureau.

The "Logistics Department" lives up to its name, genuine logistics, closely linked with various departments, handling all troublesome matters like material transfers, personnel movements, fund allocations, and maintaining the Order Bureau. Even post-battle cleanups are part of their responsibilities. The "Ferryman" Bologue saw at the end of the assessment is specifically set up by the Logistics Department for battlefield management.

With Geoffrey's guidance, Bologue left the Field Operations Department and arrived at the Logistics Department, the initial position they arrived at when reaching the Order Bureau, where the employee cafeteria is located.

"Back to the Condensers, not only Debtors and Demons possess those peculiar Extraordinary Powers, humans possess them too."

Geoffrey explained.

"In eras not yet recorded by history, Scholars discovered a mysterious source of power, which we call the 'Secret Source.'"

In the years that followed, Scholars began to understand, experiment, and gradually grasp the 'Secret Source,' or rather, utilize the 'Secret Source,' just like how we nowadays use electricity to illuminate darkness, or diesel to drive heavy machinery."

They systematized this knowledge and named it Alchemy, and these Scholars became known as Alchemists.

Ultimately, Alchemists thoroughly comprehended this Extraordinary Power and developed 'tools' to harness it, thereby taming it."

"Alchemy Matrix."

Bologue uttered that mysterious phrase, as the hazy and dark world gradually became clear.

Geoffrey nodded in affirmation, continuing.

"Alchemy Matrix, a complex and intricate matrix, like reins for taming Extraordinary Power, akin to precise circuitry or complex machinery. Different matrix compositions lead to varied effects. We call the abilities it possesses 'Secret Energy.'"

He took out the 'Key of the Crooked Path' and placed it on the dining table.

"Like this 'Key of the Crooked Path,' essentially it's just an ordinary key, but it's embedded with an 'Alchemy Matrix,' and the 'Secret Energy' effect of this 'Alchemy Matrix' is to open 'doors' to different regions."

"When an 'Alchemy Matrix' is embedded in a weapon..."

Bologue recalled, remembering during the assessment, the Blade-Biting Wolf clad in sharp blades, exuding a suppressive and menacing aura.

"These carriers, embedded with an 'Alchemy Matrix' and harnessed with Extraordinary Power, we uniformly refer to as Alchemy Armament. The Blade-Biting Wolf you encountered can be understood as a piece of Alchemy Armament."

Geoffrey explained.

"So, Condenser... the human body embedded with an 'Alchemy Matrix,' granting the ability to command Extraordinary Power, right?"

Bologue inferred, his breathing becoming slightly rapid.

If it's possible to embed the Alchemy Matrix of the 'Key of the Crooked Path' into a human body, could Bologue then possess the 'Secret Energy' to open any door, crossing vast distances effortlessly?

"Yes, but not exactly."

Geoffrey corrected.

"The 'Alchemy Matrix' isn't embedded in 'objects'; its carrier is the soul."

Picking up the 'Key of the Crooked Path,' Geoffrey's voice became heavy and solemn.

"Remember what I told you before? Everything has a soul, even iron, stone, and flesh."

Bologue listened attentively to Geoffrey's words,

"As for Condensers, they are humans whose souls are embedded with an 'Alchemy Matrix,' and thereby gain the ability to command Extraordinary Powers."

Chapter 27 - 13 Condensers_2

"But how do you plan to implant the 'Alchemy Matrix' into the soul? It's something intangible and invisible," Bologue asked.

Geoffrey's lips curled slightly, his voice carrying a sense of mystery and the unknown.

"That's why we need 'Condensation,' to transform the soul from nothingness into an entity that can be interfered with. That's why we're called 'Condensers.'

Bologue was dumbfounded, staring blankly for quite a while before he managed to pick up the remaining bread and smearing it with meat sauce, stuffing it into his mouth.

This feeling was quite peculiar, reminiscent of when he first arrived in this Otherworld, surrounded by new and unknown things, both exhilarating and unsettling, leaving him feeling uneasy and confused.

"So you mean, Condensers have a Philosopher's Stone... or at least something akin to a Philosopher's Stone within their bodies, correct? And it's engraved with intricate Array Patterns, much like an engine, driving Extraordinary Power within you."

Bologue tried to accept all of this; it seemed like the weakness of the Condensers was now apparent. Once the soul solidified within their bodies was extracted, they should surely perish.

"Yes, but not quite like you think. The Condenser's soul doesn't present itself as a solid entity. It's something between nothingness and entity."

Geoffrey's subsequent words shattered Bologue's assumptions.

"Condensation transforms the soul from nothingness, bypassing the liquefaction process, directly solidifying into an entity, thus refining the so-called Philosopher's Stone. And when we implant the 'Alchemy Matrix,' the soul enters a semi-condensed state, undergoing the three states of matter transformation.

Transitioning from the nothingness of 'gas,' to the flowing 'liquid,' and further crystallizing into the solid 'entity.'

The implantation occurs at the 'liquid' stage, where there's an entity yet to crystallize, still possessing a malleable form. It's during this stage that we implant and cover the 'Alchemy Matrix,' and once the coverage is successful, the ritual concludes.

Human souls cannot be restrained; therefore, after the ritual ends, our souls halt this Condensation process, reverting from 'liquid' back into nothingness - 'gas,' but this time, they're accompanied by the 'Alchemy Matrix.'

At this point, Geoffrey recalled something and reminded Bologue.

"You previously asked me about the origin of Soul Shards. Part of the speculation arises from here.

The production of these shards is due to the 'loss' that occurs during soul state change, which can also be explained through Condensation. The process requires the release of heat, and the released portion might just be the Soul Shards."

After speaking, Geoffrey swiftly picked up the hot soup that was about to cool down, taking several gulps, then wiped his mouth with a napkin.

"Is there anything else you're confused about?"

"Yes, although you describe it casually, interfering with and implanting into the soul sounds extremely risky," Bologue said.

"Yes, it's more than just risky. Even with the advancement of Alchemy, the process of implanting the 'Alchemy Matrix' is still full of uncertainties, and as I've mentioned before, the soul determines the body. Do you think, during the ceremony, when our souls are interfered with, our bodies will fare well?"

Geoffrey's voice was suppressed.

"There are frequent cases where the soul successfully accepts the 'Alchemy Matrix,' but the body breaks apart during the ceremony. Worse yet, the soul fails to bear the 'Alchemy Matrix,' resulting in direct soul collapse and death."

What Geoffrey had just told were countless gruesome examples, accumulated knowledge stained with blood.

"Is this why there are so few Field Operations Department staff?"

The risks are huge, yet Bologue remained highly interested in the implantation of the 'Alchemy Matrix.'

"That's part of the reason. Another is because field operations are indeed extremely high-risk. That's what I initially planned to tell you; you won't only face Demons but also those hostile Condensers who carry unique and unknown 'Secret Energy.'

"You should know, Bologue, that I am also a Condenser; I've just retired from active service," Geoffrey said, grinning slyly and speaking softly to Bologue, "If we were adversaries now, what would you do?"

Bologue glanced sideways at the nearby chair, speaking coldly, "I'd swing the chair and smash your head."

"Then what if my 'Secret Energy' prevents the target looking into my eyes from moving?"

Hearing this, Bologue tried to avert his gaze, but during the conversation, he had already looked at Geoffrey.

What met his eyes was Geoffrey's still friendly smile, though now it seemed to carry an icy edge.

"See, you're frozen," Geoffrey said, "I don't even need to control you completely; just stalling you for a few seconds allows me to take up a spoon and stab your throat."

"You must know, I was once a member of Field Operations. Although I've gained weight, the muscles are simply covered by fat," Geoffrey said, rolling up his sleeves to reveal an arm seemingly devoid of any muscle.

"But I'm an Undying Body," Bologue responded coldly.

"True, but I can repeatedly break your corpse, keeping you in a 'dead' state. As you've mentioned, multiple deaths in a short time lead to unconsciousness and incapacitation."

Silence.

After quite a while, Bologue had a revelation; he realized what his problem was. In this Extraordinary World, an Undying Body might be strong, but not absolutely so. He still had much to learn, and arrogance would only lead to his downfall.

"I understand what you mean," Bologue nodded seriously, with genuine sincerity.

"That's the battle between Condensers, much like rock-paper-scissors, probing, guessing the opponent's 'Secret Energy' to find vulnerabilities and deliver a fatal strike."

Geoffrey acknowledged Bologue's attitude. The fact that Bologue, who displayed some mental issues, could sincerely listen to his advice was indeed somewhat remarkable for Geoffrey.

"The strong rule, but survival is of the fit.

This is a saying that's been circulating within the Order Bureau for a long time, the battles Condensers face are full of deceit and eeriness.

In most cases, we don't know what kind of enemy we'll face, how many there are, or what kind of 'Secret Energy' they possess. All we can do is adapt, be flexible, and in constant trial and error, discover the enemy's weak point, then slit his throat."

When Geoffrey spoke of these things, his eyes darkened quite a bit, seemingly recalling battles of his early years.

"Information is life," Bologue stated, comprehending the truth behind Geoffrey's words.

"Exactly," Geoffrey nodded in approval.

"So..." Bologue recalled Geoffrey's earlier 'hypothetical,' suspiciously eyeing this fellow who had moved from field operations to logistics, "Is your 'Secret Energy' effect really only 'hypothetical' as you described?"

Geoffrey smiled, using the phrase Bologue had just mentioned, retorting back to him.

"Information is life."

Chapter 28 - 14 Contempt, Gaze, and Myopia

After finishing lunch, the two strolled within the Order Bureau.

"As for the intelligence on the target, I think the information Lebius provided to you should be clear enough," Geoffrey said, "My suggestion is to go back and rest a bit, set off under the cover of night, it's better that way."

Geoffrey squinted his eyes as if recalling something, then continued.

"And... if I'm not mistaken, the equipment I applied for you should have already been delivered to your home."

"Equipment? What equipment?"

Hearing "equipment," Bologue's eyes lit up. Ever since he learned about Alchemy Armament, Bologue has taken a keen interest in these extraordinary weapons. If he had had an Alchemy Armament during the assessment, he might not have needed to die to shatter the Blade-Biting Wolf.

"Some standard equipment for field staff. After all, you're now a formal employee. We can't just have you slashing around with a folding knife anymore... By the way, why do you like melee weapons so much? Firearms are quite a bit more efficient."

Geoffrey lifted his coat, revealing a handgun tucked into the belt at his waist. It looked plain, but Bologue instinctively felt it was no ordinary firearm.

"Maybe it's psychological trauma?" Bologue said uncertainly, "You know, before I went to prison, I was a soldier. After staying in a warzone for so long, it's inevitable to grow weary of such things."

"Really?" Geoffrey keenly noticed something.

Bologue paused, hesitated for a moment, then shook his head.

"Not really, it's just that if I told you the real reason, you probably wouldn't believe it."

"Huh?" Geoffrey asked curiously, "Go ahead."

"Do you remember the thing I asked you for right after I got out of prison?" Bologue avoided explaining and instead questioned Geoffrey.

Geoffrey shook his head straightforwardly. He couldn't remember.

"Glasses," Bologue said, "It's an injury left from my time as a soldier. A shell exploded next to me, leaving my head buzzing. When I woke up, I was a bit nearsighted. When things are too far, my vision starts to blur, and my marksmanship is terrible."

"Unfortunately, it was a long time after that when I received the 'Blessing,' and for some reason, the 'Blessing' didn't cure this... maybe it doesn't count as an injury."

"At first I wore glasses for a while, but after all, we're fighting Demons, and nearly every battle would destroy a pair, so eventually, I just stopped wearing them and using guns much."

"Is your nearsightedness severe?" Geoffrey asked.

"Not severe. Actually, if I really try to see, I can manage. I just need some time to concentrate."

Bologue said, frowning and squinting, his facial muscles tensed as if entering another state. However, looking at Bologue's expression at that moment, Geoffrey's cheeks puffed up, as if he couldn't suppress his laughter.

"Go ahead, laugh, laugh, I knew it would be like this."

Bologue maintained his "focus" state and said helplessly.

His expression at this moment was very amusing, with tightly knit brows and squinting eyes, his whole face scrunched into a grimace, his features twisted together, resembling the Chinese character "囧."

"Is it really like this?" Geoffrey laughed so hard he was almost out of breath.

"Yeah, and I realized that instead of focusing to open fire, I could just as easily rush over and hack the opponent to pieces in that time."

Bologue's expression twitched slightly, which was why he didn't want to show this side to others. The cold-blooded warrior had become a grumpy killer eager to get off work.

"Haha!"

Geoffrey couldn't stop laughing, continually expressing his amazement.

"My gosh, Bologue, I never would've thought... have you thought about doing comedy?"

Truth be told, Bologue's contrasting side genuinely amused Geoffrey. He wiped the tears from his eyes from laughing, recalling how things were at the beginning.

"Wow, so at the very beginning, when you had that perpetual grim face, it was just because you couldn't quite see clearly?"

In Geoffrey's memory of meeting Bologue, Bologue was far more aloof than he is now. Even making eye contact, his blue eyes showed no reflection of Geoffrey, as if Geoffrey never entered Bologue's view, and Bologue also never truly looked at him.

Bologue treated everyone with equal disdain.

It felt fantastic, like a nightmare stepping out from urban legends, cold-blooded, oppressive, with absolute confidence in his strength... but in reality, he was just a bit nearsighted, too lazy to clearly see other people's appearances.

"Oh heavens, someone save me."

Geoffrey laughed to the point of near exhaustion, drawing the attention of nearby staff who glanced over.

Bologue did not respond. For this matter, he found himself feeling an unusual touch of embarrassment.

No one expected that Lazarus, who came back from the dead, would have such a side — slightly comedic, a little less precise, like a living human with flesh and blood, rather than a flawless monster.

"Phew, back to serious business. Once operational deployment at your 'Rupert's Tail' officially starts, Lebius should allocate you more advanced equipment. You can look forward to it a little," Geoffrey said.

"I'm already excited if you ask me. If you're willing, I'd even want you to use the 'Key of the Crooked Path' to send me home straight away," Bologue said.

"No can do. I still have work to do. You'll have to make your way back on your own and get familiar with the route on the way."

Chapter 29 - 14 Contempt, Gaze, and Myopia_2

Listening to his words and thinking about the long return journey, Bologue felt a silent exhaustion.

Oubos is extremely large; it is said to be the most magnificent city among the nations, and this city is rapidly expanding. The new district is constantly being planned on the blueprints, like an arched wall.

Transportation is convenient, but whether it's the cable cars spanning the Rift, the subway racing underground, or the trams speeding on the tracks, no matter how convenient the transportation, it all makes distance seem far under this complex and vast cityscape.

Bologue made up his mind that he must get a "Key of the Crooked Path" to avoid this damn commuting as much as possible.

"This counts as your first mission, be careful. The other side might have a Condenser," Geoffrey was still a bit uneasy, "You know, if you were incapacitated and thrown into the deep trench of the Great Rift, I can't think of any way to get you back."

"That sounds good. Maybe I can personally explore if the Great Rift has an end."

Bologue appeared under no pressure, and Geoffrey quickly gave him a stressful look again, staring at Bologue, who could only wave his hand and say.

"Just kidding, I'll be careful. First, observe the situation, and then act."

Bologue truly took Geoffrey's advice, which made Geoffrey very pleased.

"I will become a Condenser too, right?"

Bologue inquired, for such immense power was hard not to be tempting.

"Yes, I'm already preparing your implantation ceremony, and maybe after this mission, you can begin the transition to become a Condenser. Don't be anxious; the early preparations for becoming a Condenser are plenty."

Geoffrey recalled the Order Bureau's procedures, estimating the timeline.

"However... making you a Condenser is indeed a very pressuring decision."

"Why say so?" asked Bologue.

"Because you are a Debtor, and your 'Blessing' is a power independent of 'Secret Energy' and Alchemy Armament. In this guessing game, the enemy might guess your 'Secret Energy' and your Alchemy Armament's power, but no matter what, they can't guess your 'Blessing', right? Not to mention your 'Blessing' is so strong.

The Undying Body.

Bologue, we're all looking forward to you. The Undying Body is a very powerful force; although you have the possibility of being incapacitated, the multiple resurrections give you more opportunities than others... more opportunities to trial and error."

Trial and error, fighting among Condensers always requires trial and error, but once out of control, trials and errors can lead to death. But not for Bologue, for him, death is merely a restart, and knowing the enemy's "Secret Energy", he will become the most lethal blade.

"Another chance to start over," Bologue whispered.

"You need to utilize your 'Blessing', not fall into a frenzy of hacking and slashing. For instance, you can completely play dead and give the enemy a fatal blow when they are off guard," Geoffrey suggested.

"Sounds... not too bad?"

Bologue imagined the scene, a dead corpse suddenly springing up and thrusting a throat-slicing sword, which indeed seemed insidious and cunning.

"But also remember, try as much as possible not to let the enemy realize your Undying Body, and even if they do, you must ensure one thing..."

Geoffrey did not continue, waiting for Bologue to respond.

"Kill them, all enemies who know I have an Undying Body must die," Bologue caught on.

"Yes, exactly."

Geoffrey patted Bologue's shoulder vigorously, laughing out loud.

"I'm already looking forward to you becoming the annual best newcomer!"

"The Order Bureau has such an evaluation mechanism?" This eerie title stunned Bologue.

"Of course! We have an internal incentive policy; otherwise, do you think such a life-risking industry can really be sustained merely by enthusiasm and ideals?"

Geoffrey looked like an old hand, then whispered.

"Don't think I'm joking; if you can really win the award, you can apply for some rewards."

"Like what?"

"For example, Alchemy Armament," Geoffrey said, "much more powerful than the standard equipment of the field staff."

He took out the revolver tucked at his waist. As Bologue had observed earlier, the gun was very plain, with marks of time's scratches on its metal surface. Bologue couldn't identify its exact model but could see a special emblem on the grip part.

Bologue closely observed that emblem, and judging from the Order Bureau and Special Operations Group's emblems, within the Order Bureau, these special emblems often represented something.

It was a fruit, with a snake coiled around the outside, attempting to gnaw at the flesh.

"It is the emblem for the Order Bureau's 'Research and Equipment Department', known as the 'Sublimation Furnace Core'. Currently, the Order Bureau's 'Alchemy Matrix' and Alchemy Armament are mostly developed by them, responsible for our research and equipment production as well as facility maintenance."

Geoffrey timely explained to Bologue.

"This gun is what I applied for after completing an important mission."

"What's its effect?" Bologue curiously asked.

"It's a secret." Geoffrey put his finger in front of his mouth and whispered.

"Such custom Alchemy Armaments are often very expensive, and even the Order Bureau can't be extravagant in this aspect. So if you don't want to spend your hard-earned salary to pay for these things, you'd better work hard to earn such opportunities," Geoffrey said.

"Secret... secret..."

Obviously, Bologue didn't take Geoffrey's words seriously and focused on the gun's capability, then he asked.

"Geoffrey, for people like us, do we always have to keep our information absolutely confidential?"

"Not really, you'll have a partner later, and the only one you can completely be honest with about your abilities would be your partner, as that will be the person who lives and dies with you," Geoffrey said.

"So, Geoffrey, your abilities are not absolutely confidential, your partner knows it all, right?"

"Hmm, what's up?" Geoffrey nodded.

"Then... since you were transferred to logistics, where's your partner?" According to Bologue's understanding, Geoffrey and his partner should be inseparable, but since he met him, Geoffrey had always been alone.

Geoffrey was silent for a few seconds, his gaze a bit dim, but he still spoke in a relaxed tone.

"Precisely because I no longer have a partner to accompany me, I was transferred to logistics."

Bologue's steps paused for a moment, he understood, and his tone paused, "I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry for, that's how it is in this line of work," Geoffrey said, "That's also why I understand your desire for revenge for Adelle, isn't it? Because I've also avenged a friend before."

Unknowingly, the two had already reached the entrance of the Order Bureau, stepping out leads to the Rina District as Geoffrey mentioned, and beyond this door, they would reach the bustling world.

"The regret is, I failed," Geoffrey sighed, recalling such matters inevitably weighed heavily, "Perhaps recalling my past failures makes me more eager for you to thoroughly decimate the opposition."

Bologue looked at Geoffrey, slightly lost in thought; he hadn't quite understood Geoffrey's kindness toward him before. It seemed like he was truly a nice guy, but now he understood a bit more.

"Oh, absolutely, I'll pulverize him to dust!"

Bologue vowed.

Chapter 30 - 15: The Room of Infinite Cultivation

The doorway leading to the outside world was starkly simple, in contrast to the artistic design style within, so plain that it was hard to associate it with the Order Bureau. Stepping out of the building, a gloomy world unfolded before the eyes.

Pedestrians hurried along the streets, cars moved slowly, emitting thick exhaust fumes; everything was draped in a gray haze, as if wearing a pair of blurry glasses.

Emerging from the Order Bureau, Bologue found himself in the bustling streets, feeling quite peculiar, for it took only a few steps to transition from the mysterious extraordinary institution to the crowded streets.

The mundane world and the mysterious tightly intertwined, indistinguishable from one another.

Having walked a bit further, Bologue restrained his emotions... although there seemed little need to do so, for he had already encountered enough of the bizarre today, leaving his mood somewhat numbed.

Turning his head back, he wanted to look at the mysterious building housing the Order Bureau.

Bologue froze in place.

"Indeed, this is the Order Bureau. My first time seeing it, I had a similar expression," Geoffrey stood beside Bologue and said.

A skyscraper shot up from the ground, towering before him, its shadow completely engulfing Bologue.

The whole edifice resembled a delicate geometric body, its surface devoid of any windows, not even "passages" connecting the interior to the exterior, seemingly a colossal structure entirely cast from concrete, its rough gray walls blending with the misty atmosphere, anchored above in the heavy haze of Opus, like a pillar supporting a sea of clouds.

Bologue found it hard to catch his breath.

Wordless, soundless—there was only the oppressive solemnity brought by the immense structure and the bizarre astonishment in the face of normality, as if this were not a man-made building, but a tombstone erected by gods in a mythic era, coldly watching over the worldly changes, the rise and fall of the ages.

"In my memory, there were no buildings like this here."

Under the intense visual impact, Bologue's voice lost all emotion.

"Just simple cognitive distortion, one of this 'Cultivation Room's' many abilities," Geoffrey remarked with a sense of pride, "Only those holding a 'pass' can perceive its existence."

Bologue gazed at the majestic structure, gently rubbing the "Rupert's Tail" badge in his pocket, which presumably was his "pass."

"Cultivation Room?"

"Yes, that's its name."

Geoffrey looked at the fortress-like structure and spoke slowly.

"The 'Alchemy Matrix' is a very convenient tool. When implanted into an area, the region extensively covered by the 'Alchemy Matrix' is referred to as the 'Void Realm,' and the Order Bureau's 'Cultivation Room' is one such 'Void Realm' that can continuously expand.

One of the 'Cultivation Room's' secret abilities is expansion, allowing for the continuous enlargement and alteration of its narrow internal space, albeit requiring extensive material consumption... The reason your Special Operations Group's activity room hasn't been approved yet is that the 'Cultivation Room' is still undergoing expansion."

Reflecting on the 'Cultivation Room,' Geoffrey recalled the indescribable excitement upon first encountering such a miraculous creation. Bologue, too, was likely feeling the same, deeply staring at the 'Cultivation Room,' he could even see the doorplate hanging at zone number 117 of Lingna.

"Cognitive distortion, expansion...

The 'Cultivation Room' is the cornerstone of the Order Bureau. Over a long period of time, we've made numerous enhancements to the 'Cultivation Room,' making its 'Alchemy Matrix' increasingly complex. Do you remember the anomaly during the assessment? That was the work of the 'Cultivation Room,' showcasing another one of its abilities, 'seal,' extending its 'Alchemy Matrix,' temporarily transforming your location into part of the 'Cultivation Room' and then initiating renewal."

Scenes from the past flashed repeatedly before Bologue's eyes, recalling the moment when gray cement entirely sealed off the building.

"So the 'Transfer Station' is also a 'Void Realm,' right?" Bologue recalled seeing those doors standing in the darkness.

Geoffrey nodded, then mounted the steps, standing at a height.

"I won't see you off; wish you success in your mission, Bologue."

Geoffrey bid farewell to Bologue, who paused for a few seconds in place before suddenly speaking.

"Thank you, Geoffrey, thank you for all the care you've given me, and for explaining all of this without reservation."

These words were heartfelt, for without Geoffrey's help, the past year would have been intolerable for him as a debtor; worse still, he might have ended up back in the Black Prison.

"Hm? You suddenly saying all this really makes one uneasy!" Geoffrey's voice rose.

"No, I just feel that such words must be said when they need to be," Bologue remembered Adelle, he had prepared gifts but could never give them anymore.

Geoffrey seemed to grasp Bologue's sentiment, his expression also taking on a hint of melancholy, yet he smiled again.

"Though these matters are quite sad, seeing you able to mourn for another person, I think it's quite comforting," Geoffrey said, "Just to be clear, this isn't schadenfreude."

"Why so?"

"Because it makes you appear still capable of feeling joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, rather than a mindless monster."

Geoffrey finished speaking and turned back inside the Order Bureau, waving with his back to Bologue, who said nothing more, having already discussed enough; what was needed now was action.

With emotions of shock, Bologue left, glancing back at the 'Cultivation Room' every few steps, feeling that the direct impact of the giant structure was more stimulating than any employee benefits Geoffrey could speak of.