

Endless Debt

#Chapter 11 - 3: The Demon, the Folding Knife, and... Rock Music [Thanks to the Wise Leader of the New Era]_3 - Read Endless Debt Chapter 11 - 3: The Demon, the Folding Knife, and... Rock Music [Thanks to the Wise Leader of the New Era]_3

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Escaping from the memory, Geoffrey actually felt a bit excited.

"Bologue will get through it; only by regaining freedom can he keep going forward, whether it's for Adelle's revenge or to complete his own soul."

Geoffrey muttered.

"By any means necessary, no matter the cost."

In the distance, the "Cultivation Room" started up. The gray-white bricks began to move, blocking all entrances and exits to the building. Intricate patterns emitted a faint glow, flickering incessantly on the building's walls.

...

Bologue woke up leisurely from the sofa, rubbing his tired eyes with a slight headache. The room was dim.

He never had the habit of taking afternoon naps, because Bologue would often sleep through the entire afternoon, waking up to the desolate night... it's not a good feeling, waking up each time feeling as if he had been abandoned by the whole world.

Stretching lazily and letting out a big yawn, he barely managed to relax his body when suddenly he became alert, every muscle taut like a drawn bowstring.

Bologue smelled it, a scent of decay.

Evil, twisted, decayed, like piles of corpses soaking in stagnant water, corpse fluid and blood mixed together, swarming with flies and mosquitoes that buzz annoyingly.

The smell was so bad, yet under Bologue's scent, it seemed extremely delicious. Just by inhaling such an aroma, his faint excitement surged, his blood burning alongside it.

Demon.

This is the scent of a demon.

"The soul is our most precious 'source.' Any changes to the soul will reflect on the body. People missing a soul will appear sickly, and those completely devoid of a soul, that is, demons, their bodies will become empty shells, ceaselessly decaying, like living corpses. Only by devouring souls can they halt their body's decay and satisfy their inner hunger.

So, many times, you can discern the presence of a demon through their scent."

Geoffrey's words echoed beside his ears, something he had taught Bologue. Since then, Bologue had become sensitive to odors, whether they were fragrant or foul.

Demon would temporarily quench their hollow hunger by devouring souls, thereby suppressing the outbreak of bulimia nervosa. Yet there would still be a faint scent of decay clinging to them, which they cover up with large amounts of perfume.

"A demon?"

Bologue murmured, picking up the unfolded folding knife, his gaze alert.

He didn't know why a demon would appear here, but he understood that apart from Bologue, everyone else in the building was ordinary people, powerless to resist the demon. They would be killed, devoured.

Even though his neighbors were quite annoying, they didn't deserve to become the demon's fodder.

"Does this make me the Savior?"

Bologue mumbled to himself.

Opening the wardrobe was like some kind of peculiar ritual. Bologue donned a white shirt, tied a necktie, and tidied his appearance in front of the mirror, looking like he was going out for work.

Yes, it was indeed work, but to be precise... it's overtime.

Pulling open the wardrobe drawer, it was filled with cold folding knives. Bologue favored these weapons; they were lethal, easily stored, and most importantly, didn't create much noise.

He picked up several folding knives, slotting them into the tactical harness under his shirt, one by one, then grabbed a black coat that tucked all these deadly blades away.

Walking towards the door, the scent of decay leaking from the doorway.

There wasn't any fear on his face; rather, Bologue was somewhat delighted.

Others might fear demons, but for Bologue, demons represent fragments of the soul, a chance to complete the soul, and the possibility to suppress bulimia nervosa.

More importantly, it allows for justified venting.

Leaving the bedroom and passing through the living room, he casually picked up a record and placed it on the record player, the black record slowly spinning, producing a scratching sound.

Pushing open the door, the corridor lights flickered on and off, something he had complained about to the building supervisor many times. However, the man only cared about the rent, never thinking about repairs.

The usual clamor was gone; the corridors were eerily silent, with the walls yellowed and plastered with random ads, as if, for a moment, Bologue was the only person left in the building.

In the old building, the folding knife scraped against the wall, creating a piercing noise.

Bologue looked toward his neighbors' doors, only to see the "doors" had vanished, replaced by gray-white cement walls. Not only his neighbors but all doors except Bologue's room were blocked, even the windows.

The entire building sealed shut, turned into a cage.

"A Killing Array targeting only me?"

Not knowing how the "demon" did all this, but Bologue wasn't nervous about it; instead, he breathed a sigh of relief, indicating he doesn't have to expend energy on looking after the neighbors.

Having witnessed all sorts of extraordinary events, Bologue quickly accepted the current situation.

After all, demons and souls are real; what remains impossible?

The deathly silence and stench, eerie chill surged inside the closed building, but just then, the sound of a low bass abruptly echoed from Bologue's room, soon followed by undulating drums and gradually fervent guitar sound.

The scorching rock music played.

When Bologue first arrived at this world, he was extremely miserable; entertainment was scarce and "primitive," technology wasn't overly backward, but recalling his past life, it was far lacking.

Having experienced luxury, returning to frugality was hard; Bologue's mood was likely like this then; fortunate amidst misfortune, there were still things in this world that piqued Bologue's interest.

Such as rock music.

"Evil follows you around like a shadow! Evil shares your bed! Evil calls forth your desires!"

Inside the record player, the lead singer sang with a hoarse voice, exerting full effort.

Bologue hummed the same tune, gripped the chilly folded knife like a night-stalking Death God.

Chapter 12 - 4: The Irritable Forensic Expert

Since Adelle's death, Bologue felt increasingly irritable, and over time, this irritability grew more intense, fiery, and unbearable.

This feeling is akin to bulimia nervosa, but Bologue knew that this irritability came from his own heart.

Every time he obtained new information and punished those damned villains, Bologue felt a sense of irritability being released, granting him brief tranquility. Yet, no matter how many villains he killed, the irritability was merely alleviated, not truly eradicated.

Only by ending it all could Bologue achieve liberation. He relentlessly searched for Adelle's soul.

Adelle was different from Bologue; she was murdered, forcefully "condensed," and despite Bologue's persistent investigations, he never found Adelle's soul, which is what they call the "Philosopher's Stone."

The name given to a human soul "condensed" into a tangible entity, a crystalline, translucent red gem.

Souls are the bargaining chips in trades with Devils, and likewise, such currency is popular among humans.

The rarity of Philosopher's Stones isn't only due to their value as expensive alchemy materials, more importantly, demons can consume them to alleviate empty hunger and soothe bulimia nervosa outbreaks.

A part of Opus's gray business deals with these entities, using living people to condense Philosopher's Stones and selling them at high prices to demons to mitigate bulimia nervosa symptoms, allowing them to maintain human form.

The list Bologue found was a record of Philosopher's Stone sales, and through it, he killed each demon listed.

"Condensation" cannot completely bind a human soul, only a Devil's "blood contract" can fully dominate a person's soul, meaning Adelle's soul will eventually "fade away," returning to freedom, the only remaining question being, how much time will it take to fully evaporate and "fade away."

However, after working with Geoffrey for so long, Bologue learned some secretive knowledge; for instance, Alchemists have many means to prolong the existence of Philosopher's Stones, slowing down the evaporation rate.

Adelle's death is certain, what Bologue wants now, is to find her Philosopher's Stone as soon as possible to grant her soul freedom.

Each day, each second delayed makes Bologue exceedingly anxious, causing him to become irritable, cruel, and insane.

Geoffrey often said Bologue had some mental issues, always succeeding in hunting demons but in a terribly messy manner. He recalls the two of them joking about similar things before.

"You're like an outstanding doctor."

Geoffrey praised.

"But unfortunately, a forensic one."

It sounded bizarre.

But when did he become like this? Always able to get things done but always creating chaos.

When he came to this world? When he signed his name under the Devil's blood contract? Or when he walked out of the Black Prison?

Or perhaps... when Adelle died?

Bologue couldn't be bothered to think, nor did he have time to ponder.

A silhouette swiftly passed by, stirring a gentle breeze, lifting the ads posted on the wall, rustling noisily.

Bologue sprinted all the way, the obnoxious scent grew more intense, almost suffocating.

His thinking was simple now; Bologue didn't care who these demons were, where they came from, or where they were going, he had only one thought.

Kill them all, leave none alive.

A hoarse growl came from the corner ahead, Bologue could smell the scent of demons, and demons could also smell the scent of souls. Though incomplete, it was worth their frenzy.

Dashing out of the corner, as anticipated, a sharp shriek sounded, clashing with a folding knife, sparking bright blazes.

Their silhouettes pressed close together, struggling against each other.

The opponent's strength was great; Bologue's steps were unstable, almost knocked down, crashing into the wall, then turning away. The spot on the wall was soon struck by a sharp scythe, leaving a long narrow dent.

"Friend, you look starved."

Bologue retreated, the opponent fully exposed in view, under the flickering dim lights, hideously so.

It was a demon that had already shed human form; distorted in its "emptiness," the opponent resembled a gigantic arthropod.

Its head twisted into an unrecognizable shape, jaws opened to almost a contorted angle, revealing sharp, dense, shark-like teeth, with dark red blood stains lingering between them.

Its arms completely deformed, forearms morphed into praying mantis-like scythe-shaped blades. If not for the folding knife blocking the attack just now, Bologue might have been cut in half.

The demon's body bowed, ready to strike like a beast, whipping up the howling wind.

No evasion, charging like cavalry, Bologue pressed on relentlessly.

The blade flashed by, sparks flying, amid continuous clashes, the hand wielding the knife numb from shock, his attack suppressed. The opponent's power and speed were far superior, forcing Bologue to gasp under the crisscrossing scythe swings.

Thankfully, the narrow corridor limited the demon's swings, otherwise, Bologue would face pressure far greater than now.

After another heavy blow, Bologue's body retreated, his folding knife shattered completely from strain, fragments scattered and scraped Bologue while puncturing the demon's skin.

Throwing the broken knife, unsurprisingly, it was easily slashed away by the demon. But as it slashed, another blinding white light swept past, with a large smear of blood.

Chapter 13 - 4: The Irritable Forensic Expert_2

Bologue maintained his stance of swinging the blade, drawing out a new folding knife.

The Scythe was hard and sharp, but the part connected to the flesh was not as strong and remained flesh and blood; the folding knife could slice through it.

"Come, closer, and closer."

Bologue taunted, uncovering his coat, taking another folding knife from the strap, and gripping it in reverse.

The two folding knives crossed together, forming a cross-shaped shield in front of him.

The narrow corridor restricted the Demon and also protected it; Bologue couldn't get around to the weak spot at its back to attack or maneuver with it.

Either retreat or advance.

The "void" would twist the Demon's flesh and its pitiful mind; this Demon had been hungry for too long, its body mutated into such a form, its mind must be almost gone.

Like a wild beast.

Bologue was the first to break the standoff, recklessly lunging forward, swinging the folding knife, slashing downwards.

Such a rash blow was easily blocked by the Demon; by instinct, another Scythe swung up, exploiting the vulnerability Bologue exposed, slicing toward his waist and abdomen. Bologue could only raise the reverse-gripped folding knife to barely stop this strike, but the reverse-gripped knife didn't stop; instead, it continued to swing upward.

A sharp ringing pierced the eardrums as blades scraped against each other; the Scythe was deflected, and the reverse-gripped folding knife was also thrust over the head, spinning a circle of blade flowers before being held firmly again.

This wasn't a reckless attack but a premeditated feint.

The Demon had no time to defend; half its body was exposed under Bologue's folding knife, and soon it lost sensation in half its body.

Slowly turning its head, it saw the entire left arm had completely collapsed, a sharp folding knife deeply embedded in its flesh, hacking into it, splitting muscle and bone, just like a tree struck by Thunder, the body split in two, the wound extending to the waist, and vaguely visible writhing viscera.

A shrill howl rang out, dizzying Bologue, and the Demon tried to lift the broken left Scythe, but the folding knife was deeply embedded, unable to exert any force.

It head-butted against Bologue, dragging him forward, crashing him out of the stairwell, falling between floors along the spiral staircase.

Biting hard on the folding knife in its left shoulder, tearing it out, blood gushed out, but it seemed to feel no pain, scarlet twisted eyes peering through the floor, searching for the fallen Bologue.

No trace, Bologue had disappeared, but then it realized something had appeared in its vision.

A mirror, a smooth mirror appearing within eye contact.

Soon, scarlet blood smeared over the mirror, dripping down.

This was not a mirror, but a Silver blade.

Bologue gripped the edge of the railing with one hand, hung mid-air, holding a folding knife in the other, and as the Demon poked its head out, pierced through its skull.

Using all his strength to yank it down, some residual consciousness made the Demon struggle, but to no avail, Bologue flipped over to straddle the Demon, tightly gripping the folding knife, refusing to let go, and even trying to forcefully enlarge the wound.

The two entangled, crashing into the stairwell, finally landing in the main hall on the first floor.

Dust and debris rose, blurring the scene, as Bologue walked out of the smoke, holding the Demon's head in hand.

Exhaling deeply, he casually tossed the head aside, looking around, silence everywhere, and then murmuring whispers broke the silence, hideous and bizarre shadows emerged from the darkness.

Demons, countless Demons, too many for Bologue to bother counting.

The stench was suffocating; without exception, these Demons had deteriorated to a certain extent, their consciousness and form completely distorted, leaving only the hunger for soul.

Grotesque appearances, with some looking like sickly ordinary people, others like insects, beasts, and some like conglomerations of twisted limbs, leaving Bologue unsure where its head was.

It was like a mad parade of deformities.

The hoarse voices overlapped like sound waves, pressing over Bologue, yet he showed no sign of fear, though his body trembled.

Trembling with excitement.

Dazzling azure light rose from the mantis-like Demon's corpse, merging into Bologue's body, a sense of satisfaction filling his heart, making the restless void fall into tranquility.

With a normal person's mindset, facing such Demons, in such a situation, it seemed only prayers remained.

Bologue indeed was praying.

"Thank what god, thank what heaven."

He muttered gibberish, taking off his coat to let his body stretch freely, the left hand folding knife positioned in front, the right hand folding knife held high, the back of the blade tight against his shoulder.

"Truly thankful."

Bologue expressed sincere gratitude.

To him, these were no longer sinister Demons, but a bounty of aromatic meals awaiting Bologue to feast on.

But just as Bologue prepared to swing his knife to tear them apart, the Demons down to the last, a faint metallic sound arose.

At first, it was merely a slight scrape between two pieces of metal, but soon it seemed like thousands of Iron Swords scraping against each other, grinding under tremendous force, ringing with a tearing, metallic buzz that pierced the air.

A bright cold gleam flashed by, and the next moment the Demons surrounding Bologue fell, as if cleaved by an invisible blade, limbs collapsing from bodies, viscera spilling onto the ground, stinking blood mingling with shattered bones, spreading evenly across the floor like a fungal blanket.

Bologue froze in place, a breeze brushing over him, sending shivers down his spine, followed by footsteps echoing from the darkness.

The sound came from the dark corridor on the first floor, where cement walls had sealed all doors and windows, transforming it into a straight, narrow path.

An immense pressure emanated from the narrow passage, overwhelming everything.

Absolute stillness, not a sound, even breath halted momentarily.

Silent, unseen, shapeless, there was nothing, only a terrifying menace from the darkness, brandishing swords, spears, and halberds charging forth.

"These Demons are no longer suitable for evaluating you, killing them all is merely a matter of time."

A cold voice echoed from the darkness, rising in step with the voice, a glimmering cold light, revealing its form to Bologue.

Bologue couldn't discern if it was human, Demon, or some kind of monster unknown to him.

A helmet forged of black steel shaped into a wolf's head, emitted a ghostly blue light from its crevices, as if inhabited by some Spirit Body, standing upright like a human, but covered in black bristles that, as it moved, rubbed against each other producing the steel buzz Bologue had heard.

Those were not bristles but sharp blades overlapping, draping its body, morphing it into a wolf clad in blades.

"Find me, and you'll be free."

An indifferent gaze fixed upon Bologue, the voice rang out then silence ensued once more.

In the prolonged calm, neither side made a move, unease brew within, until a melody floated from the top floor.

"Night drapes over your shoulders, your name etched in darkness!"

The song triggered like a starting gun, the tense bowstring released.

Bologue swung the folding knife, carving a Silver light track, as the jarring buzz approached.

Chapter 14 -s: Value

For a moment, Bologue thought he was dreaming, a nightmare.

Yes, he hadn't woken up from his nap yet, the closed building, hordes of demons, and that damned figure entangled with deadly blades, all of it was just the bizarre aspect of a dream... Bologue wanted to comfort himself with this thought, but he clearly knew that this was all real.

The metallic hum almost robbed Bologue of his hearing, sparks flew amidst the flashing of blades.

Bologue maneuvered with the demon wolf, amidst the fierce slashes, the arms wielding the blade began to grow numb, almost losing sensation.

After a brief clash, Bologue abandoned the idea of directly confronting this demon wolf, swiftly moving as they fought, to avoid being cornered by this creature.

Once caught by those deadly blades, Bologue would be shredded into pieces in an instant, just like the fallen demons.

Within the sealed building, a storm of blades raged, as the dark shadow swept past, countless cracks appeared on the walls, old dust continued to fall like swirling snow.

Bologue fled quickly, occasionally looking back to see the ferocious and terrifying figure breaking through the barriers in the hazy gray-white atmosphere.

The clang of steel burst forth, growing nearer and more piercing.

Bologue had never encountered an enemy like the demon wolf, its body lacked the decaying stench, making it hard to determine if it was a demon.

Human, perhaps?

Bologue didn't think humans could achieve such feats, at least not the ones he knew of.

Such swift speed, brutal and deadly power...

The sharp hum was close at hand, he was caught up.

Without a moment's hesitation, he abruptly turned, swinging his blade, the two figures collided, the folding knife cutting into the dense, blade-like mane.

The blade shattered, the folding knife in Bologue's hand filled with nicks, more blades clashed around, like thousands of whirling sharp edges, or a spinning meat grinder, tearing into Bologue's flesh, leaving his arm a bloody mess.

The intense pain radiated from his arms, Bologue gritted his teeth, mustering all his strength to swing.

The demon wolf was clad in iron armor, yet its weight was much lighter than Bologue expected, as if underneath the armor, there was no flesh, merely an empty shell.

The two clashed, but quickly separated, Bologue, at the cost of his injuries, successfully repelled the demon wolf, gaining distance once again.

From afar, he watched the demon wolf, it spun a few circles in the air, landed lightly, its wolf head raised, the faint blue glow covered with a layer of dust, the tangible aura seeping out from the gaps.

It stood up, faint blue light radiated from its pitch-black armor, while at the same time, intricate and ornate patterns reflected on the steel, for a moment, the murderous aura dissipated, instead resembling a piece of masterful art.

Alchemy Matrix.

Gazing at the patterns on the steel, a strange yet familiar term arose in Bologue's mind.

This was a term he had heard half a year ago, after getting drunk with Geoffrey.

At that time, Bologue could distinctly feel Geoffrey realizing he had misspoken, even sobering up somewhat, and after that, he never mentioned these topics again.

Bologue's reaction was swift, recalling the demon wolf's previous vague words, he quickly understood everything.

"This is your examination, right?"

Slowly retreating, the gray-white concrete walls sealed off all escape routes, while in this maze-like battleground, up ahead, the demon wolf advanced step by step.

This was an examination, from "those people," an organization truly within the Extraordinary World, only they could possess such peculiar powers, to trap one in this sealed cage unknowingly, and unleash innumerable demons and the demon wolf before him.

"Have I performed too well?"

Bologue complained, piecing together the demon wolf's earlier words, it seemed like it hadn't intended to take action, but his overwhelming suppression against the demons forced it out of the shadows.

A gurgling sound of flowing water arose, the spilled blood flowed back into Bologue's arms, as if time reversal, the damaged flesh gradually covering the wounds, restoring them to their original state.

Bologue exhaled a heavy breath, his movements seeming somewhat slow, but in the next moment, he swung up a roaring gale.

The folding knife filled with nicks was thrown, accurately striking the demon wolf's body, but was easily deflected by the iron armor, sparking slightly, yet this wasn't the end, he swiftly charged towards the demon wolf, flinging his binding coat towards it.

The black coat hung between them, blocking the demon wolf's sight, the hum quivered slightly, the demon wolf raised its hands, the blades on its arms slashed, shredding the coat into countless fragments in moments, but behind the fragments, there was no sign of Bologue.

Where was he?

A heavy blow struck from the waist, the folding knife pierced through the iron armor, Bologue could clearly feel the resistance from the hilt, after breaking through the outer layer of armor, all was smooth, just as he suspected, the demon wolf was merely an empty shell of iron armor, with nothing inside.

An unusual color flashed in its azure eyes, not lingering, Bologue released the folding knife and retreated sharply, leaving the lethal steel inside the demon wolf, while innumerable blades accompanied by claws struck down, leaving grotesque cracks in the spot Bologue had just occupied.

Chapter 15 -s: Value_2

A moment of hesitation, and Bologue would end up like those demons, hacked into bloody meat chunks.

The battle eased slightly. Bologue and the dire wolf exchanged glances. The dire wolf didn't rush to attack but glanced at the folding knife lodged in its side, wearing a thoughtful expression. Meanwhile, Bologue tightened his grip on the folding knife, eager to strike.

Without warning, Bologue stopped fleeing and charged towards the dire wolf, breaking free from the narrow corridor as the clanging of steel rang out once more in the main hall.

With every clash, blades shattered, and Bologue's body gained new wounds, yet under his bizarre self-healing abilities, blood flowed back, flesh reformed, maintaining an eerie equilibrium.

Despite being heavily injured, each time, Bologue avoided fatal blows and managed to gain enough time from the dire wolf to heal his body.

More importantly, demon corpses were scattered throughout the main hall, slain by the dire wolf. In Bologue's view, azure glows emerged from the corpses, flooding into his body, bringing an overwhelming sense of fulfillment and seemingly strengthening his power.

The wind howled past, as dense blades twisted into a pitch-black scythe, grazing above Bologue's head. He quickly ducked, driving the folding knife into the dire wolf's left shoulder, embedding it deep so that the sharp blade protruded from its back.

Bologue had no time for joy as another gust of wind arose and a deadly blade struck Bologue, sending him flying harshly into the wall, leaving a bloody mark. He crumbled to the ground, his arm twisted, the blow had shattered his bones.

The dire wolf didn't pursue; its body was covered with scars and dents left by the folding knife, several knives broke within it, and these internal fractures interfered with its movements.

It realized something, a low voice sounded.

"You knew how this would end from the start, didn't you?"

"Yes, 'Find me.' The objective of the test isn't to defeat you, but to find you, to find the body that should exist within this shell."

Bologue coughed blood, upon guessing it was a test, he understood that the dire wolf was merely an empty shell. Excluding the possibility of a ghost, someone must be manipulating it. As long as he finds that manipulator, Bologue wins.

"Do you know where I am?"

"All doors and windows in this building are sealed, except my room." Bologue smiled, "I guess you're leaning on my sofa, listening to my favorite record."

Noticeably, the dire wolf's shimmering light stalled for a few seconds, a low, suppressed laugh echoed.

"Why haven't you come to find me then? You've had many chances."

Bologue could easily avoid the dire wolf and seek his true self rather than endlessly tangling with this shell. For a long moment, Bologue was silent, then responded.

"Value."

"Value?"

"Yes, value."

Fractured bones began to align, strong muscles twisted the arm, reforming it. Bologue slowly stood up against the wall, azure light flashed in his eyes.

"The so-called test is essentially the process of assessing a person's value, isn't it? Determine if his value is high enough for you to willingly take a risk."

Bologue spoke to himself.

He was well aware of the fearsome identity of being a debtor. Many debtors were further tempted by devils to patch their souls, offering more souls and becoming complete puppets of the devil. Bologue suspected "those people" were worried about this aspect too; bringing a devil's pawn in always seemed a colossal problem.

Bologue still had much to accomplish. He couldn't be locked back in the black prison, and to step into the extraordinary world, he needed their approval.

He had nothing, and "those who wield extraordinary power" were not folks one could satisfy with mere empty words, so what he needed was action alone.

To prove his value through action and thus knock on the door to the unknown world.

"Slaying demons is the pass mark for this test. Under your hunt, figuring out the reason for everything and finding you counts as passing with full marks?" Bologue speculated, "But that's not enough."

"Not enough?"

The dire wolf repeated Bologue's words, not quite understanding his meaning.

Bologue just smiled. Yes, nothing needed to be said; what was needed now was action, and only action.

He leaped from the corner, incredibly fast, like a meteor, running with large strides, the blood-soaked ground slippery. Bologue skidded several times, his steps awkward, yet he resembled a hound ducking low for a rush.

Reaching out, he snatched up a demon's corpse along the way, hoisting it onto his shoulder like a shield.

His identity was a prisoner, a debtor yearning for freedom. Bologue had to demonstrate his value, ensuring they wouldn't hesitate. He needed to be so "valuable" that they couldn't refuse.

The dire wolf raised its hands, sharp blades sliding out from the grooves in its fingertips, the shrill buzzing persisted.

Using a tried-and-true tactic, just before closing in on the dire wolf, Bologue hurled the demon corpse forcefully at the dire wolf, attempting to conceal his actions with it.

The dire wolf hesitated for a second, though full of dominance and intimidation, after hearing Bologue's narrative, an inexplicable unease stirred within.

The familiar move played out before its eyes, yet such a trick clearly worked only once, by some stroke of luck, it stepped back.

Since the battle began, it was the first time it retreated.

Mysterious blue light pulsed like breathing, searching for Bologue's figure, the iron clang covering any footsteps. It could only rely on its sight to capture Bologue's trace.

It couldn't find him; it couldn't locate Bologue's silhouette. The next moment, the demon corpse flying in front of it exploded with a "boom".

The folding knife shredded the demon corpse, Bologue this time went straight in, amidst the scalding blood and scattered bones, a vicious face gleamed with joy, bright teal light shone in his eyes.

True and false, this time Bologue didn't launch an attack from the corner but faced head-on with a direct blade.

At this moment, the dire wolf understood Bologue's intention; this guy never aimed for just smoothly passing the test; he aimed to surpass it, showcasing absolute value, making them need Bologue.

This was an absurd interview; Bologue aimed to join a killer company, so what proves one's value better than slaying the interviewer?

Accompanied by hysterical laughter, the blade light pierced above.

Chapter 16 - 6 Resurrection

The folding knife, like a howling wave, strikes towards the evil wolf amidst the piercing drone.

Thousands of sharp blades rise, like blooming flowers, grazing the skin, penetrating the body, trying to hinder Bologue's advance, yet still unable to withstand this life-risking blow.

The sharp blade light descends upon the evil wolf's head, it blocks completely, but from its body comes a series of explosive sounds as if invisible chains suddenly bind it tightly, shackling all its limbs, leaving it helplessly watching the guillotine fall.

Thunderous explosions echo in the air, air currents swirl everywhere, blood mist surges, covering both in an instant, but soon the blood mist is blown away by the howling wind, with fine blood droplets pattering around.

Armor, sharp blades, body, ground, walls, ceiling, lights...

Everything in sight is draped in a crimson layer, momentarily seeming to wriggle as if infused with life, the world dragged into the stomach of some mighty creature.

Bologue falls, his face pale, limbs a bloodied mess, the whole person on the brink of shattering, as if dragged out of a meat grinder, fresh blood gushing out, he tries to get up but his body doesn't respond, Bologue's injuries are truly severe.

The most deadly wound comes from the neck, a slender cut slicing open Bologue's throat, accompanied by painful breaths, producing a night owl-like screech from the pitch-black wound.

The disturbing piercing drone gradually quiets down, the evil wolf stands its body up, slowly turning its head, for some reason, its movements are stiff, like a rusty gear-driven machine, with metal scraping sounds emanating from beneath its shell.

The gleam in the seams of the armor dims noticeably, seeming to extinguish in the next moment.

"Was this premeditated?"

the evil wolf asks.

It looks at its own hands, in Bologue's life-risking blow, instinctively Bologue should have been shredded before he swung the folding knife, but at that moment its arms lifting to the chest felt a hindrance, it was this hindrance that delayed the evil wolf for several seconds, failing to block the blow.

"To... demonstrate one's value,"

the evil wolf murmured, with broken blade heads staying within its armor, like long spikes piercing the body, influencing the armor's movement at critical moments, jamming arm joints, even the most agile body became slow.

This was the first time the evil wolf encountered such a thing, a hunter wounded instead by prey.

The evil wolf let out a low, hoarse laugh.

"I heard Geoffrey speak of you, he said you've been in the Black Prison long enough, suspected of some mental issues, narcissistic and paranoid, obsessed with so-called retributive justice... have you taken yourself as a Savior? Why?"

The evil wolf recalled information about Bologue, curiously asking.

"Why?"

Bologue's voice whimpers, as if hearing an amusing joke, the pale face gradually adopts an unrestrained smile.

"It's like sunrise and sunset, like birth, aging, sickness and death, like justice and evil... retributive justice isn't human iron law and principle?"

He laughs loudly.

"Does this kind of thing still need a 'why'?"

The evil wolf gives no reaction, it's just a cold shell, showing no visible emotional fluctuations, it seems in thought, or maybe just gazing at Bologue.

As for Bologue, after laughing at the evil wolf, he makes no more sound.

He is dead, his body lying within the pool of blood, unresponsive, his head looking towards the sky, pupils scattered.

It's said when a person dies, they review the scenes of their life, summarizing their lifetime.

Bologue cannot see life's scenes, all he sees is a terrifying and oppressive void.

It's an unbearable emptiness, wandering with silk-like azure rays, they span the vision, behind the deep gray void is endless desolation and massacre, with a deep, distant sound resonating, large chunks, like glacier mountains and rocks, colliding repeatedly, bursting with sporadic fragments, uninterrupted sharp angles like sharp fangs, biting each other, spreading to the end.

This is what Bologue sees "after death," each "death" he briefly enters this "afterlife world."

Then he's banished back to the human world again.

The evil wolf watches Bologue's corpse.

Its azure eyes reflect the blood-colored scene, the bright azure gradually dims, like scattering stars, disappearing into the abyss of the pupils.

The stars should fall into silence, but faint arcs of electricity flash, the stars brighten again, and with the ebb and flow the brilliance becomes more and more dazzling, they reunite to form a blazing sun.

The scattered pupils solidified once again.

The sound of trickling water arose, blood flowed back into the body, torn wounds began to adhere and heal, broken bones proliferated and reset, and the blurred flesh grew new granulation, interlocking to fill in the shaved-off flesh.

The rib cage raised once more, blood surged intensely in the vessels, rekindling the silent heartbeat like the pounding of war drums.

Bologue coughed painfully, spitting out the blood clots stuck in his throat, and like an unutterable phantom, slowly stood up, standing amidst the pool of blood.

"Phew, this 'Blessing' is quite useful, isn't it?"

Bologue touched his throat, the skin now intact, yet he still felt a faint chill.

The pain of having his throat slit was real, his death was real, yet Bologue eventually survived, standing up once more.

"The resurrected...Lazarus."

A voice filled with malice and eeriness echoed from beneath the Iron Armor; even though the documents had been enough to understand Bologue, witnessing this 'resurrection' invoked awe and fear in the Evil Wolf.

This was Bologue's 'Blessing,' a curse and blessing from the Devil.

"Does this mean I've passed the test? If so, I won't come upstairs to see you."

Even though he had just died once, Bologue acted as if nothing had happened, maintaining a nonchalant demeanor.

The Evil Wolf didn't respond, and Bologue reached out, grabbing toward him.

He grasped the folding knife that nearly split the wolf's head entirely.

The life-risking strike succeeded, as the folding knife bypassed countless obstacles of blades, like thunder splitting a mighty tree, accurately slashing the pitch-black steel, cutting the ferocious wolf's head in two.

Dim light sprayed out, like flowing blood, gushing from the split cracks, with the faint light beneath the armor steadily dimming as well.

Forcefully drawing out the folding knife, a sudden flicker of light followed by complete darkness, the phantom dwelling beneath the Iron Armor vanished, and the wolf's head shattered into halves, clanging to the ground, the empty shell of the armor trembling for a few seconds before collapsing entirely, as if it had died.

"Oh, by the way, remember to close the door when you leave."

Bologue gazed at the metallic carcass, hoping it could still hear him.

A thunderous rumble sounded as if the earth was shifting, the entire building slightly trembled, Bologue steadied himself, glancing around, seeing the walls enveloped with arrays resembling those of the Evil Wolf, rapidly dissipating.

The cement walls sealing the doors and windows retreated one by one, the physical space's structure modified and reset, the 'Cultivation Room' detached from the building, returning it to normality.

Bologue couldn't fathom this bizarre phenomenon, but he believed he would soon understand it all.

Picking up the shattered wolf's head helmet, as if it were a trophy, he walked towards the main entrance.

With no sense of hindrance, the door opened effortlessly, the night wind brushing over, slightly quelling the heat on Bologue's body.

He stood on the steps, endless blood flowing past his feet, like a red carpet for a protagonist's debut, converging into a small stream, cascading down the steps, towards those who'd been waiting in front of the building for a long time.

Bologue saw Geoffrey, waving his hand, flashing him a smile, then tossed the wolf's head helmet at his feet.

The helmet rolled over, emitting clanging sounds along the way, and upon seeing the appearance of that wolf's head helmet, everyone stepped back slightly, their gazes filled with caution.

They recognized this helmet.

Swallowing nervously, the invisible pressure weighed on everyone present, plunging the atmosphere into eerie silence.

They gazed at the figure emerging from the door, Bologue bathed in warm blood, emitting wisps of white mist, like red-hot iron meeting cold water.

For a moment, they found it difficult to distinguish Bologue's existence; human? Or Demon?

They were unsure until a relaxed voice broke the dead silence.

"Phew...is this considered a welcome party?"

Bologue brushed the fallen bangs to the back of his head, wiped the dirtied blood from his face, and gazed at Geoffrey.

"Where do I pick up my badge?"

Chapter 17 - 7 New Life

In the sweltering, intense song, the man slowly opened his eyes, the deep blue gleam in them flickering out. As the wolf was beheaded by Bologue, the connection between the man and the wolf severed.

He rubbed his temples hard, blue veins emerged densely across his stern face as he took deep breaths, suppressing the disturbance in his chest and heart.

Bologue's decisive stroke not only severed the steel but also impacted his consciousness; the man wasn't that fragile, yet he felt his head splitting.

"Bologue Lazarus."

He muttered the name, after a brief silence, a slight smile crept upon his face. He reached out to move the stylus off the spinning record, finally putting an end to the disturbing song.

As Bologue had speculated, the man was indeed in his room, surrounded by various files.

"He's thrown everything into disarray; we should have been here for his final interview."

The woman's voice emerged from Bologue's bedroom as she walked out, occasionally glancing back at the photo-covered wall inside the bedroom.

"Are you just going to let him pass, Lebius?"

"Hmm... that's what I think, at least for now."

Lebius looked at the sandbox in front of him, stretching out his hand, moving the flags stuck in it.

"To entrust extraordinary powers to a debtor with an undying body... If he loses control, it would be devastating for us."

The woman appeared hesitant; although they had recruited debtors before, few had a 'blessing' as powerful as Bologue. Just thinking about Bologue's undying body and his cunning, enigmatic powers filled her with unspeakable dread.

"Sometimes, I feel Yas is right, dealing with debtors is akin to gambling with the devil," the woman said.

"The devil... gambling, you say?"

Lebius tasted the words, a chill in his voice.

"But he indeed is a very useful sharp sword, Yuriel," Lebius stated calmly, "even if he is a deadly double-edged sword."

"Have you... made up your mind?"

Yuriel sighed, knowing she couldn't change Lebius's mind but wanting to give it a try.

"You know, Nesanel, why was I entrusted with forming the Special Operations Group?"

Instead of replying to Yuriel, Lebius talked about something else.

"Because I'm different from you; apart from safety, contracts, or rules, I care more about outcomes. As long as I achieve my goals, whether my employees are humans, debtors, or creatures not even classified as either, it doesn't matter to me."

Lebius planted the flag down; the soldiers on the sandbox began their assault, attacking the high grounds of the city-state.

"Just like war, whether through overwhelming military force, cunning strategy, or elite decapitation strikes, our ultimate goal is to win, right? If we can attain that 'beautiful' outcome, does the process really matter?"

No, it doesn't matter at all; the Order Bureau needs results, and my Special Operations Group exists for that purpose."

Yuriel remained silent, keenly perceiving the cold atmosphere spreading from Lebius.

"Bologue Lazarus is a decent employee; compared to the known 'undead,' he is still young, not that numb, with intense and burning 'desires' within, for which you've seen his ruthless means."

Lebius spoke with a hint of deeper meaning.

"Having 'desire' is a good thing."

Picking up the files beside him, he handed them to Yuriel, Lebius grabbed the cane next to the sofa, struggling to stand, while Yuriel stood beside without any intent to help.

Lebius arose from the darkness, the faint light casting upon him, carving his slender figure into a fragile silhouette on the wall.

He seemed frail, yet his eyes concealed sharp swords, so piercing that one dared not meet them.

"Aren't you afraid of losing everything in this gamble?" Yuriel asked.

"I have nothing to lose."

Lebius answered without emotion.

Given that, Yuriel had nothing more to say, picked up a key, inserted it into the door beside, once opened, the world beyond was no longer the familiar corridor but a murky darkness.

Lebius dragged his disabled right leg, leaning on the cane, as he and Yuriel stepped into the darkness.

...

With the door open, the fishy stench of blood wafted over Geoffrey and Yas, mixed with the lingering stench of demons.

Inside the door, the chamber had been entirely doused in blood, countless corpses scattered across the floor, nearly none unbroken, as if a twisted killer had just enjoyed a delightfully gruesome time here.

Some demons still clung to life, but they no longer had their demonic visage, lying on the ground like pitiable victims, wailing in agony.

The crowd outside the building were awestruck, some legs began to tremble, while others, weak in resilience, dry-heaved, bending over to spill their dinner and stomach acid from their mouths.

As 'professionals,' they were not unfamiliar with demons, even demon corpses, but rarely did they encounter scenes like this, akin to a slaughterhouse.

Chapter 18 - 7 New Life_2

This change was too abrupt.

For them, it was just a leisurely and enjoyable test. Some people were joking with each other about how they would clean out the Demons in the building after the time was up, and rescue that unlucky guy. Some even said that the unlucky guy might already be dead, after all, it was one of Lebius's malicious jokes...

No one had expected that the unlucky guy didn't wait for their rescue, but instead fought his way out alone.

What surprised them even more was the helmet thrown out by Bologue, the shattered wolf's head.

"This is... Lebius's 'Blade-Biting Wolf'."

Someone recognized the wolf's head, their voice slightly trembling.

Most people knew who Lebius was, and they were well aware of the terror of the 'Blade-Biting Wolf'. But now, this symbol of fear and death was shattered, and the broken helmet lay before them, still stained with blood.

Did Lebius lose?

An unbelievable thought arose in their minds.

"Three hundred Weng coins, you said it, Yas."

Geoffrey was the first to react, whispering to Yas and then stepping forward to greet Bologue.

Yas was a bit stunned. After a while, he pulled himself together and shouted to the others.

"'Ferryman,' clean up the site!"

Is cleanup necessary?

The guys known as "Ferryman" looked bewildered. There were hardly any threatening Demons left in the building. From their point of view, it was Bologue they should be cautious of, since he was the one who threw out the broken helmet.

But under Yas's fierce gaze, they had no choice but to move, brushing past the blood-soaked Bologue and entering the blood-stained building.

It was like walking into a monster's lair. Its eating habits were extremely messy, with food strewn all over the place. Thick blood hung on the walls, and the evening breeze blew, creating sounds like a monster's breathing.

There were no living creatures left.

After a brief inspection, they reached this conclusion.

The Demons that were barely breathing died soon after. They bore many fatal wounds, rendering them powerless. They could only fall to the ground, waiting for the moment their blood would run dry...

In the center of the pile of flesh and debris, they saw the fallen Iron Armor, looking exactly like the 'Blade-Biting Wolf' in their memories. However, most of its blades were bent and twisted, some even had gaps, and its armor had puncture wounds. Inside, sharp blades clogged the space as if carefully calculated, crossing in a way that perfectly restricted the armor's movement, turning it into a deadly cage.

Yas stood outside the door, watching everything with a somber expression. His gaze nervously flickered to Bologue, who was sitting by the steps.

If someone like him were to become a Condenser...

Yas shook his head vigorously. He didn't dare to continue the thought.

"How do you feel, Bologue!"

Geoffrey busied himself around Bologue. From somewhere, he had procured a towel, and like a coach during a boxing match's break, he wiped Bologue's blood.

"Feel? Fantastic! And then... I think I might have overeaten."

Bologue was exhausted, but when talking about this, he couldn't help but laugh with joy.

The feeling of defeating a formidable foe was indeed thrilling, with an exhilarating sense of accomplishment. The "Soul Shards" of the Demons killed by the 'Blade-Biting Wolf' surged into Bologue's body after death, and the overwhelming satisfaction was nearly bursting him.

Looking at his body, streaks of azure light flickered between his veins. Geoffrey made no comment, as expected; the light was only visible to Bologue himself.

"Overeat...?"

Geoffrey's expression twitched slightly. Evidently, he interpreted it as a different kind of overeating, glancing at Bologue's mouth. He couldn't distinguish whether it was Bologue's own blood or the blood of some unlucky Demon.

As expected, it turned out this way.

"I really suggest you see a doctor, Bologue."

Geoffrey strongly suggested, his expression complex. There was both joy for Bologue passing the test and wariness towards a possible mentally unstable person.

"You're really quite the lunatic."

Geoffrey sighed, glancing at the blood flowing over the steps, then at the shattered helmet, thinking about what the helmet symbolized, feeling a chill on his neck.

"Logically, when trapped in despair, shouldn't you be searching for survival? And yet you thought of taking it down... and you really did take it down!"

Geoffrey was somewhat incoherent. He understood that Lebius had indeed gone easy, after all, Lebius had long reached the Third Stage, wielding the Golden Scepter, and wore a bright Red Robe, becoming the "Negative Bishop".

But... even so, the result that Bologue brought about was still incredibly shocking.

"Killing it, isn't that also a way to escape despair?" Bologue replied with his reasoning. "I won't die. I am the undying Lazarus, who experiences Resurrection!"

Bologue smiled, but this smile, coupled with his injuries, really didn't bring joy. Instead, it emitted a chilling and eerie feeling.

The deadly wounds caused by the 'Blade-Biting Wolf' were healed during the "Resurrection", yet there were still many small wounds on Bologue that were healing slowly.

"How long do you need to recover?" Geoffrey asked.

"A few hours? I'm not sure. I 'died' once in there."

Chapter 19 - 7 New Life_3

Bologue raised his hand, his fingers brushed across his throat, and he spoke softly, "Slit my throat, nearly decapitated me, that feeling was terrible."

"Just hearing about it sounds awful. Unfortunately, I don't have an undying body, so I can't quite relate to your troubles."

Geoffrey was utterly amazed. He knew the truth behind Bologue's "blessing," yet every time he witnessed Bologue's resurrection, he still found it unbelievable.

Blood reversed its flow, wounds healed, and even broken bones repositioned themselves one by one. You could see those faint scars on his body, but soon those scars disappeared at a speed visible to the naked eye, leaving only skin stained with dirty blood.

Just how dearly did that demon favor Bologue to bestow him with such power?

"I need some rest... Did I pass the assessment?"

Bologue pushed Geoffrey away. He slowly leaned backward, trying to lie down, while Geoffrey crouched beside him and said.

"You passed, surpassed expectations. Not only that, but you also gave Lebius a beating!" Geoffrey reminisced on the person that name represented and continued, "I've always kinda disliked that guy."

"Who is that?"

"Your future 'boss,'" Geoffrey chuckled, "How does it feel to give your future boss a thrashing during an interview?"

Bologue's expression momentarily froze. He never expected his future boss would personally assess him. He shook his head and countered.

"And what about you? Where will you go?"

Geoffrey pondered how to explain it to Bologue.

"Our organization is divided into many departments, like fieldwork, logistics, and personnel, among others."

"I guess you are in the personnel department, right? Choosing unfortunate debtors from the Black Prison," Bologue asked.

"More or less, but not entirely."

Geoffrey gave Bologue a thumbs up, praising him, "You're so impressive; they must give you quite a commission."

Bologue had no energy left to banter with Geoffrey. He raised his head, gazing into the pitch-black night.

The sky over Opus was always gloomy and gray, devoid of sunlight, and starless. The night was pure darkness, with scarce sightings of the moonlight.

He coughed painfully a few times, his chest heaving violently, as deferred pain surged up his nerves.

Bologue possessed an undying body, but the "blessing" was not without its price. The undying body also came with its burdens.

Back in the Black Prison, "those people" conducted precise tests on him for better containment.

The specifics of those tests... Bologue was somewhat reluctant to recall them, though he was grateful for those awful tests, as they provided him with a clear understanding of his undying body.

His manner of undying was somewhat complex. In a normal state, it was like time reversal, with spilled blood returning to the body and fractured bones reconnecting.

In special circumstances, if, for instance, an arm was severed and the limb locked in an iron box, it wouldn't forcefully break out and reattach itself; instead, a new arm would regenerate from the stump, while the original severed limb would turn into ash-gray powder, like dust, after a short while.

Or if his body shattered into countless meat fragments, it would regenerate and revive from the largest piece as the origin.

Because of this complex undying mechanism, "those people" found it difficult to categorize Bologue's undying process, but they understood it operated with the least energy consumption.

Every resurrection left Bologue feeling exhausted. With each subsequent death in a short period, his resurrection time would progressively lengthen, increasing his fatigue.

From the current tests, it appeared that after dying five or six times, Bologue would faint from exhaustion, and according to "those people's" calculations, if Bologue were continuously killed within a short span, it was estimated that after about a hundred deaths, his resurrection time could extend to several days or even months.

Therefore, Bologue's undying body seemed to have a certain limit. If he died excessively in a short period, he would become incapacitated.

What utterly dreadful memories.

Luckily, this time, the "Soul Shards" helped. These shards acted like a panacea, aiding the process of "resurrection," and the more shards there were, the less burden Bologue had, and the quicker the healing.

Sometimes he wondered if there were enough demons, perhaps Bologue could become a "Perpetual Motion Machine," able to "resurrect" over and over, as long as he continued to kill demons.

"Now then, can you finally tell me who you people are?"

Bologue tilted his head, looking at Geoffrey.

"Rhine Alliance Order and Security Bureau."

Geoffrey calmly uttered this strange term. Even though it was the moment of the revelation of the riddle, both of them reacted quite composedly, as if the story naturally progressed and unfolded undisturbed.

He reached out and shook Bologue's hand, stained with dirty blood.

"Shortened to 'Order Bureau,' as the name suggests, it's under the Rhine Alliance, an organization maintaining extraordinary order and human safety."

"Order Bureau..."

Bologue murmured the words, slowly sitting up. After a short rest, he felt considerably better, just a bit weary, yearning for a place to sleep peacefully.

"According to Lebius's requirements, you'll be assigned to his action group, though his team was only recently approved, and the facilities for their activity room and staff dormitory haven't yet been determined..."

Oh, and tell me your measurements so they can make your uniform. You'll need to fill out your own forms for matters like benefits, and I'm unsure about your salary. The pay scale varies across different departments..."

Geoffrey droned on like a nagging old lady, endlessly chattering in Bologue's ear. In terms of "personnel," he was indeed quite professional, akin to a nanny, continually looking after him.

Unfortunately, Bologue hadn't listened to any of his words, merely sitting there dazed, staring at the sky.

Amidst the bustling crowd and with the reason for his successful employment, these people carried on without concealment. A group of people in black emerged from the night, cleaning the bloody building, and heaps of corpses were being transported out. A few people guarded nearby, akin to security, yet none of them carried any guns.

What did they use to fight then?

The intricate patterns and the term Geoffrey once let slip came to mind.

Alchemy Matrix.

Then Bologue saw Yas, commanding the scene. Upon noticing Bologue's gaze, Yas swept his eyes over with hostility.

"That's Yas, Yas Cyril. Don't be mad, that's just how he is," Geoffrey noticed the exchange of looks and explained to Bologue, "He doesn't hate you; he just abhors your connection with the Devil."

"He has always been against hiring debtors... Fortunately, his words don't count," Geoffrey joked.

Bologue didn't mind Yas, he just murmured to himself.

"Free at last."

Bologue was free, even if just temporarily.

After a prolonged imprisonment, Bologue finally returned to this world. With no "Black Prison" hanging over his head anymore, whatever he wanted to do now had the opportunity to be carried out.

Thinking of this, Bologue displayed a morbidly satisfied smile.

"In any case..."

Geoffrey pulled Bologue up and addressed him with an extremely formal attitude.

"Congratulations, Bologue Lazarus, a new life begins."

Chapter 20 - 8: The Demon That Hunts Demons

The faint light seeped through the curtains, falling on Bologue's face as he opened his eyes to start a new day.

Getting up, he thought he would space out as usual, but this time Bologue's consciousness cleared much faster. Not only that, he felt much "healthier".

The feeling was quite vague, but Bologue attributed it to the "satiety" from the assessment. Having killed so many demons, he felt his soul had never been so full, and this fullness not only filled the void but also reflected on his body.

A soul determines the body; a strong soul leads to a strong body, and a decaying soul distorts the body into a demon.

If it were like a game in his past life, Bologue felt his experience points would have surely increased significantly. But unfortunately, he could only rely on vague feelings to understand these things, unable to intuitively see the extent of his soul's fragmentation.

But this was not a problem. Bologue guessed the Order Bureau would solve this for him, and he began to look forward to the day he could intuitively observe his void.

"New life indeed."

Bologue sighed. After successfully passing the assessment, he felt a sense of relief, as if a heavy stone in his heart had finally dropped. He could finally continue planning for future matters without languishing in the Black Prison.

"Soul..."

Gazing at the ceiling, Bologue's thoughts wandered.

Geoffrey resembled a teacher; during the one-year internship, he taught Bologue a lot. In his words, these were the most basic "professional ethics," and it seemed from that time, he believed Bologue could join the Order Bureau.

All things in the world possess souls, whether steel, stones, cats, dogs, or humans. They all have souls, but due to the differences in wisdom and will, souls are somewhat differentiated.

For Devils, souls are items of "value," the only remedy for a Demon's hunger, the most precious alchemy materials for Alchemists.

Things like steel and stones, these "dead objects," have souls without will, "Cold Iron souls." Their souls will not "fade away" on their own and can be easily seized, confined, and utilized, which is reflected clearly in alchemy.

Living creatures like animals and plants have souls with a certain degree of wisdom and will, "Mang Silver souls." Thus, after their death, the soul will slowly "fade away." However, their wisdom and will are too insignificant and can be completely bound through "Condensation."

The human soul is the most precious, possessing complete wisdom and free will, the "Golden soul." After the shell's death, the human soul cannot be bound. Even if devoured by Demons, it can only temporarily linger in the void, easing the hunger.

Using "Condensation" to bind the "Golden soul" and transform the void into an entity is merely futile. The manifested "Golden soul" will slowly evaporate until it completely "fades away."

The human soul is the most precious and unbindable. Even using "Condensation" to forcibly "retain" the soul only delays its "fading away."

Except for one method.

The Devil's Blood Contract.

Through dealings with a Devil, writing one's name in the contract, offering one's soul, from that moment, the human soul will be fully bound, completely belonging to the Devil, unable to "fade away," eternally a part of the Devil's property.

The Devil's form shifts endlessly, and no one knows what shape it will take when it approaches you. It could be a bird, a letter, or even a phone call... Those drained of all their "Golden soul" in the deal transform into hungry demons.

Nowadays, Bologue has faced numerous demons. They were once satiated by Devils, fulfilling their "desires," but soon fell into another, deeper madness.

The most perplexing is the Devil's judgment of "value." To humans, everyone's souls are the extremely precious "Golden souls," yet to the Devil, souls seem to be differentiated "in value."

The most obvious reflection of this is Bologue, as a debtor, and those demons he slew.

To the Devil, Bologue's soul is of extraordinary value; even a part of it granted him a "Blessing," while most demons offered their entire souls and became monsters.

No one knows the criteria these Devils use to assess "value," just as no one knows what purposes these mysterious beings truly hold.

He sighed deeply.

So, a part of Bologue's soul now permanently belongs to the Devil.

Whenever he thought of this, Bologue felt a headache, wondering how he could redeem his soul.

But... it seems redemption might not be necessary.

Besides all this, the soul has another characteristic, which is the fragments.

In the birth and fading of a soul, or being seized and devoured, during the transfer of carrier or change of form, "loss" is inevitable, and these lost parts are termed "fragments."

Fragments are of the soul, yet not the soul.

Geoffrey could not explain this either. Currently, no scholar has effectively observed the existence of fragments; it's all deductions and theories.

Demons feast on others' souls, experiencing "loss," which neither fades nor transfers, but accumulates within the Demon, fully releasing upon its death.

Fragments do not behave like the "Golden soul," unable to be bound, inevitably "fading away." They can be absorbed and devoured by Bologue, significantly repressing the restlessness of the void, preventing the onset of Bulimia Nervosa.

This forms a somewhat interesting food chain: Demons devour human souls, and Bologue kills demons to seize fragments from their remains.

In this light, Bologue seems more like a Demon.

"A Demon that hunts Demons."

Bologue muttered to himself; he liked this notion. In his future work, he would have ample opportunities to collect fragments to complete his soul.

"I want to gaze at the sun and watch it be erased~"

Walking out of the bedroom, Bologue was humming a tune; it had been a long time since he felt this happy.

Brushing his teeth, washing his face, the familiar face in the mirror, with skin a bit unhealthily pale.

The Black Prison is a sunless place; having not seen sunlight for too long, when Bologue was released, he looked like a cold corpse. He had planned to lie in the sun for a while to make himself look healthier, but in this ghostly place of Opus, there was no sunlight at all.

Looking up, there were only heavy and oppressive, leaden-gray clouds. Sometimes these burdensome cumulus clouds would even stretch to the ground, and the entire city enveloped in toxic smog, making gas masks very popular in Opus, a necessity everyone owned.

Bologue, relying on his Undying Body, once went out without a gas mask during the "gray tide smog," walking alone into the fog that swallowed the city.

That was an utterly awful memory, feeling like swallowing shattered glass. Though not deadly, the pain was relentless, repeatedly strangling your respiratory tract, even your lungs.

Since then, Bologue earnestly prepared some gas masks at home and bought a drawer full of filter canisters, as these items were essentials in Opus.

Oubos, a dreadful city, yet countless outsiders still come here.

After tidying up, Bologue came into the corridor, which was still familiar, dust everywhere, with advertisements plastered on the yellowed walls, and garbage piled in the corners.

Sounds of commotion came from all sides, the noise of a TV next door, a couple arguing, and unrestrained laughter.

Nothing different, as always.

But Bologue's mindset had changed somewhat; he was a free man now, like an imprisoned slave breaking his own shackles. It felt wonderful.

Walking out the door, the building was as usual, no signs of slaughter, no remains of Demons. Bologue had carefully checked; there was not even a shred of meat.

It was as if that night's madness was merely a void nightmare.

But Bologue was sure it was real.

How did they do it?

Silently deploying so many Demons and then perfectly covering all traces.

Asking his neighbors, they appeared to know nothing, as if that night the entire building had, with the cement walls sealed, fallen into a long slumber.

The world was far more complicated than he had anticipated, but fortunately, Bologue now stood at the gate of the New World, just waiting to push hard to open it.

"Bologue!"

A sudden shout jolted Bologue from his thoughts; Geoffrey was at the end of the corridor, walking quickly over. After three days, Geoffrey finally reached out to him.

"Are you here to take me through the entry procedures?"

Bologue asked directly, harboring a hint of excitement he could barely contain.

"More or less, and to introduce you to some of the basic structures of our Order Bureau."

As Geoffrey spoke, he fished out a key chain from his waist, carefully sifting through it, picking out a rusty brass key, on which faint texts were engraved, but they were too minute for Bologue to discern what they said.

"Let's go."

He indicated to Bologue, standing in front of Bologue's house door.

"The place where you live is too far. Reaching the headquarters from here takes at least two hours. Time is tight, plus my application has been approved; it's just the time to show you around."

Geoffrey spoke mysteriously to Bologue.

Bologue didn't understand how Geoffrey's statements were connected, but recalling the strange feelings during the assessment, he let it go.

The "Order Bureau" was far more mysterious and complex than he had imagined. These guys not only dealt with Devils but also hunted Demons, wielding Extraordinary Powers that Bologue wasn't yet aware of.

"What are you doing?"

He watched as Geoffrey closed the door, then picked up the rusty brass key and attempted to open the iron door with it.

"Your key won't work on my door..."

Bologue's words trailed off as he fixated on the key.

Delicate, ghostly blue arcs appeared on the key, which perfectly slid into the lock core, and once inserted, the ghostly blue arcs quickly spread over the lock core and the entire door, swiftly sweeping across the metal surface before disappearing.

Bologue could feel it—something was flowing, something invisible, intangible, yet certainly present, surging, pouring into the key.

Geoffrey twisted his wrist slightly, the key turned, and a crisp mechanical spring sound resonated from within the lock core.

The door opened.