

Endless 168

Chapter 168: Stay True to Yourself

"Do you know? David told me, in the world after death, there is no Celestial Kingdom, nor is there Hell."

"Where do people go after they die?"

"Nowhere, they just stay where they are, then fall into eternal dreams."

I remember it was a stormy afternoon, rain pouring down repetitively washing the glass, from inside it felt like the whole world was being dragged into the ocean.

Kedening liked such afternoons, the colder it was outside the window, the more it highlighted the warmth inside, making one cherish everything they currently have.

Jini and he nestled on the sofa, the house eerily quiet, the two whispering to each other.

"What's within the dreams?" Kedening asked.

"What we want the most, what we desire the most, we will fall into eternal satisfaction and peace within them," Jini murmured.

"David also said, if this dream really existed, his dream would be to nestle in a big house, watching the green grass blown down by the wind outside the window."

"Sounds like what David wants," Kedening whispered, "what is most desired..."

He looked down at Jini in his arms.

"In that case," Kedening said, "then for us, it's like a dream now."

"Yeah, I really wish it were like that..."

Jini responded, holding Kedening tightly.

...

"Ha...ha..."

The illusory images shattered, Kedening gasping for breath, waking up from the dreamlike state, cold sweat rolling down his forehead, a sharp pain following.

He tried hard to grit his teeth and hold on, stabilizing his swaying figure, blood continuously oozing from the bullet holes, taking his body heat and life with it.

"This is so bad..."

Kedening whispered, he had never imagined Bologue could perceive all this in such a short time and set a trap to attack him.

He was not an Undying Body; he couldn't ignore his injuries like Bologue. The fortunate in the misfortune was that the bullet had hit him from the side, with major organs unharmed, allowing Kedening to still have the power to fight.

"By the way."

Bologue rubbed his head vigorously, trying hard to dispel the muddled feeling, the green eyes cleared up, he flicked out a folding knife, the sharp blade reflecting Kedening's figure.

"This is a personal vendetta, so I don't need a prisoner."

Bologue slowly bent down, assuming a starting stance, his feet firmly planted, accumulating strength, one hand touching the ground to support his body while ready to summon at any time, the other hand holding the folding knife backwards, the cold blade hidden behind him.

Ether erupted.

In the moment of radiant brilliance, a green trace flashed on the ground.

From this brief encounter, Kedening roughly figured out the signs of Bologue's Secret Energy initiation, the green light trace covering the material he intended to summon, before the distortion of reality would activate, meaning there was a time lapse from Bologue unleashing Secret Energy to it taking effect, even though the time was extremely brief.

When the green light trace appeared, Kedening had to evade, but he didn't know how Bologue would distort reality, would it cause dense long halberds to grow from the ground? Or raise walls?

Different choices would trigger different situations, and the initiative was in Bologue's hands. He could only respond wearily, not to mention he was already injured, the sharp pain interfering with Kedening's judgment.

"Faint!"

Kedening shouted, raising his pistol and firing, while casting Secret Energy on Bologue.

Secret Energy·Wandering.

As Bologue had guessed, this was the Secret Energy of the "Void Spirit School," with the effect of influencing the senses, causing directional confusion, twisting an enemy's movements and intentions completely.

A swing of a sword upward might turn into a swing downward, a dodge backward might become a reckless advance; in complete sensory disruption, as Bologue had just experienced, even the most basic standing became impossible.

The muddled feeling struck the brain, Bologue's movements stiffened, but by then the summoning was finished, a wall rose from the ground, isolating Bologue from Kedening.

In that moment of isolation, Bologue clearly sensed, the muddled feeling in his mind rapidly dissipated until his body returned under the control of consciousness.

"It was indeed sight..."

Bologue murmured, moving to the other side, while continuous walls followed him, blocking his figure.

This wasn't Bologue's first time facing a Condenser from the "Void Spirit School," Eugene, whom he had killed, was one of them.

As an expert, after hunting down Eugene, Bologue carefully recalled the experience of his battle and summarized it in a manual.

This was a common practice within the Order Bureau, where field staff consolidated their combat experiences and shared them with one another.

While Secret Energy was diversified by schools, the diversification also limited the Secret Energy itself, such as the "Commanding School" relying on real-world substances, the "Illusion Creation School" requiring a large amount of Ether, so after promotion, Condensers develop sub-schools to complicate the Secret Energy and reduce limitations.

Interestingly, these limitations are also the best characteristics to distinguish Secret Energy schools, for example, the "Void Spirit School."

This was a set of rules Bologue explored himself, unsure if anyone had mentioned it before, the "Void Spirit School" is a fascinating school; it primarily acts on the mind, and therefore hardly affects reality.

Applying the Secret Energy of the "Void Spirit School" to Bologue's "firearm theory" while hunting Eugene revealed an important point.

Secret Energy requires a target to be activated.

Bologue recalled the conversation he had with Geoffrey back then.

"What if my Secret Energy made anyone who looked me in the eye unable to move?"

Why is it the gaze again?

Yes, indeed. The gaze is a very convenient medium, much like the "Void Spirit School" itself—intangible, invisible, and deceitfully sinister. A mere eye contact can expose one to a barrage of Secret Energy.

Bologue deduced that for the 'Void Spirit School', the gaze is very important. After all, this kind of Secret Energy targets the mind and spirit, abstract concepts which are difficult to define, so they need the gaze to pinpoint a specific target to attack.

"If you encounter a Condenser from the 'Void Spirit School', try avoiding his gaze."

Bologue wrote this advice in his own handbook, but it was just a theoretical suggestion on paper, one that Bologue never expected he would have to practice so soon.

If he ever got the chance to publish it, Bologue pondered on naming it "An Expert's Self-Cultivation and Appreciation of Rock Music".

The title sounded odd, but Bologue really liked it.

"Rule one! Stay true to yourself!"

In the midst of cheers, wall after wall rose up, fully obscuring Bologue's silhouette, just as he declared, stay true to oneself, with expert style!

In an instant, the pressure on Kedening intensified. He couldn't see Bologue at all, let alone unleash his Secret Energy on him.

Secret Energy needs a target to release. Bologue's target was the ground beneath his feet, easily reachable with a touch. Kedening's target was Bologue, but without being able to observe him, the Secret Energy was like an arrow without a target, impossible to release.

Kedening had thought before that if he could ascend to become a Prayer Believer and develop his subordinate school, he would walk the path of "Illusion Creation", using widespread mist as a medium to affect everyone who came into contact with it, casting Secret Energy·Wandering on them.

Unfortunately, he wasn't; at present, he was just a First Stage Condenser, helpless in such a situation.

The "Bright Light Blade" in his hand consumed too much Ether; he couldn't use it frequently. Firearms were ineffective against Bologue, not to mention that his own injuries were still affecting him.

As for Bologue, this damned Undead didn't care about injuries at all, and he himself was a Condenser with a "Narrow and Sharp" leaning from the "Commanding School". His Ether consumption was minimal, not to mention he also had Soul Shards for backup energy.

In Bologue's script, killing Kedening was just a matter of time.

Perhaps... he really was going to die here.

This thought flashed across Kedening's mind as despair spread in his heart.

A sudden whistling sound in the air arose as Bologue darted around, casting Stone Spears one after another as he moved swiftly. To sight Kedening and activate Secret Energy required time, and before Kedening could even react, Bologue's silhouette would already be gone.

Even Bologue didn't think the Stone Spears would kill Kedening. His mastery over Ethereal Amplification was more refined than his own, so that swift speed allowed him to easily dodge the Stone Spears.

Before coming to kill Kedening, Bologue was worried Kedening might escape. After all, if a determined Condenser were to flee with all his might, it would be a real headache for Bologue. But the moment he saw Jini, he realized Kedening had nowhere to run.

"What a pitiful tragedy."

Bologue said, yet his actions showed no mercy.

The raised walls collapsed one after another, raising dust, engulfing the entire platform in swirling clouds. In the dust, Kedening searched for Bologue's figure, ready to strike a serious blow at any moment, but no matter which direction he looked, he couldn't see the figure enveloped in light.

Damn it.

Kedening realized something was wrong. Bologue had dispelled his Secret Energy, the Initial Activation Phenomenon on him had vanished. But Kedening hadn't; his own Alchemy Matrix was still burning, emitting a brilliant glow, his silhouette completely unshielded amidst the heavy dust.

A sharp blade pierced through the dust, the screeching killing intent stabbing every nerve.

Tightly gripping the Bright Light Blade, scorching Ether wrapped around the Short Sword, transforming it into a razor-sharp Ethereal Sword. Kedening turned and cut, easily severing the incoming folding knife, but then another flash of light engulfed him.

Secret Energy·Summoning Hand.

Azure trajectories grew like a spider web's veins, covering the folding knife. Although its blade had been severed, the handle gripped tightly by Bologue twisted into a sharp Fist Blade under the drive of Secret Energy, hammering towards Kedening's chest.

Their eyes met briefly as Bologue threw a heavy punch, even imbued with Ethereal Amplification. If Kedening's flesh and blood body were to be hit, he would surely be doomed.

Kedening's pupils seemed to ignite, driving Secret Energy with overwhelming Ether, attempting to disrupt Bologue's movements at this life-and-death moment.

Their figures almost overlapped, then were completely scattered by the explosion of Ether.

Bologue's punch shattered the ground, the force so great that his own muscles got strained as a result, tearing his yet-to-heal wound open again, blood spilling out.

Kedening fell back heavily, collapsing to the ground, gasping in pain. He was still alive; at the last moment, he managed to impact Bologue, but they were too close—so close that even with the impact on Bologue, his abdomen was still grazed by the Fist Blade, large smears of fresh blood staining his clothes red.

"This time I'm really going to die..."

Kedening gazed at the sky. Bologue had shattered the canopy, and the pitch-black rainy night entered his view, the falling rain washing away the dirty blood on him.

He had imagined such a moment countless times. Facing death, Kedening's mind held a rare peace.

Ending like this wasn't all that bad.

Turning his head wearily, he saw a woman asleep on the bench, his eyes momentarily lost focus, then became determined again.

Kedening clumsily got up, bracing his hands against the ground, supporting his body, enduring the sharp pangs of pain.

"I... I can't die yet."

The rainwater and blood mixed beneath him, forming a dark mirror, reflecting Kedening's face. Staring at his own likeness in the water, flames roared in his eyes.

"I can't die yet."

He said.

Another twisted, hateful silhouette surfaced below the water—Bart, smiling as he looked at Kedening.

"Yes, you can't die yet, Kedening Caesar."

When Kedening stood up once more, he no longer felt any pain.