

Endless 201

Chapter 201: Pillar of Royal Authority

The crimson figure stood in the wind, draped in heavy iron armor. The silver-white armor was inlaid with gold-threaded patterns, and red mane extended backward from the helmet like long hair, draping over the back. When a breeze blew past, they swayed, like floating fireworks.

Upon seeing the man's arrival, the servant on the side saluted, speaking with reverence.

"Lord Glyain."

"Glyain? It's been a long time since anyone called me that," the man said, his eyes revealing a troubled expression. Then he said, "Call me the Sixth Seat... or the Red Dog. I prefer this name over Glyain."

The servant gazed at the man's bright, blazing form, thinking that perhaps Red Lion was more fitting for the man than Red Dog.

"His Majesty awaits you."

The servant bowed and cleared the path, and the iron-armored soldiers guarding the area lifted their crossed long halberds. Under the massive archway, the gray-white stone steps layered upward.

Red Dog raised his head, his gaze passing through the archway to see the lone mountain in the Royal City and the grotesque halls that wildly grew atop it.

Thick stone pillars were carved from the steep cliffs, climbing the mountain like snakes entwining trees, filling the mountain with continuous architecture.

The entire mountain top was leveled, and the labyrinthine palace sat there, connected with the architecture sprawling on the mountain cliff. Then, towering spires rose as if to pierce the cloud sea.

Countless griffon statues were placed atop the spires, as if they came from the cloud sea. Wild winds swept between the towering spires, echoing like fierce thunder, as if the griffons came to life, crying in rage, ready to dive at the earth to tear apart invading foes.

"What is it like to live here? It must be lonely and desolate."

Red Dog gazed at the king's residence and couldn't help but comment.

Everyone would marvel at the craftsmen's astounding skills upon seeing it, unable to resist viewing it as a divine creation to worship, but Red Dog felt all this was somewhat superficial.

Majestic, yet filled with the aura of death; it rose high above the mundane world, yet couldn't touch the true sky.

Over the long years, countless craftsmen devoted their lives to this enormous and grotesque structure; many even spent their entire lives within it.

Initially, it was just a palace atop the mountain; as the Kagader Empire grew, it became increasingly grand, seemingly alive and continuously expanding.

Soon, the structure devoured all the rock on the summit, then hollowed out the interior of the mountain, breaking free from the lone mountain's constraints. Like bones, the stone pillars protruded from the mountain, transforming themselves into stone pillars that reached the heavens and connected the earth.

Pillar of Royal Authority.

That's its name, the residence of the Kagader Royal Family, the core of the Royal City, the core of the Empire.

The gray-white stone steps below extended down to the mountain's base, then into the structure surrounding the mountain. The spiraling stairs led directly to the palace on the summit.

Red Dog stepped onto the stone steps and entered the Pillar of Royal Authority. Along the way, he saw no other person. The entire Pillar of Royal Authority was eerily quiet; only when the fierce wind crashed against the resonators set outside would they burst forth with a sacred, ethereal melody.

Some elderly folks who had lived within the Pillar of Royal Authority said it used to be very lively inside; the court musicians played day and night, and iron-armored guards patrolled the steps with rhythmic iron steps.

But all of this vanished when the King of Slaughter caused the blood-colored night. After that, the Pillar of Royal Authority drove everyone away and completely sealed itself, allowing no one inside except upon the king's summons.

After that, the Pillar of Royal Authority completely isolated itself from the outside world. No one knew what transpired within, not even the King's Secret Sword.

Sometimes, when Red Dog gazed at the Pillar of Royal Authority, he couldn't help but think that perhaps something bizarre and insane was gestating here, but until it breaks out, no one can discern its form.

After a long journey, Red Dog finally reached the summit. He trod upon the bright red carpet, advancing through the tranquil Central Courtyard, surrounded by towering walls that almost blocked out all light.

"Your Majesty."

In the end, Red Dog reached the throne, knelt on one knee, and bowed his head.

The steps piled high, lifting the throne to a lofty height. Anyone wishing to glimpse the throne had to look up, but even when looking up, all they could see was the light streaming down from the dome, and the shadow of the throne cast in the light.

On the way, he saw no other person, leading Red Dog to ponder that perhaps if he killed the king here, no one would know.

"Red Dog."

A deep, hoarse voice sounded, the king spoke, and Red Dog cast aside the chaotic thoughts in his mind.

He was keenly aware of who he faced; the king before him might be the most brutal king in Kagader's history.

After all, it was he who orchestrated the blood-colored night, earning the moniker King of Slaughter.

"As Your Majesty wished, we've gathered a huge amount of Philosopher's Stones, now delivered to the White Servants."

The White Servants were the servants who guided Red Dog under the Pillar of Royal Authority. After the blood-colored night, only the king and the White Servants who served him resided in this bizarre, grand palace. Not even the King's Secret Sword could penetrate it.

"It is just that in Oubos, our collection ran into some complications. The Order Bureau attacked us, leaving no survivors."

"Is that so? What a pity, I was quite looking forward to Mammon's power," the King said with a hint of disappointment, "It seems as though Mammon's power is fated never to leave Opus, even if we have found a way to solidify it."

The Liquid Spirit Potion, crafted with Mammon Coin, contained a trace of strange power. The King thought he could seize this power, but it still faded away, as if it were destiny.

"Fortunately, there are other Philosopher's Stones... you did a very good job on that, Red Dog."

The King praised, his voice echoing through the dome, soft-spoken yet transformed into a rumbling thunder when it reached Red Dog's ears. He looked up but couldn't see the King's figure, only a silhouette bathed in sunlight, as if he were conversing with a deity.

"Now, I have a new mission for you."

...

Red Dog departed with his new mission, his iron boots stamping the ground, the clear sound reverberating, gradually fading away.

The King watched the direction in which Red Dog left, then turned his gaze back to the throne behind him.

Probably even Red Dog couldn't guess that the King was not actually on the throne. For the current King, that throne was too big, too high. His frail, timid body was not enough to support him climbing onto it.

"What a terrifying price to pay..."

Looking at his own hands, shriveled like a mummy's, the King murmured.

Since the Night of Blood, the King had almost ceased to appear before the people. In fact, most of the King's Secret Sword had never truly seen the King, even if they were bestowed with the Secret Sword, it was done through the White Servants.

Everyone had different speculations about the King, but no one could imagine that the current King appeared so hunchbacked. His body showed a bizarre sickliness, covered with black spots of death.

His sallow skin clung to his bones, his body emaciated like a mummy's. He wrapped himself in a layer of gray cloth to conceal his body.

The White Servants emerged from the darkness, lifting the chair beneath the King, carrying him away reverently.

Without needing the King's command, the White Servants knew where to go next. They advanced within the labyrinthine Pillar of Royal Authority, sitting on a lift, descending through the deep tunnels.

For a hundred years, craftsmen had cut through the mountain, making the space within the Pillar of Royal Authority far more complex than it appeared from the outside. In the dimness came the King's pained breathing, but it was the only sound. The White Servants, like corpses, had no breath, no voice, silently executing commands.

The descent lasted for about ten minutes, seemingly passing beneath the surface, deeper into the underground. In the darkness, a cloying stench emerged, as if countless pieces of flesh and limbs filled the blackened corners.

The foul smell grew stronger, as if stepping into a monster's lair. A common person would wretch at the stench, but the King's face showed a rare expression of enjoyment, adding a hint of vitality to his sickly body.

The gates opened, revealing a massive underground space. Dark rocks covered the ceiling, but near the ground, red moss grew in abundance... no, not moss, but flesh growing twisted like moss, with bud-like tendrils swaying, crawling along the rock walls.

The air was damp and decayed. The King struggled to stand, his shadow wavering as he walked forward. At the end of the fleshy moss lay a still crimson lake.

The most conspicuous scarlet floated on its surface, resembling a lake filled with blood. As the King approached, ripples began to emanate across the surface, then boiled violently, shaking the entire cavern as if a gargantuan creature was awakening.

The White Servants stepped forward, carrying heavy boxes. They opened the boxes before the King, pouring handfuls of Philosopher's Stones into the Blood Lake, but it did not quell the restlessness until massive, blood-veined white tendrils rose from beneath the lake.

They flailed wildly in the air, sweeping up the nearby White Servants along with the Philosopher's Stones into the blood. The crunching of bones being chewed resounded.

The King showed no fear; instead, he quickened his pace, shouting at the turbulent lake surface.

"Your loyal servant offers you sacrifices!"

More White Servants approached, throwing more Philosopher's Stones into the Blood Lake and getting swept below by the tendrils. Throughout the process, no one felt fear; not even cries of agony were heard before death.

Only the creature within the lake feasted greedily, alongside the King's devout pleas.

The surface of the lake calmed again, mirror-like. The King had already stepped into the Blood Lake, gazing at his reflection in the crimson mirror. Then his image shattered, reflecting into countless ones below the lake's surface, as if thousands of mirrors were reflecting himself.

Looking from higher above, one would realize it wasn't merely broken mirror images, but a massive, insect-like compound eye.

"Ah... it's you."

A woman's languid voice rose. Amidst the bloodshed, a pair of white arms ripped open the compound eye, reaching out from the gushing blood. The woman draped in blood-woven red garments appeared.

She smiled enchantingly at the King, cradling his aged head in her hands, baptizing him by submerging him into the blood. When the King rose from the blood again, the woman and the bizarre gigantic compound eye had vanished, leaving him alone standing in the blood.

His blurred vision sharpened, power surged through his entire body, even his stiff joints loosened. The King lowered his head, seeing a face many years younger reflected beneath the blood surface.

Not long after, lunatic laughter echoed through the cavern. He laughed, madly calling out.

"Xilin... Xilin... my child..."

Outstretching his hand, the King pleaded.

"Red Dog, please retrieve my child."

Chapter 202: Final Act: Bargaining with the Devil

Today is a rare good weather day, clear skies, with a blue curtain covering the earth, the temperature just right, neither cold nor hot, a gentle breeze brushing past, the roadside wild grass and flowers swaying.

A motorcycle slowly cruised along the slate-paved path, Palmer and Bologue sitting together, with Palmer in front and Bologue behind, both particularly adhering to traffic rules, with motorcycle helmets on their heads.

During the stormy night chase, to reduce resistance and speed up, while launching an assault on the train, Bologue used the Summoning Hand to dismantle the motorcycle's sidecar. Fortunately, the sidecar had been broken many times, so Palmer didn't feel bad. And since a new sidecar hadn't been purchased yet, Bologue could only squeeze in with him.

The motorcycle stopped by the roadside, Bologue took off his helmet, the sunlight was somewhat dazzling, and he had to squint his eyes to look ahead.

"Is this the place?" Palmer asked.

"Yes, it is. I've been here once." Bologue replied.

Palmer's gaze traveled from head to toe over Bologue, who was in a neat suit and had his hair carefully combed, with a flawless face and holding a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

If it weren't for the fact that they were in a cemetery, Palmer would have thought Bologue was here for a date.

His gaze turned towards the distant forest of tombstones, Palmer wondered to himself, "A date in a cemetery?"

With Bologue's personality, it's not impossible for him to do such a thing.

"What kind of flowers are these?"

Palmer noticed the flowers in Bologue's hand, which were chosen by Afeiya after discussing their purpose with Bologue.

"I think they're called forget-me-nots, meaning never forget," Bologue said skeptically, "Didn't you listen to Afeiya at the time?"

Back then, Afeiya had earnestly explained the meanings of different flowers to them, and Bologue, not wanting to refuse this kind gesture, patiently listened to it all.

"I'm not very interested in such knowledge." Palmer shrugged.

Finally reaching this point, Bologue felt like a pilgrim, his mood extraordinarily calm, almost devoid of emotional fluctuations.

"Do you need me to wait for you here?"

Palmer asked as he could see the importance of today to Bologue, the ceremonial man had already maximized the sense of ritual, and he wouldn't disturb this sacred moment.

"No worries, let's go together." Bologue invited.

They entered the cemetery, located in Opus's countryside, and unlike the city's cloudy atmosphere, it was vibrant and full of life.

Bologue waved his hand from afar, greeting the gravekeeper.

The cemetery at the Border Sanatorium seemed like an isolated secret realm, hiding all missions and glories static away, but here, Bologue felt some liveliness rather than secrecy.

It was visible that not only Bologue's group came to mourn today; there were shadows moving in the distance, and when passing some tombstones, there were also flowers placed upon them.

Bologue wandered around, finally reaching a cross-shaped tombstone with Adelle's name engraved on it.

Placing the flowers at the tombstone, Bologue squatted down and carefully cleared the surrounding weeds, pulling them out from the crevices between bricks.

"Is she Adelle?" Palmer asked.

During the time spent vacationing at the Border Sanatorium, Bologue had told Palmer the reason for his revenge, as the reliable driver during the stormy night, Bologue felt Palmer had the right to know this.

Thus Palmer also learned of Adelle's existence, understood why Bologue stubbornly chased the train and wanted to eliminate them completely.

"Hmm." Bologue replied.

Bologue cleaned away the weeds around, wiped the tombstone with his hand, dusting off a lot of dirt.

"I'm curious about what kind of person she was, being able to change a killer like you." Palmer sighed.

"She was a good person, a kind person." Bologue replied.

"I know, I know." Palmer nodded repeatedly, having heard such words countless times from Bologue during the ride here.

Faced with these issues, the violent killer turns into a child, going back and forth with the same few sentences, so much so that Palmer's ears formed calluses.

"Next is liberating her soul." Bologue said softly, then took out the ruby from his chest.

Under the sunlight, the Philosopher's Stone exhibited a brilliant brilliance, so elite and transparent, like a treasure of the world.

Once the Philosopher's Stone is shattered, the bound soul will be released, but it symbolizes Bologue completely losing everything.

"Actually, you don't need to break it." Palmer saw Bologue's hesitation.

"Once a person dies, they're gone. In the 'Golden Soul,' perhaps there are traces from when we were alive, but it's not us... the Philosopher's Stone in your hand is not Adelle, it merely carries her shadow; you could selfishly keep it." Palmer said.

One must always keep something as a memento, if Bologue secretly preserves the Philosopher's Stone, Palmer is willing to keep it confidential for him.

"No, I'm just thinking about some things," Bologue shook his head, his eyes deep, "It's time to say goodbye, can't be too hasty."

The memories of the past flashed and flew by, as Bologue slowly clenched his fist, holding the Philosopher's Stone in it.

"I have many ways to remember her, there's no need to selfishly keep a soul, especially since I am the Undead. The Philosopher's Stone will eventually fade away, but I will not."

Speaking, Bologue squeezed forcefully, the sound of the crystal shattering came from his palm, waves of warmth overflowed from his hand, warm and fiery like blood.

Slowly opening his hand, the crystalline Philosopher's Stone had already shattered into countless particles, with the fragments sparkling like stars under the sun, quickly dissolving, turning into an invisible gas, dispersing back into the world.

Both silently watched it all, vivid specks of light slowly ascending, merging into nothingness under the gentle breeze, until Bologue's hand held nothing.

Vaguely, Bologue seemed to hear the gentle laughter of a woman, as she circled around him, giving him one last look, before her steps gradually faded away until he could no longer follow.

Bologue knew, she had left, truly left.

He tilted his head to look at the sky, after a long gaze, Bologue lowered his gaze back to the earth before him. Surprisingly, as the Philosopher's Stone faded away, Bologue's emotions were not greatly stirred. Thinking about it, he was already prepared for the farewell. To cry at this moment would inevitably be too undignified.

"Is it over?" Palmer asked.

"Yes, it's over."

There were no moving words, no solemn ceremony. Everything felt so serene, as if fearing to disturb the spirits slumbering here.

Bologue slowly retreated, a light smile suddenly emerging on his face, not caring about the cleanliness of his clothes, he sat directly on the ground.

Palmer mimicked Bologue's actions, sitting down facing the gravestone beside him. Today was the last day of the holiday, they had all the time to waste.

"Interested in telling her story?" Palmer asked.

Regarding the story of Bologue and Adelle, Bologue hadn't said much at the Border Sanatorium, merely stating that Adelle was his friend, and he wanted revenge for a friend, that's all.

But seeing the peaceful serenity on Bologue's face—this damn expression on a killer's face was truly puzzling—Palmer's curiosity drove him to pursue the story of the two.

"Her story? There's not much to it, really."

It was as if Bologue was prepared in advance. He took out a yellowed photo from his pocket and showed it to Palmer.

"This is what she looked like when she was young, very beautiful, right?"

Palmer nodded. Time had blurred the photo, but he could still discern Adelle's youth and beauty from its outlines.

Then, Palmer's expression changed. He saw another familiar face in the photo, a face that shouldn't be there. Before he could say anything, Bologue continued.

"This is Mo'Er, one of my comrades. Perhaps because we came from the same place, I got along well with him."

Bologue pointed to the other person in the photo. He had a faint smile on his face, chatting incessantly, much like Palmer.

"During a battle, we were injured. At the time, Adelle was a military doctor, responsible for taking care of us. We spent some good times together, but later the camp was suddenly attacked by the enemy... Mo'Er died."

"I nearly died in the attack too, but Adelle saved me. She placed me on a stretcher and dragged me into the dense forest."

"The whole battlefield was in chaos, the melee lasted a long time. Adelle and I hid in the forest, avoiding enemy attacks while searching for the main force. We drank dew when thirsty, gnawed on tree bark when hungry."

"Many times, we both felt like we couldn't hold on. At night, we confided our lives to each other. She even said if I really felt I was about to die, to remind her. She said she was somewhat a priest, so she could hear my confession before I died."

It was a terrible time, but for Bologue, it was immensely precious.

"Fortunately, neither of us gave up, and we survived. Back at the camp, Adelle continued taking care of my injuries. As a form of gratitude, I would listen to her teachings occasionally. Though I understood nothing, I faked it well enough that she believed she had truly saved a lost lamb."

Bologue turned his head, looking at the dazed Palmer, "So, she's an incredible person, right?"

Palmer rigidly nodded, then cautiously asked.

"Bologue, can I ask you a question?"

"Go ahead."

Palmer took a deep breath, suddenly realizing that he had overlooked something so important.

"How old are you," Palmer quickly added, "I don't mean your damned psychological age."

He was somewhat incoherent, paused briefly, then organized his words before seriously asking again.

"Bologue Lazarus, how long have you been the Undead?"

This question stumped Bologue. He thought for a moment, then slowly stood up, brushed the dust off, and gazed toward the edge of the horizon, at the gloomy, dark city.

"It happened a long time ago," after a brief silence, Bologue recalled, "back then this land was not called Oubos, but known as King Solomon's Holy City."

"Sixty-six years ago, during the battle known as the Fall of the Holy City..."

Against the light, Bologue softly said.

"I sold my soul to the Devil and thus became an immortal, eternal being."

Chapter 203: Epilogue

Rhein Calendar Year 1243, Order Bureau.

The dry metallic creaking sound echoed occasionally, as the rudimentary elevator slowly descended within the dark and deep vertical shaft, akin to exploring an ancient tomb where the air was laden with dust.

The man leaned in the dimly lit corner and coughed heavily a few times, constantly feeling as though lingering here for too long might inflict him with some respiratory illness.

Despite this thought, he still picked up a cigarette, lighting it brought a faint glow to his resolute face, he inhaled deeply, allowing the smoke to mix with the suffusing dust.

Several cigarette butts lay scattered on the ground, this wasn't the man's first smoke; whether it was the antiquity of the elevator leading to an inefficacy or perhaps he was heading to the bottommost depths of the Abyss, was undeterminable.

The man felt as if he's been here for several hours, yet the descent continues unabated.

The interior of the Order Bureau was modernized, even avant-garde in some sections; yet despite such modernization, there were areas retaining centuries-old styles, a blend of old and new.

The stone walls were covered in damp moss, dusty candlesticks, the elevator was blemished with rust, the wooden boards underneath seemed precarious, he felt a slight exertion might send him through the floor into darkness.

Luckily, these antiquated areas were beyond the reach of ordinary staff; only a few within the Order Bureau could venture within, the man happened to be one among them, notably one with substantial authority.

Having smoked yet another cigarette, he felt somewhat irritable; upon reaching for more within his pocket, he found the recent one was the last from the pack.

"Ah... damn it."

The man complained, recalling what a woman had once mentioned to him.

"You should quit smoking."

"Why? Condensers don't succumb to lung cancer, much less one of my Tier." The man raised an eyebrow in reply.

"I just dislike the smell of smoke."

As the woman spoke, she approached, extinguishing her cigarette; maybe she intended to kiss him yet pinched her nose, and frowned exclaiming.

"So stinky."

Reflecting on this, the man chuckled to himself, crumpled the cigarette pack nonchalantly tossing it into the darkness.

Suddenly, the elevator began shaking violently, astonishing him; thinking, regardless of antiquity, it wouldn't halt due to littering, would it?

But quickly, the trembling ceased, the iron gate drew open, dim light shone ahead, where a gray-robed individual awaited holding a candlestick.

It wasn't the elevator malfunctioning, but rather the man had finally arrived at his destination.

"Whew, this hellish place is troublesome every visit."

Stepping out, he fully stretched his body; only then one could notice his towering physique akin to a sturdy bull.

"Vice Director Nesanel."

The gray-robed one nodded to Nesanel; acknowledging him not as the Minister of External Affairs but the Order Bureau's Vice Director.

"Good morning, Prison Warden, you look well."

Nesanel patted the gray-robed man's back, peering into the unknowable darkness within the robe, full of banter said.

Darkness and gray robes shrouded the Prison Warden fully, yet it didn't hinder displaying displeasure. Though unhappy, he knew this man cared little for his sentiments; he's always been like this, acting on his whims.

The Prison Warden despised physical contact, yet this old chap never learned, always patting him upon each visit; despite rebukes, he'd retort, "You've lingered in the darkness too long, you need some vitality, friend."

Nesanel felt filled with life undeniably; few could at his age have such a youthful mindset.

"Lead the way, I feel no matter how often I come, I can't remember the path; it's too dark... have you not considered installing more lighting?"

Nesanel babbled continuously; the Prison Warden simply ignored his chatter.

Around them wasn't just darkness but a light-consuming mist; no form of illumination could persist here, only the Prison Warden's candlestick could faintly light the surroundings, albeit just nearby.

After departing the elevator, the Prison Warden led Nesanel along a narrow path; along steep cliffs, vision hindered judging their position, forget about hidden paths.

Besides limited sight, this area was an Ether vacuum; Nesanel attempted releasing some Ether, soon those drifting Ethers were devoured entirely by something within the darkness, consuming not only light but Ether.

These actions did not escape the Prison Warden; he spoke no further, considering his visitation an inspection of Black Prison's security capabilities.

"Let's chat, Prison Warden."

It's far too quiet here; Nesanel could faintly hear the sound of his heart pumping blood, needing conversation to break the damned silence.

"About what?"

"Discuss matters concerning him," Nesanel stated, "to be so anticipated by the Director, I'm genuinely curious."

The Prison Warden fell silent briefly, then in a rasping voice akin to a mummy said.

"That was sixty-six years ago, discovered by Alberto Alfredo on the battlefield," he reminisced about the scene, "his presence could hardly go unnoticed; King Solomon's light burned everyone into towering salt pillars, amidst the sulfur and fire burgeoned Hell, he was the sole living being struggling in agony."

Chapter 204: Epilogue 2

"After that, Alberto Alfredo became the first Director of the Order Bureau, and he also became the first prisoner of the Black Prison."

The Prison Warden hesitated slightly before continuing.

"Actually, calling him a prisoner is not entirely accurate; you understand the nature of the light's curse. We are not so much imprisoning him as isolating him to prevent the spread of its power.

Aside from his resurrection ability, he's just an ordinary person, completely unable to withstand the burning of the light's curse. His flesh turns to salt pillar while he resurrects again and again in an endless cycle.

Like a curse, the light's curse matched his resurrection, and he struggled in pain and death for years before finally overcoming it, completely severing this dreadful power."

The Prison Warden's voice was devoid of any emotion.

"After the light's curse disappeared, he stayed in a slumber for years due to his numerous deaths before waking up; more than a decade had passed since he was imprisoned."

"What was his reaction upon waking?" Nesanel asked curiously.

"Depression, guilt, severe self-destructive tendencies. I thought the torment from the light's curse broke his spirit, but during a conversation, I learned that something else was truly torturing him."

The Prison Warden paused, signaling for Nesanel to follow him, as they left the steep narrow path and came to a gigantic cliff.

The torch rising in darkness illuminated the scene before them, casting flickering light on the metal-cast door adorned with reliefs of demons and gods. They looked fierce and ready to break out, their shadows shifting with the firelight, and for a moment, they seemed to come alive.

Nesanel could already envision the scene—the demons wailing in the burning iron, trying to escape, only to be driven back by sharp spears, solidifying into grotesque forms; golden seals closed the door gap, etched with holy words vowing to banish these evils from the world forever.

The Prison Warden slowly raised his hand, rocks trembling and ground shaking, as the golden seal adopted a strange liquid quality, causing the massive door, as tall as the cliff, to slowly open a crack, allowing him and Nesanel to enter.

Behind the door lay a deep well, vast and spiraling downward, lined with burning candles. Corresponding to these candles were iron-cast cell doors embedded into the well walls, a continuous shine extending toward the darkness.

The imprisoned evils seemed to sense the presence of living beings, causing the deep well to erupt into chaos—bestly roars, ethereal wails, women's cries—all composing Hell's elegy.

"He felt responsible for the deaths of so many, but when I asked why he felt that way, he couldn't explain," the Prison Warden continued down the spiral path, "just like the forgotten transaction, he can't explain why he feels this way; he just repeatedly says he should be accountable for the tragedy."

The cell door beside them shook violently. Nesanel turned his head, golden sparks blazing in his eyes; a mere glance caused the door to cease its agitation and fall silent.

"We all know King Solomon initiated the light's curse, sulfur and flames consumed the battlefield, turning everyone, including himself, into salt pillars... This tragedy is unrelated to him." Nesanel murmured, the golden sparks in his eyes extinguished.

"You didn't need to act; they can't escape." The Prison Warden let out a raspy chuckle.

"I just felt a bit frustrated and wanted to vent," Nesanel shrugged, then asked, "And then?"

"He believed he was linked to the tragedy. Though he couldn't articulate it, likely out of guilt, he cooperated fully, whether in extreme testing or interrogation."

The Prison Warden continued.

"We suspected it was related to the transaction's contents, possibly a condition of fulfillment that misled him to think he was connected to the tragedy. It's plausible—everyone died, leaving behind gray-white salt pillars on a scarlet battlefield, and eventually only you remain alive... He wasn't aware of King Solomon or the light's curse; he might have thought all of it was his doing."

No one explained this to him at that time; that information was taboo even for the Condensers, let alone a debtor.

Nesanel remained silent, and after some time, he slowly spoke.

"Suppose he truly is linked to the tragedy?"

The Prison Warden halted his steps, and Nesanel sensed the gaze from beneath the gray cloak, the raspy voice echoing again.

"Do you think that's possible, Deputy Director Nesanel?"

The voice carried unprecedented seriousness and even a hint of fear.

"You and I both know the cause of the Fall of the Holy City; it's just that everyone chooses to remain silent."

"Indeed, without the Fall of the Holy City, perhaps even after hundreds of years, we wouldn't confront the threat of the Devil." Nesanel jestingly remarked.

"So, the investigation on him ended like that?"

"Yes, it ended like that. He cooperated fully, but apart from his identity as a debtor, we could not find anything useful, and then he was simply forgotten," the Prison Warden reminisced on past memories.

"I kept observing him for years following that; the man was constantly steeped in sorrow, still seeing himself as the prime culprit of the tragedy. He wished to die but couldn't, even starving to a husk would only result in his robust resurrection."

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One day, that guy suddenly emerged from self-destruction, sitting in a corner, a pensive look on his face."

The Prison Warden still remembered that moment; it was probably the first time in years that the Prison Warden had spoken to him. After so many years without speaking, he stuttered when he spoke.

"I asked him what he was doing. He said he was reminiscing. Having memories allows him to endure solitude. Then, many years passed, and he still maintained his sanity, exercising in the narrow cell every day, reflecting on life."

"Sounds quite interesting indeed."

"Yes, I've seen many people walk toward destruction in the darkness, but it's my first time seeing someone crawl out of the abyss without any external help," the Prison Warden affirmed. "He maintained a regular life all the time, even when his space was just that tiny patch of ground."

"I asked him, saying that this was all meaningless and that he couldn't leave here. He replied that he was an Undead. Mountains will crumble, kingdoms will fall, and even such a massive organization as ours will one day become fragmented, but he is undying. As long as he waits, one day he will step on our ruins to regain freedom."

"Surprisingly philosophical. What does he plan to do after getting out?" Nesanel asked, "Become a psychologist?"

"I don't know, but I think he would investigate matters related to himself, explore the truth about the Fall of the Holy City, and seek out the details of his bargain with the Devil. He believes his hands are stained with the blood of those people, and regardless, he needs to give himself an answer, whether or not it's the answer he wants."

Over these many years, the Prison Warden had been observing him. Compared to other prisoners, he was so unique, so peculiar.

The two paused, and unknowingly they had reached the bottom of the deep well. A lonely cell door stood there, confining the first prisoner since the Black Prison was established.

"Actually, there's another purpose for imprisoning him for so long," the Prison Warden suddenly said.

"He is a Debtor, the Devil's Deputy. He possesses a powerful Undying Body. It's a pity he's just an ordinary person lacking any power. By imprisoning him, we've also restricted the Devil's actions," Nesanel said, understanding what the Prison Warden meant.

"We have always regarded this place as a trap. If the Devil wanted to activate this Deputy, they'd have to find a way to rescue him. But for so many years, nothing has happened, not even during the secret war... It seems even the Devil has forgotten about him."

The Prison Warden shook his head regretfully, then said.

"Yet now, we are actually going to release him on our own initiative."

For a moment, both fell silent. An eerie chill surged through their bones, their eyes meeting involuntarily, until Nesanel's awkward laughter broke the dead silence.

He laughed briefly before stopping, some sorrow creeping onto his face.

"Maybe, the Devil foresaw this day? No need for rescue; we are releasing him ourselves."

"Like a fate we cannot escape... That sounds truly terrifying," the Prison Warden said, reaching out to the sealed cell door. The touch was cold, like caressing ice.

"If we really are being manipulated by the Devil now, why is it now? Not earlier, not later, precisely at this moment to let him return to the world."

Nesanel couldn't understand and didn't bother trying to. He trusted his friend, believing that as the Director of the Order Bureau, he wouldn't make the wrong decision.

In the darkness beneath the gray robe, a blazing white light burst forth instantly. Blazing Ether was released along his fingertips, even burning the cold gray-white metal of the cell door into a glowing crimson.

The golden seal sealing the cell door began to melt, large chunks falling off, even causing the ghostly engravings on the door to come alive, hoarsely gaping with bloody mouths and sharp claws and tails in the flowing and twisting metal.

The deep well stirred once again, monsters crashing against the cell door, their eerie voices converging, conversing and roaring.

"He's going to be released."

"The people of the Order Bureau have finally gone mad."

"A bigger villain, a bigger monster!"

In the endless whispers and shouts, Nesanel's eyes glowed with Canyin, resonantly saying.

"Quiet!"

The power of glory spread out, stirring a storm inside the deep well, even repelling the sticky darkness. Yet, the hordes of demons did not cease, instead laughing even louder, ridiculing Nesanel's foolishness.

But when the golden seal melted, and the spirits perished, leaving only the cold iron cell door open, the hordes of demons suddenly quieted down. Not even a whisper was present, for fear of disturbing what lay beneath the deep well.

The world was quiet, a frenzy of madness growing wild in the stillness.

Nesanel peered nervously into the darkness inside the cell door, ready if a monster rushed out, to kill it and cast its body into steel, even if it could be resurrected, forever solidified at the bottom of this deep well.

Incandescent trails of light faintly appeared on Nesanel's body surface. He stepped inside but did not find a monster, only a person doing a one-handed handstand in the center of the cell.

Sweat pooled beneath the man, suggesting that he'd maintained the handstand for some time. His body, like a stone sculpture, motionless, had complete control over every muscle through years of training.

He gracefully twisted his body, silently touching the ground with his feet, then stood up straight. His azure eyes scrutinized Nesanel. This was the first person he had seen in all these years.

For some reason, Nesanel felt somewhat unnerved by his gaze, and then he realized the source of his unease.

In this dark, despair-filled cage, the man had spent a long time alone. Not only had he risen from destruction, but he also maintained his sanity, contemplating an unimaginably distant future. He was not a monster, yet surpassed a monster.

"Bologue Lazarus."

Nesanel uttered the man's name, gazing into those cold azure eyes, feeling as if he had spoken an ominous curse.

"You... are free."

Chapter 206: Prelude: To Alice

Rhein Calendar 1237, Order Bureau, Sublimation Furnace Core.

The heavy gate slowly opens with the mechanical turning, and the patterns engraved on the gate shatter along with it. A dry and scorching atmosphere floods from the split gate, as if behind it lies a subterranean group of volcanoes.

The girl wears heavy protective clothing, her platinum blonde hair braided into a bun at the back of her head. Her eyes shimmer, filled with anticipation as she looks at the parted gate.

"You know the meaning of these patterns, don't you, Alice?" Teda stands beside the girl, wearing the same heavy protective clothing.

"It's said that humans initially lived in a paradise on the ground, but under the serpent's instigation, they stole and ate the fruit representing wisdom, thus were banished by the gods..." Alice softly said.

Each time she tells this story and its connection to the pattern, a hint of doubt rises in Alice's heart, not understanding why the emblem representing absolute reason and the pursuit of knowledge originates from this enigmatic mythological belief.

At this moment, Teda reached out and gently patted Alice's shoulder, a smile appearing on her face as she spoke.

"That's right, we alchemists are like that greedy serpent, attempting to steal the knowledge of the gods, the truth of the gods."

The gate completely opened, waves of heat rushing in, Teda picked up the helmet, which also bore the same pattern—a serpent entwined around fruit, its mouth wide open, attempting to bite into the fruit of wisdom.

"Put on your helmet, inside is not as gentle as outside."

Alice nodded, taking the helmet from Teda's hand and firmly securing it on her head. The sound of mechanical locking echoed, fully integrating it with the protective clothing.

"Let's go. Once you implant the alchemy matrix, this will be your workplace."

Listening to Teda's words, Alice walked into the torrential heat waves, enormous black silhouettes emerging from the rising heat. Large swaths of red light were cast, ear-piercing noise continued, pipes like masses of serpents crawling over every inch of visible space.

The vision gradually cleared up, behind the gate, many people like Alice wearing protective clothing were walking about. Broadcast sounds echoed within the vast space, small trucks slowly drove by, transporting heavy cargo, elevators rose and fell along the edges. Looking through them, one would find suspended walkways spanning overhead.

The most striking was the reactor at the center. Like an elevated mound, through the mechanical gaps, one could see the brilliant flames within, as if it imprisoned a raging sun as an energy source, continuously transmitting fire through power pipes.

Alice gazed at all this, her eyes carrying an emotional excitement, after waiting for so many years, she finally arrived here, becoming a part of this, to explore the end of the "Secret Source."

"Welcome to the Sublimation Furnace Core."

Someone approached Alice, nodding at Teda, also welcoming Alice.

"Alice, these two are Belli and Balder, both my students. You'll be considered my student too in the future."

Teda introduced Alice, regrettably both were wearing heavy protective clothing, Alice couldn't see their appearance. Inside the Sublimation Furnace Core, everyone's appearance was hidden under helmets, with identification mainly relying on the nameplate on their chest.

"I've often heard my father mention you, the most studious student and the most talented student."

Alice's gaze flashed over both of them, the most studious was Balder, the most talented was Belli.

"Alice Yazhede."

She introduced herself, bowing to the two, restricted by the protective clothing, her movements appeared somewhat clumsy, like a swaying penguin.

"So cute, is this the junior sister?"

Belli rushed over, she was considerably taller than Alice, directly pulling Alice into her embrace. Through the helmets, the two heads rubbed together.

For Belli's enthusiasm, Alice accepted it calmly. She often heard Teda say Belli was an overly lively child, while Balder was the opposite, silent and steady.

"I heard from the teacher before that you are a child even more talented than me, and more studious than Balder, is that true?"

Words could no longer express Belli's joyful feelings, she directly started feeling Alice through the protective clothing, but all she touched was simply the protective clothing. Alice felt like a short tree with a happy monkey hanging on it.

"Indeed, perhaps my skills in the end will need Alice to inherit, so you'd better work hard."

Teda laughed, pulling Belli away, then continued.

"It's her first day at the Sublimation Furnace Core, control yourself. You'll have plenty of time to interact later."

Belli reluctantly released Alice. In this place full of machinery and flames, aside from research, few things piqued Belli's interest. Now looking at Alice, her gaze seemed to have found a new toy.

Balder as usual maintained his silence at the side. Only when Teda asked did he respond.

"Is the implantation ceremony ready?" Teda asked.

"It's ready. After all, it's for the junior sister to use, we have thoroughly checked it." Belli guaranteed.

Alice followed them, looking around as they walked.

As Teda's daughter, Alice was exposed to a significant amount of extraordinary knowledge from a young age, showing remarkable talent. Because of this, Teda early on began cultivating Alice as an alchemist. Under the education of the Sublimation Furnace Core's head, Alice made rapid progress. By the age of ten, she could independently refine the "Mang Silver Soul" and process it.

Chapter 207: Prologue To Alice_2

Teda often mentions Alice when working, even saying that when Alice is old enough to stand on her own she might replace him as the new Sublimation Furnace Core Minister. At that time, Teda would be able to set aside these tedious affairs and immerse himself completely in research, like previous ministers.

Therefore, Belli and Balder are not seeing Alice for the first time; they have heard her famous name from their teacher's endless lectures. Simply put, in terms everyone can understand, Alice is "someone else's child."

"But is it really possible to implant ahead of time?" Balder queried softly.

In the Alchemists' research, the origin of the soul remains a mystery continuing from ancient times, yet Alchemists have discovered some patterns despite the enigmatic nature of the soul.

When children are born, their souls aren't stable, like an indistinct mist difficult to consolidate into form. But as they age, their souls gradually stabilize, reaching full stability at eighteen, like soft soil turning into hard stone.

Thus, eighteen years is regarded as the mark of soul formation and adulthood. Many implantation rituals occur when subjects reach adulthood, but in some ancient Extraordinary Clans, they possess extremely secret knowledge and perform implants differently, though these are just isolated cases.

Balder glanced at Alice behind them and then asked, "She's only sixteen; her soul hasn't fully stabilized yet."

"You know, Balder, sometimes rules must give way to genius," Teda said confidently. "And besides, the implantation ceremony is under my direction, with the Sublimation Furnace Core supporting from behind."

With the Sublimation Furnace Core Minister personally in charge, the whole department backs him, making it beyond lavish, a feat even some Extraordinary Clans struggle to match.

Balder seemed to nod slightly, aware of his own personality flaw of excessive caution, completely opposite to Belli's impulsive nature. Teda often remarked that their working together was the perfect complement.

With the teacher present and the entire Sublimation Furnace Core backing up, there was nothing to worry about.

Teda understood Balder's concerns; initially, he shared the same thoughts, but Alice couldn't wait anymore. She was weary of Teda's teachings and craved deeper, more obscure knowledge.

This knowledge exists only within the Sublimation Furnace Core, yet before she could enter, she needed first to become a Condenser, join the Order Bureau, and be part of the Secret Energy faction, opening the path toward the "Secret Source."

Teda frequently glanced at Alice, consistently feeling that she would propel the world's history, deepening Alchemists' understanding of the "Secret Source."

With these thoughts, he was enveloped in beautiful anticipation, but the next second, an ear-piercing alarm shattered the dream. Alarm bells clanged and blinding red warning lights flashed continuously.

Before anyone had managed to understand what happened, the "Cultivation Room" started writhing violently, as emergency passage doors appeared from thin air. After a brief panic, everyone entered the unknown doors in accordance with protocol.

For many, it was the first time the "Cultivation Room" opened emergency passages leading to shelters; for Teda, it was the same, this situation happening for the first time since the establishment of the Order Bureau.

Though people tried to remain calm, the continuously collapsing "Cultivation Room" nevertheless instigated fear among the crowd. Everyone understood the mystique and power of the "Cultivation Room," yet despite seeming impregnable, it crumbled under some forceful attack.

Waves of Ether siphoned out from within the "Cultivation Room," rushing towards a certain point, along with fading the densely patterned bricks. Deprived of Ether's support, they too turned into ordinary stone, falling and collapsing.

Massive stones crushed many people, blood-soaked cries echoing nonstop. Many Ether facilities malfunctioned in the Ether vacuum condition, some directly causing explosions.

Columns of fire erupted, hot metal shards rained down like dense bullets, slicing through whatever flesh they struck.

"Get out of the way!"

Balder shouted as he pushed Belli aside. Being close to the emergency passage, Belli was thrown directly to the side of the passage by Balder's forceful shove. Then another loud explosion occurred, fiery light engulfing Balder.

Dim light flickered across Balder's body; he attempted to activate Secret Energy to protect himself, but upon trying, found his "Rectangular Soul Critical" had already been breached, leaving no trace of Ether within.

What terrified Balder even more was that the entire Sublimation Furnace Core was in this utter Ether vacuum; neither Condensers' Ether nor Alchemy Armament's strength remained, as if some tyrant power descended, ravaging everything.

The Protective Clothing meant for safeguarding the body began disintegrating; essentially Alchemy Armament, it fell apart as its material's Ether was seized.

Balder thought he was doomed, flames scorched his flesh, consciousness fading when a large hand reached into the fiery abyss and dragged him out.

"Go quickly!"

Teda screamed as he hurled Balder away. Though just a scientific personnel, Teda was indeed a Negative Power User, possessing strength to resist against this oppressive force.

Balder slammed heavily against the wall, burns covering his body, but thankfully the helmet wasn't shattered, preserving his head. Belli reached out to grasp him, no need for thanks now, she pulled Balder into the emergency passage.

Teda breathed painfully; being able to act under such power meant he bore unimaginable pressure. The high temperatures engulfed the Sublimation Furnace Core as if he stood at a volcano's mouth, each breath bringing intense scorching pain.

"Are you okay, Alice?"

Teda cried out the girl's name; when the collapse occurred, he immediately embraced Alice, radiating dazzling light trails. Under the drive of Illusion Creation, extreme cold pushed back the heat and resisted imminent dangers.

Alice did not respond; like a kitten, she quietly lay on Teda's shoulder, with her face exposed gradually as the Protective Clothing disintegrated, shattered.

Amid the roaring death impulse, Alice's gaze was dazed and hollow, like a puppet stripped of its soul.

She watched.

From within the tearing apart of the "Cultivation Room," in the apocalyptic scene, the Celestial God-like figure descended amid the destroying Thunder, under his authority, all things collapsing.

Chapter 208: Evil Spirit

Wandering Crossroads · Spider Web Bar.

The multicolored lights, accompanied by the frenetic music, cast downward, creating an otherworldly interior where everything takes on an odd shape, mingling with the flushed, bewildering faces of patrons lost in intoxication, rendering the place akin to a dream of disorientation.

Some indulge recklessly amidst the alcohol and dance, others murmur conspiratorial whispers in the darkness, shadows twisted grotesquely by the lighting, casting on the walls, mirroring those vibrant yet peculiar graffiti.

The air is thick with the heavy scent of alcohol, mixed with other indistinguishable odors, reminiscent of impure diesel, the sour decay of flesh, and traces of fresh blood...

Vika stands behind the bar, quietly wiping the glass in his hand, accustomed to this hallucinatory scene, he performs his duties with a blank expression, amidst the revelry, he seems to be the only sober presence.

Two men weave through the crowded throng, seating themselves at the bar, raising a hand to gesture at Vika. Vika nods, serving them two drinks.

"Vika, I recently found something good."

After draining his glass, a slight flush appears on the man's face as he speaks mysteriously to Vika.

"Jello, what good thing?"

Vika doesn't care much for these drunken men, but chatting with patrons is part of the job.

"A Mammon Coin, a brand new, never-before-seen Mammon Coin."

Jello carefully retrieves a handkerchief from his pocket, laying it on the tabletop, unfolding it to reveal a shimmering glow in Canyin.

In the dingy cloth, sits a Mammon Coin, spotless, devoid of even scratches, as if freshly minted from the treasury.

The most amazing aspect of this Mammon Coin is that its design differs from all known ones.

In the Wandering Crossroads, such occurrences are common; whenever a new urban legend emerges, a corresponding Mammon Coin follows, the presence of this coin undoubtedly indicates something.

A new legend has appeared.

"I know you're the expert, Vika," Jello grins, "Can you discern anything from this coin?"

Vika is not only the bartender at Spider Web Bar but also its actual overseer. Given the bar's absolute peace feature, Vika holds significant sway within the Wandering Crossroads.

Everyone seeks to curry favor with Vika to ease their paths in the Crossroads, and the best method is surely by gathering Mammon Coins, more accurately, different Mammon Coins.

To Vika, collecting different Mammon Coins is akin to stamp collecting. He doesn't mind splurging substantial sums for some rare and precious Mammon Coins.

"I reckon I'm the first to discover this coin, I might be the only one holding it in the entire Wandering Crossroads."

Jello chuckles, aware of variations among Mammon Coins. Some are common, others exceedingly rare, and the one even Jello can't identify is undoubtedly the latter.

It's speculated the rarity of Mammon Coins relates to the spread of urban legends; the more people aware of a legend, the more coins exist representing it, vice versa.

Vika picks up the coin from the handkerchief, inspecting the emblem, then inquires.

"Where did you get this coin? Tell the truth."

"Well... quite the coincidence."

Jello considers, facing Vika's piercing gaze, realizing honesty may serve him better if he wishes to remain here.

"I found it stuck in a public phone booth's coin return, seems someone just forgot it there."

Vika doesn't respond, eyes deep in contemplation.

"Is this some kind of church symbol?" Jello continues blabbering, "The emblem looks like a staff."

Vika caresses the surface of the coin; indeed, as Jello remarked, it resembles some church symbol, or perhaps a staff.

The emblem's lower part is a cross symbol, atop the cross sits a circular symbol, further connected above by a semicircular symbol.

The symbols link together, forming this perplexing, bizarre depiction.

"Mercury..." Vika murmurs.

"What?" Jello catches Vika's words, excitement flaring on his face, "I knew you'd recognize it."

"It's neither some church symbol nor a staff, it's an alchemical symbol, representing one of the seven metals in Alchemy, namely Mercury, or Quicksilver."

Vika grows intrigued by the coin, meticulously studying its nuances, elaborating to Jello.

"Alchemists view Mercury as an extraordinary metal, it transcends solid and liquid states, surpasses earthly and celestial realms, exists beyond life and death."

"Like something... unkillable."

The other man speaks, having mostly been drinking beside Jello, now breaking his silence, his voice deep as though narrating an ancient tale.

"Something unkillable, peculiar metal." Vika nods at the man, affirming his theory.

"Alchemists also regard it as a symbol of the serpent, its exact origin is unclear, but from church myths we learn, humans once resided in earthly paradise, tempted by serpents, consumed the fruit of wisdom, thus cast out..."

Vika spoke while another image emerged in his mind: a venomous snake coiled around the fruit of wisdom.

"Thus, in the eyes of some Alchemists, they regard the snake as a cunning, greedy pursuer of truth, all in order to swallow that fruit of wisdom."

"Oh... That sounds truly unsettling."

Jello was startled, but then his face broke into a smile. He rubbed his hands together, signaling to Vika with his eyes.

"Your debt is cleared."

Vika understood Jello's implication and directly pocketed the coin, placing it close to him.

Jello nearly burst into laughter, but his joy was quickly replaced by curiosity. He cautiously asked Vika.

"Now that the coin has appeared, which legend does it represent?"

"I don't know."

Vika decisively shook his head; he spent most of his time in the pub, and the chaos of the outside world was none of his concern.

"I do know of a strange occurrence recently," said a man nearby, "Have you heard of the Evil Spirit story?"

"Evil Spirit?" Jello wore a puzzled expression, "What are you talking about, Will, what is an Evil Spirit?"

"Haven't you heard? It's a legend that emerged after that stormy night recently, where many gangs were exterminated. The newspapers say it was due to mutual conflict... Is that possible? They've coexisted peacefully for so long, yet suddenly, they fought to the death, and everyone died without a single victor."

Will drank calmly, trying to numb his nerves. Recalling these stories felt like reliving a bloody nightmare.

"Fortunately, one unlucky soul survived; a kid named White told me these stories.

The reality of that night was that a monster known as the Evil Spirit barged in. White and his peers tried to fight back, swinging knives at it, firing their guns — the firepower was enough to kill someone a thousand times over, yet strangely, the Evil Spirit bled but didn't die."

Will mimicked White's tone, a mix of fear and despair.

"Only the constant flicker of gunfire could be seen, along with the echoes of cries in the darkness. White could only catch a glimpse of that terrifying figure under the brief flashes, and soon his comrades fell one after another, pierced by blades, crushed by the Iron Hammer..."

Will set down his glass, his murky gaze fixed on Jello.

"Imagine, Jello, imagine such a scene—no forewarning, the nightmare descended suddenly, you couldn't discern the other's motives, nor see their appearance. The only certainty was that people died one after another, you tried resisting, yet it was futile, as if once it arrived, all you could do was pray and repent."

"Is it fake?" Jello was unnerved by Will's words, and he questioned firmly, "If the Evil Spirit is truly so dreadful, then how did White survive?"

"That's the interesting part about the Evil Spirit," Will smiled, baring yellowed teeth, "It's a selective Evil Spirit, not a beast indiscriminately thirsting for blood."

"White says he survived because the Evil Spirit told him 'he wasn't on the list', so... what list might that be?"

"The list of evildoers."

Suddenly, Vika, who was listening in, spoke up. With his head lowered, he continued wiping the glass in his hand, his mind recalling what he heard and saw at Norm's clinic.

A blurry figure gradually clarified in his mind, and Vika remembered what he said the first time he came to the Web Pub.

Become a legend.

"Yes, the list of evildoers," Will toasted to Vika before looking at Jello, whose face was turning pale, "White survived because he was still a child, joined the gang only days ago, hadn't fired a gun, washed his hands clean of blood. Had his hands been stained, White might have died that night too."

"No, no, no, Will, it's impossible, how do you know all this in such detail? White is just a story you made up!" Jello's voice rose, trying to disprove his words.

"Because White is my nephew. I ought to thank the Evil Spirit, for it gave White a great shock to his psyche. After witnessing corpses and blood, this kid became much more obedient, never mentioned joining gangs again."

Will's gaze was fixed on Jello, intentionally lowering his voice as he pursued further.

"This can be true or it can be a story, but why is your reaction so intense, Jello? Are you afraid the Evil Spirit has marked you for wrongdoing?"

"That's none of your business." Jello stood up instantly, shooting an angry glance at Will, "See you tomorrow, Will."

"I also hope to see you tomorrow! Jello! Beware, the Evil Spirit is watching you!"

Jello quickened his pace, trying to cast away Will's laughter from his mind, walking on damp, dark streets; the twisted, eerie street scenes always looked strange.

Cold gripped his body; winter was coming. As he wrapped his coat tightly, he bit a cigarette and lit it.

"Damn story," Jello muttered, "Damn Mammon Coin collection."

The Wandering Junction's layout was complex; many didn't live here. They mostly resided in the more habitable Qiushang Town, or around the Great Rift. Thus, those people hardly believed in the Tyrant, let alone the legends of the Mammon Coin.

Jello was one among the non-believers, collecting those coins only because this damn Wandering Junction used them as currency.

"Nothing like an Evil Spirit, just the ramblings of mad people."

Jello repetitively whispered as he walked toward the end of the road, oblivious to the twisted, bizarre architecture behind him, where a blurred figure had squatted for some time.

A man in a black coat, wearing a sinister mask, whose azure eyes reflected Jello's silhouette, slowly opened his coat, withdrawing a worn Sheep Horn Hammer from within.

...

Chapter 209: Food Chain

"You seem quite revered by this Evil Spirit."

Seeing Jello leave, Vika poured Will another drink and then said.

"I wouldn't say revered... more like hopeful," Will replied blearily, uncertain, "When we're young, we all probably have such fantasies, a force of absolute power executing justice across the world, but as we grow older, we come to realize it's impossible."

"Do you think the Evil Spirit has become this force?" Vika asked.

"Who knows? But just thinking about a monster chasing evil people, it's inevitable to feel this world isn't so bad. If you've done evil, then there's a monster chasing you until you pay the price," Will pondered, "like the Sharp Sword dangling above everyone's head."

Will's words suddenly stopped as he suspiciously eyed Vika, the mysterious and esteemed bartender.

"You wouldn't happen to know what the Evil Spirit is, would you?"

Vika smiled, but before he could say anything, Will hastily waved his hand to silence him.

"Don't say, don't say anything, even if you know something, it's best to remain silent."

"Why? You think the Evil Spirit will come to kill me?" Vika said.

"No, it's just... do you know why such legends scare Jello like that?" Will suddenly changed the subject.

"Because a legend is just a legend, not any person, not any monster, not a supernatural phenomenon, nor any chaos... In short, it's vague, without any definite entity."

Will probably drank too much, his speech rambling, yet Vika attentively listened to this drunkard's words.

"Without a definite entity, people will keep speculating, and speculations become odd and strange. With people's constant psychological suggestion, the legend also becomes increasingly crazed and bizarre."

"Instilling fear in people's hearts?" Vika understood what Will meant.

"Yes, implanting fear in the heart, maybe someday, people will be so terrified just hearing the Evil Spirit's breath," Will laughed loudly.

"Having people live in fear? Sounds a bit troublesome." Vika voiced his disagreement.

Will glanced at Vika and then asked, "Vika, why do you think you can control all of this?"

"They respect me."

"Yes, but such respect is only confined within the bar, based on the precondition that you bring benefits. When everyone is killing in a frenzy, no one cares about respect, except for one thing."

Will held up a finger.

"Fear.

Even those in a killing frenzy will retrieve some sanity under absolute fear."

Downing the drink in one gulp, Will hiccupped and continued to speak.

"For evil people, what they need is not their reverence, just their fear of you.

Whether it's the Great Rift or the whole Opus, human society is like a jungle, rule-abiders are those poor little lambs preyed upon by rule-breaking wolves.

But the appearance of the Evil Spirit broke this distorted food chain.

Now the wolves are no longer just predators, in the Evil Spirit's eyes, the wolves are also preyed upon, hunted by the savage Evil Spirit."

"That doesn't sound like something you would say," Vika commented.

"Right, these words are from White; ever since that night, his mindset has entirely changed. Now he's a fervent fan of the Evil Spirit, believing the Evil Spirit is an Angel sent by God for retribution."

Will said while shaking his head, bemoaning, "Young people today, their minds are really messed up."

"And Jello? You must know something to say that to him, right?" Vika tentatively asked, knowing extracting information from clients was a source of many insights.

"Can you waive my drink charge?" Will winked.

"Consider it on me."

Vika said, pushing another drink his way, unusually curious about something, leaning on his arms and listening quietly.

"You care much about the Evil Spirit?" Will said, "I often hear some rumors, Vika, like your mysterious boss..."

Midway through, Will laughed again, interrupting himself.

"I know what should and shouldn't be said. Speaking of Jello, he seems to have recently linked up with those merchants, probably using some unsavory means to obtain goods he shouldn't have from those merchants."

Will shrugged, whispering.

"We all understand, besides the Evil Spirit, there's another absolute predator in this city, it's above everyone else... Jello will eventually be targeted."

"Not bad news, though I knew it already." Vika replied.

"I knew nothing could escape you, you just wanted to confirm again from the perspective of us ordinary folks, right?"

"More or less, but you... no, your nephew's predator theory I quite like." Vika acknowledged.

"I hope he wouldn't ponder so many chaotic things, really not easy for peace of mind." Will sighed and shook his head.

"At least your nephew has some reverence now," Vika said, "Sometimes you need to burn the child to make him realize the dread of fireworks."

Will nodded, then laughed again.

"Compared to these, I'm more curious whether I'll see Jello tomorrow.

What do you think, Vika?"

...

The wandering crossroads isn't a specific place, it's more like a large cluster of buildings in a region, connected by corridors built on cliff sides or aerial walkways, with a few connected by cable cars across the Great Rift.

At this moment, Jello was sprinting through an aerial walkway, with mist shrouded above him, below was the brightly lit, rolling Sea of Mist.

He strode through the swaying aerial walkway, the fierce breath beneath his gas mask incessant.

Since a certain moment, Jello felt an inexplicable fear, unsure where it stemmed from but dragged him effortlessly into the ice sea.

The eerie footsteps remained incessantly around his ears, carrying a steady rhythm, continually striking his heart until it utterly crushed.

Jello was certain something was pursuing him, yet he couldn't see it, couldn't find its silhouette isolated on this aerial walkway, but Jello was sure it was right nearby, watching him closely.

"Beware, you've been targeted by the Evil Spirit."

Will's words lingered like a curse in his mind, he didn't believe in such things, yet now the reality he knew was slowly twisting and collapsing.

Running off the aerial walkway, Jello entered another building, slowing his pace, trying not to display a panicked expression, hand reaching into his pocket, gripping the revolver tightly.

On the street, people blended into the gray tones, heavy breath beneath the gas mask ceaseless, resembling dry corpses lying in coffins.

Under the invasion of fear, Jello felt everyone secretly observing him until he could bear no more of these gazes and slipped into an alley.

Jello moved within the narrow, grim alley, familiar with its maze-like paths where few could capture him.

Today was an exception, at the alley's end, a shadow blocked the path, lifting its head slowly, revealing blue eyes.

Jello didn't recognize this person, uncertain if it was human, but upon meeting those eyes, it was as if an evil voice whispered in his heart, declaring the identity.

"Evil Spirit!"

Jello exclaimed its name in terror as the Evil Spirit strode towards him.

Taking out the revolver, in panic, Jello pulled the trigger, emptying the bullets. Some hit the wall, some missed, some struck the Evil Spirit, but it seemed unfazed, continuing to stride forward, descending the Iron Hammer upon Jello.

"First, restrict mobility."

The Evil Spirit spoke, hammering Jello's calf bone, causing him to cry out in pain, drawing the short knife from his waist, attempting resistance, yet another Sheep Horn Hammer fell, crushing Jello's arm.

"Then, disarm."

Specks of blood sprayed onto the Evil Spirit's face, yet he remained indifferent, maintaining the demeanor of an expert.

Jello now was completely petrified by the Evil Spirit's ruthlessness, his words resembling a culinary routine, first boiling water, adding vegetables, then seasoning... The words paired with his violent actions, he was like a brutal butcher.

"Finally, ensure the target remains silent."

The Evil Spirit said grabbing Jello's collar, in Jello's desperate gaze, the tidal wave of terror pervaded his mind.

Chapter 210: Law-Abiding Citizens

When Jello woke up again, an unbearable pain surged through his body, and his mind was muddled, like he was hungover, with a faint ache from the blackout.

As his consciousness cleared, more pain crawled into his mind along the nerves, making it almost impossible for Jello to breathe, and he could only open his mouth wide and let out low, whimpering moans.

It took him a few minutes to barely endure the full-body pain, tears in his eyes as he looked at the sky overhead.

It was still the familiar gloom of Opus, the sky was gray, making it impossible to determine the exact time, and thus how long he had been unconscious was difficult to know.

Jello struggled to recall, residual fear lingering in his mind, and then a pair of azure eyes pierced through the fog.

"Evil Spirit!"

Jello almost screamed, the last menacing figure in his memory was completely imprinted in his pupils, even in his mind.

He tried to move his body, which brought on pain and a sense of restraint, Jello was tied up with ropes and couldn't move.

What's going on?

Just as Jello was bewildered, a hand lifted his collar.

"Wow, this guy's awake, what should we do next, specialist?"

The voice was very close, it should be the man who lifted him up.

"Put him on the tracks."

Another cold voice sounded, icy like a knife.

"You're planning to have the train run over him? I've seen that move in movies." When saying this, the guy who lifted him up had an unexpectedly excited tone.

"But... this seems too villainous."

In Jello's moment of despair, the man continued speaking, this brought a slight glimmer of hope to Jello's heart, unclear about the current circumstances, but it seemed these people weren't all cruel.

Just as Jello was about to say something to save his own life, the cold voice spoke again.

"Are we the upright kind?"

"Hmm... no." After thinking for a few seconds, the man answered.

"That's right, since we're not upright, why not be professional villains?"

"Yes, indeed a specialist, even as a villain, he has to be the most dedicated one." The man let go of Jello, surprisingly clapped his hands.

Jello's mind felt dizzy, he turned his head forcefully and barely saw the figure standing not far away.

It was the Evil Spirit, the one who knocked him down in his memory.

At the moment, he was facing away from Jello, seemingly gazing into the distance, the wind blowing over, lifting his coat and revealing a blood-stained Sheep Horn Hammer on his waist.

The Evil Spirit turned around, the menacing face looming before Jello, further impacting his spirit.

For Jello, this was indeed the worst day, cursed legends turned into reality, appearing just like that, bloody, before his eyes.

Yet this was not enough to make Jello concede, having lingered in the crossroads of uncertainty for many years, he had faced worse situations than this, more importantly, the appearance of Evil Spirit on some level shattered the fantasy in his heart.

The so-called Evil Spirit was just an ordinary human, not some grotesque oddity, nor a supernatural force enveloping Opus.

The mysterious unknown had become a recognizable entity, its layers of veils to be stripped away.

Yes, it's not all that bad yet.

"Jello, you're a known middleman in the crossroads of uncertainty, often selling contraband, and some things even worse than contraband."

The man detailed Jello's information, stepping on his chest, Jello painfully looked over, only to see a black hood appearing before his eyes, this guy seemed like a bandit, but clearly, this bandit had no interest in his belongings.

"You've been in the crossroads of uncertainty for quite a while, you should know there's a power that transcends all of you, right?"

Jello stared at the black hood, he indeed knew such a power, the power named Order Bureau.

The crossroads of uncertainty was a strange, eerie place, with travelers from afar, daredevils gambling their lives, Condensers drifting between various organizations, and mysterious forces arriving with different purposes.

Here demons ran rampant, no one had good intentions, it was an absolute Land of Chaos, the normal world overlapping with the peculiar Extraordinary World, hence the existence of the Order Bureau was not a secret in some people's eyes.

But were these two really from the Order Bureau?

Jello's heart raised such doubts, he feigned calm, speaking, "I remember you never intervene in the crossroads of uncertainty."

"That was the case before, but recently the company's performance is not too good, deciding to expand business in the crossroads of uncertainty, no! The entire Great Rift."

"As you can see, we're the salesmen of this area," when saying this, the black hood's tone was full of resentment, but he quickly became lively again, "Surprised?"

"Enough nonsense with him, drag him over."

The Evil Spirit looked at his watch, then glanced afar, and continued.

"According to the schedule, the next train will pass in a few minutes, move quickly."

"Alright!"

The black hood said, starting to drag Jello onto the tracks, Jello tried to struggle, but what awaited him was a powerful punch, causing him agony.

He lay horizontally on the tracks, like a lamb waiting for slaughter, the Evil Spirit took out the Sheep Horn Hammer, then slowly squatted beside Jello.

"You should know why we're looking for you, right?"