

Endless 221

Chapter 221: Aimou_2

"Nothing at all."

Bologue shook his head. He needed some time to adapt to this strange situation.

Aimou withdrew her hand and nodded to Teda, then walked into another room, busy with something unknown.

Bologue stared blankly at her departing figure, feeling very complicated and indescribable. He turned his head and looked at Teda, who understood what Bologue wanted to ask without words.

"She is my creation, an alchemy puppet with self-awareness, her body composed of various expensive alchemy metals. Beneath the complex mechanical structure, I've also implanted multiple alchemy matrices to maintain the puppet's operation.

In a way, she is a walking humanoid void realm, and the range of influence of the void realm is limited to her body... Explaining it to you might be too complicated; you only need to know that she is my life's most perfect masterpiece."

Teda eyed Bologue's increasingly confused gaze, suppressing his own enthusiasm to spare this layman who had only read the "Golden Thesis."

"Aimou Yazhede? I had only read about such alchemy puppets in books. I thought she would be more... robotic?"

Bologue found all of this to be truly astonishing.

"She is, after all, my most perfect creation. Her self-awareness is different from that of those autonomous puppets," Teda gradually lost his smile and spoke seriously, "also, she is not called Yazhede, she is simply called Aimou."

"No surname? I thought you'd give her your surname, Yazhede. Don't alchemists like to name their creations after themselves, as if they were your offspring?" Bologue asked.

"This is different. If it were a cold, dead thing, I wouldn't mind giving it my name, but she's different; she has awareness."

Teda was silent for a few seconds, once again asserting his thoughts coldly.

"She has self-awareness, but she is not 'life'; she is merely a 'tool' maintained by machinery and alchemy matrices. If she were given a name, it would generate emotions.

You should understand that excessive emotions would distort her essence."

"Distort the essence of a tool?"

Bologue roughly understood what Teda meant.

He remembered a casual chat with Geoffrey long ago when he was still an intern, unaware of the full picture of the Extraordinary World, spending each day following Geoffrey's instructions to slay one Demon after another.

He recalled the day he drove the Demons into a barn, locked the door, and set everything on fire. The two of them leaned against the fence amidst the blaze, and Geoffrey said at the time.

"A stray dog is just a stray dog, and no one cares about them. But when you give one of them a name, it is no longer just a stray dog."

After so long, Bologue somewhat understood Geoffrey's meaning: a name is a bestowal, transforming the identity of something within its group.

With a name, an ambiguous concept gains a clear direction. Under excessive emotion, what the name represents may also be distorted in its essence.

"This is a consensus among many alchemists. If we are to create life, we would never name it. With a name comes emotion, and emotion affects our judgment, which is fatal to rational alchemists." Teda said quietly.

"When I was still a student, I heard my teacher mention a similar example. An alchemist created a humanoid flesh creature and named it 'Muli.'

That thing was merely a flesh creation, an experimental subject, a tool. But he regarded it as a family member or friend. Until 'Muli' was driven by hunger and killed many people, he still defended 'Muli,' saying it was just a bit hungry and usually didn't act like that... We all actually knew that the experimental subject had lost control."

Bologue nodded in agreement. Teda might be driven by enthusiasm, but he still maintained rationality. Should I say that it's fitting for the former minister? Even after creating such a perfect individual, he restrains himself.

"But... Aimou, what about this name?" Bologue asked.

"She gave herself this name, that's right, a cold individual thinks she needs a name to represent herself."

Mentioning this, Teda became interested, his tone both amazed and fearful.

"It was a day worth remembering for life. She suddenly told me she needed a name, and upon knowing I couldn't grant her one, she gave herself a name."

"The awakening of individual consciousness?" Bologue said.

"From that day on, she had self-awareness. This marked a breakthrough in my research, but I also felt uneasy and fearful."

"A non-human individual gained self-awareness and wisdom."

Bologue thought of the symbol of the Sublimation Furnace Core. He knew the icons within the Order Bureau all had their meanings, representing the chains and six swords in the bureau, referring to the six major families at the time of its founding and the extremes they reached within the Six Secret Energy Schools.

The entwined fruit snake representing the Sublimation Furnace Core symbolized human greed and craving for wisdom and truth.

"In the story, God created humans and let them live in a paradise on earth until one day, humans, tempted by a poisonous snake, ate the fruit of wisdom," Bologue mumbled, feeling the same unease as Teda.

Now all of this is so similar to the story in the book. Teda created the alchemy puppet, and she craved the fruit of wisdom, giving herself a name.

What comes next?

Bologue didn't continue to ponder. This matter should be left for Teda to worry about. He soon thought of another matter.

Ether surged, and a cold sensation came from his arm as a delicate Silver Snake crawled out from Bologue's sleeve. Under his control, it moved vividly, as if possessing real life, even flicking its tongue towards Teda.

"Belli said it was made by her junior sister. Is she also here?" Bologue asked.

Bologue's understanding of Alchemy was only at the introductory level, but he also knew how much talent it required to create such a stable aberration product.

"Hmm? Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, huh?"

Teda immediately recognized the Silver Snake, then a more confident smile appeared on his face.

"Haven't you already met her?"

"What?"

Just as Bologue was puzzled, footsteps approached. Aimou walked over with snacks and tea, placing them on a small table to the side.

She took off the cloak and gloves that covered her body. Inside the alchemy workshop, there was nothing to hide.

Aimou wore simple clothes, her exposed skin having a translucent gel-like texture that both simulated human skin and faintly showed an iron skeletal structure beneath, with shimmering light flickering above.

There were tiny gaps at her joints, faint mechanical sounds could be heard, and from time to time, the glow of ether flickered through the gaps.

It was this moment that Bologue truly saw Aimou. Only her lower legs and forearms were covered with Iron-Repelling Paint; ethereal light emanated from beneath her prominent chest, with vast ether swirling within.

The perpetual core consistently and steadily emitted ether, spreading to every corner of Aimou's body, keeping her in operation.

This was a scene Bologue could hardly describe.

The cold Steel Body, to some extent, seemed even more human than humans. She stretched her body slightly and elegantly served tea to Bologue and Teda.

Aimou had browsed and memorized such etiquette knowledge from books, her posture as standard as if she had undergone special training. While pouring tea, she didn't forget to wink at Bologue, the halo in her eyes rippling with waves.

Due to technical limitations, Aimou's expressions were somewhat stiff and rigid. Yet, the moment of eye contact, Bologue always felt like this fellow was mischievously smiling.

"Aimou is now considered my student," Teda said, gazing at Aimou with appreciation, "She is the most talented and promising student I've encountered."

Aimou didn't say a word. She stood behind Teda, her azure eyes with rhythmically rotating, radiant halos.

Bologue observed all this, with many words swirling in his heart, but he knew saying them now would be futile.

After calming down, Bologue placed himself in an absolutely indifferent observer's angle.

He could see the hidden things in Teda's eyes. Teda believed he maintained rationality, but clearly, he had already fallen into the whirlpool.

Chapter 222: Red Net

Oubos, Undying Club.

The Undying Club remains the same, with music playing non-stop and alcohol flowing endlessly. A recent change is that Serey is out every night, seemingly having a great time with those women, and he usually returns only at dawn.

As an alchemy puppet, Aimou is like a delicate clock, a slight bump will cause it to stop ticking. Dive into more tales on

"So what do you think of Aimou, that alchemy puppet?" Bologue asked again.

"No, I'm just thinking about some things."

After a long period of adjustment, Bode was never able to beat Sai Zong into submission, but instead, Sai Zong wore down all his resistance.

Bologue's headache worsened, feeling as if he had entered a vortex, unable to see the whole picture.

Bologue recalled the scene when he first learned about the Condenser Tier, his gaze resting on the last sheet of paper, on it was written the name of the Tyrant.

Returning to his familiar home, Bologue wrote about meeting Aimou in his diary. Due to time constraints, Bologue and Palmer didn't stay long at Teda's place, just greeted casually, got a general understanding of the situation, and then left.

Ghostly blue flames flickered in its hollow eye sockets, and a whistling sound came from the skeletal head.

According to Serey, Bode and Sai Zong had a pretty good relationship. The main reason was that ever since Sai Zong decided to act like a dog decades ago, he faithfully practiced canine behavior, often gnawing on Bode's leg bone.

Even though Adelle's incident was over, Bologue hadn't taken these things down. After thinking for a while, he got up and started taking them down one by one, tearing off the paper, writing down name after name, then pinning them back on the wall.

Palmer seemed carefree but was actually incredibly meticulous. As a former intelligence officer, he was adept at finding fatal details amid the chaos.

Watching Palmer's expression, Bologue couldn't help but smile, thinking Palmer guessed right.

This was the strategy Bologue and Palmer had devised together. In operations, Bologue's cold demeanor often raised the enemy's alertness, so in such situations, Bologue distracted all attention while Palmer acted.

Once obtaining this list, it would undoubtedly provide great convenience for Bologue's actions within the Wandering Crossroad, revealing the opponent's identity, secret school, and nature all at once.

He quickly glanced at the phone, the ringing continued, his expression growing more serious.

"I know, don't rush, let's take it slow," Bologue said, standing up and picking up his coat, "Are you going to keep drinking?"

"What do you think, if all the stories were true and God truly existed, would He regret creating humans?"

Bologue had never seen that scene, but somehow, he could sense it from Teda's emotions as if it were an intuition.

Yes, sometimes it doesn't require a tangible price to pay, acting as a Deputy for the Devils, in a certain sense, is a price in itself.

"This means that even without Teda's help, Aimou can evolve on her own, she will transform metals herself, adding more powerful strength to her body, implanting more and more complex alchemy matrices."

"What are you talking about?" Palmer looked at Bologue, puzzled at why he suddenly mentioned this. "I remember you didn't really believe in God or anything."

"Sai Zong, that damn dead dog, did he finally go crazy after living too long?" The bartender kept grumbling.

Bode's taste in music was different from Serey's. Serey liked sharp, passionate dance tracks as they facilitated his pole dancing; Bode preferred quiet melodies, and the peaceful tunes mingled with the alcohol, making people feel quite comfortable and relaxed.

While Bologue was communicating with Teda, Palmer had already roughly checked out the Alchemy Workshop, as if a beast inspecting its territory.

Recalling his stormy night pursuit, the Tyrant did not ask anything from him... perhaps he had already paid the price? For instance, the Tyrant might not have wanted that train to leave Opus either.

The Silver Snake coiled around Bologue's body, crawling slowly in sync with his thoughts, its silver scales expanding and contracting, until a sudden ringing pulled Bologue out of his deep thought.

Ever since answering the Tyrant's call, Bologue felt an uneasy reverence towards unfamiliar calls, fearing one day he might hear the Tyrant's voice, something truly unnerving.

After Serey went out to have fun, Bode took over Serey's position. While Bode was busy, he cursed at Sai Zong, who was biting Bode's shinbone, scraping it with his teeth and leaving a trail of saliva.

A skeleton was mixing drinks for the two of them... though it couldn't be said to be a complete skeleton, as it was wearing a leather jacket and had a cowboy hat perched on its head.

Bologue squinted his eyes, and no one knew what he was thinking. Then he asked, "Palmer, what do you think about Teda's place?"

However, after gaining self-awareness, Aimou demonstrated an extraordinary talent for alchemy, which Teda seemed to have anticipated. As for why, he didn't explain to Bologue.

A sudden chill enveloped his heart, making Bologue feel as if everyone within the Great Rift was a pawn under the Tyrant's control.

"Moreover... you might like this part too, expert? Or should I say Mr. Assassin." Palmer winked at Bologue.

Raising his head and looking at the busy figure behind the bar, Bologue thought he had gotten used to everything about the Undying Club. But clearly, even he needed some time to accept new things.

"Is that why she covers her limbs with Iron-Repelling Paint? It's not just for protection, it will also be her means of attack, but that's about it." Bologue realized.

"Bologue, why do you look so worried? It's the weekend, cheer up!"

But even such a short meeting gave Bologue enough intel. Closing the diary, putting down the pen, whenever Bologue closed his eyes, he saw Aimou's figure, feeling driven by intuition, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was hidden beneath that steel body.

"Perfectly crafted, with self-awareness, her body is covered in multiple alchemy matrices, and did you notice her chest? That should be her core, the Ether fluctuation is very stable, and this newfound self-awareness can further learn alchemy... do you know what that means?" Palmer put down his glass, his tone turning serious.

The Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid is Aimou's work, an alchemy puppet created this Corruption Black Level alchemy armament. Although it has various flaws, and it couldn't be considered an alchemy armament without Bologue, it is indeed a Corruption Black Level alchemy armament, this point is undeniable.

"The most important thing is the Alchemy Matrix implantation platform, which matches the information we got before. After leaving the Order Bureau, Teda's primary economic source is helping others implant the Alchemy Matrix. Other than that, there's nothing unusual. Teda was telling the truth; he did cross the line, but not by much."

The fugitive King's Secret Sword, the far-traveling Gray Trade Association, life's researcher Teda, the alchemy puppet Aimou... the Wandering Crossroad's master, the Tyrant.

In daily life, Teda strived rationally to view Aimou as a tool, but when teaching her alchemy, he treated her as a real student...

After a while of busyness, Bologue slowly retreated, sitting back on the bed, gazing at the wall.

Bologue fended off Palmer's inquiries. Every time he came here, only Palmer would drink until drunk, while Bologue would usually just sip a little.

Bologue always felt that Palmer was a hidden tough character, but unfortunately, his "Blessing" was ridiculously weak.

Bologue shared his speculation, as the Silver Snake in his hand raised its head to meet Palmer's gaze.

Actually, Teda's statement of "don't name tools" was quite understandable—simply put, it was about not treating Aimou as human.

Palmer sat next to Bologue. After returning from Teda's Alchemy Workshop, they headed straight here to celebrate the weekend break.

"Not bad, fully equipped and protected by the Void Realm, quite impressive."

So strange...

At the top of the wall was a sheet marked with "Great Rift," from which two red lines extended, connecting the Wandering Crossroad and Qiushang Town, with many pinned papers beneath.

"Fortunately, Aimou doesn't possess any combat abilities, at least not in the short term, just maintaining her own stable operation is already a miracle." Palmer added.

"Who knows? Teda holds significant influence within the Wandering Crossroad, after all, if you want to implant alchemy matrices, he's the one to see; no one would dare touch Aimou," Palmer weighed pros and cons, "Operating under Teda's name is much more reliable than under the Order Bureau."

Bologue raised his hand, and a silver snake slithered across his fingertips.

Moreover, Bologue's circle of friends was small, very few knew his number, who would call him at this time?

"Hangovers are not good for the body," Bologue said, waving at Palmer, "See you Monday, Palmer."

Bologue sat at the bar, looking questioningly at the guy behind the bar. With Serey gone, someone had to handle the drinks, and the snoring Wei'Er beside him was clearly not up to the task, as this guy was only good at knocking over glasses.

After contacting Teda, the point most beneficial to them is that Bologue might try to get the list from him in subsequent dealings, the list of people implanted with alchemy matrices by Teda.

"Ah? Is it over already?" Palmer exclaimed.

"This world is like a chessboard..."

...

Bologue liked to think in such an atmosphere, and what he was pondering was still about Teda and Aimou.

Very strange, their relationship seemed far more complex than it appeared. Fortunately, Bologue would be stationed there from now on, giving him plenty of time to uncover everything.

Bologue turned to look at the wall, covered in photographs, clipped newspaper articles, and document materials, all connected by countless red strings and pushpins, the photos marked with red crosses.

"Yeah, but what if?"

"Teda won't easily release these things, he knows very well that once the list is leaked, he will first become the target of all." Palmer said.

Bologue walked over, answered the phone, and a familiar voice greeted him.

Chapter 223: Start Key

"Hey! Bologue, you should have gone to see the teacher today, right?"

The familiar voice sounded, but if possible, Bologue really didn't want to feel this voice was familiar.

"Yeah, I went."

Bologue wasn't surprised that Belli got his phone number; he thought Belli might even know where he lived, but was too busy with work to visit him in person.

"How do you feel? You know what I mean, as someone who considers himself an expert, it shouldn't be hard for you to notice these things." Belli put away the smile and asked seriously.

"Are you referring to Aimou and Teda? I can only say that the situation feels a bit off."

Bologue held the phone with his head down and sat on the sofa, recalling the day's events.

"Teda believes he is still rational, restraining himself from investing too much emotion in Aimou, viewing her as his creation, yet he is teaching Aimou alchemy. While teaching, he should have great difficulty controlling this; he is deeply entrenched in it, unable to realize."

Some things can only be seen clearly from an outside perspective, while those caught in the vortex always lose their direction, unclear on where to head.

"I guess you're using me again; Teda's alchemy workshop is indeed suitable as a base, but more so, it's your personal interest. You want me to monitor Teda, don't you?" Bologue asked.

"It's a win-win, okay," Belli said righteously, "He's my teacher, there's nothing wrong with a student being concerned about a teacher's mental state, right?"

"Moreover, even if I don't recommend you go, Teda will eventually call you.

Remember Teda's current relationship with the Order Bureau? He has indeed left the Order Bureau, but not completely; explaining this is a bit difficult. In short, under the constraints of the agreement, the

Order Bureau somewhat permits his research, and if necessary, Teda will also assist us as technical support."

"Just like when he implanted the Alchemy Matrix for me, right?" Bologue said.

"Correct."

"He violated ethical codes and can no longer stay within the Order Bureau, yet after expelling him, he continues research under your monitoring and tacit approval," Bologue remarked, "It sounds like a word game, I thought we would strictly adhere to the codes."

"Strictly adhering to the codes is one aspect, special circumstances are another," Belli repeated that phrase again, "Sometimes, codes must make way for geniuses."

"Because Teda did indeed produce results, correct?" Bologue asked.

"Not just that; other than the nature of his research, he has not violated any ethical codes, and this has made us much more lenient toward him."

Belli explained these principles in a way Bologue could understand.

"Many alchemists yearn to create new life; they opt to create based on human-like flesh because it's the form we are most familiar with, and such research inevitably involves many human experiments and the plunder of Philosopher's Stones..."

"Teda created something with machinery as the basis, a... robot?" Bologue heard Teda's difference.

"You know, Bologue, modern alchemy already enables this; fully creating a human-like shell is possible, though it requires enormous expense, but it is not impossible," Belli suddenly said.

"Yet the problem is, what we create is merely a flesh shell, you see? Like a machine, a machine is created, needing fuel as power, and more so needing a button, a button that activates it.

We can create a new life shell, extremely perfect, but we don't know what fuel to use, or even find the activation button.

The created flesh shell is incredibly perfect, its heart beats, organs run stably, the brain is complete, yet it cannot move nor respond to any external stimuli; it's... actually just a perfect corpse."

"A soul, you can create the shell, but can't create the soul beneath it."

Bologue interrupted Belli, hitting the nail on the head.

"Yes, few study life because most research has reached its end; we can create perfect shells but cannot create new souls, yet Teda achieved it, Aimou developed self-awareness and moved.

Can you understand my thinking?"

Bologue was silent for a while before his voice slowly emerged.

"Teda violated ethical codes, yet if merely violating codes could push technology forward, the Order Bureau would gladly bear such a price."

This result didn't surprise Bologue; just as he considered himself an antagonist, the Order Bureau wasn't entirely upright. From the moment Nesanel chose him, a debtor, to join the Special Operations Group and deal with the Devil, Bologue clearly realized all this.

Everyone exists in a dim grayness, constantly battling between light and darkness.

"Yes, and this is why we don't completely oppose the Order of Truth; these fanatical believers, though unpleasant, sometimes are exactly those crazies propelling the world forward." Belli's voice was cold.

"The teacher and I, we're alike in our dedication to you, but unlike me, the teacher is even more fervent, spending nearly all his time researching the Power of Dominator before leaving the Order Bureau. Even if you don't go to him, he will come to you.

I guess when you went today, he must have asked you something, like letting him study the power within you."

Belli guessed correctly, this madwoman seemed to have foreseen everything that would happen, which is why she lured herself over, and now she is alerting herself again. Indeed, there is not a single simple person among those who become ministers.

"Why, Belli?"

Bologue suddenly asked, and as Belli narrated, the doubts in his heart grew stronger and almost burst forth.

"Previously, Teda was obsessed with researching the Power of Dominator, but what drove him to abandon these studies and turn to researching life?

Or were the two studies actually conducted simultaneously, but the research on life was exposed, forcing him to leave the Order Bureau and give up studying Xilin's Alchemy Matrix... but what is the connection between these two things?"

Bologue keenly grasped the doubts and struck at Belli.

There was no response on the other end of the phone, while Bologue continued his meditation. He was a person with a very good memory, having clearly recounted almost every day of his life during his time in the Black Prison, even without writing a diary, these events were still engraved in his mind.

"Did it happen during the secret war, right?"

Bologue recalled Belli's words, trying hard to piece together the full picture from snippets.

"For that student who died due to Overlord Xilin, your junior sister, his... daughter?"

Facing Bologue's skeptical questioning, Belli didn't deny his words. She knew early on that as Bologue delved deeper, these things couldn't be hidden from him, but she never imagined this expert would figure out everything so quickly.

"Alice Yazhede."

Belli mentioned the name that had been forgotten.

"She was my junior sister, the teacher's daughter. That day was supposed to be her implantation ceremony, the day she became a Condenser. But it was also the day Overlord Xilin invaded the 'Cultivation Room'. We were Condensers, capable of some resistance, but she was just an ordinary person, defenselessly dying under the summons of power."

Belli's voice lost all vitality, seemingly mentioning these memories drained all her energy.

"After that, the teacher grew much older, and became silent. As for Alice, there was no funeral, no mourning, she seemed to have been deliberately forgotten."

For the sake of the teacher's feelings, we pretended as if nothing happened, and never mentioned these again, until the teacher's research was exposed. He didn't bury Alice but instead condensed her soul into a Philosopher's Stone, avoiding the soul's Fade Away, and the body was sealed..."

"He wasn't trying to create new life; he was trying to resurrect his daughter." Bologue whispered, realizing this was Teda's true aim.

"Yes, fortunately, the Devil can't change the past and couldn't resurrect Alice, otherwise I think the teacher would have already made a deal with the Devil."

Belli understood the laws of the Devils, even such powerful entities still couldn't alter the events that had occurred.

But this statement touched Bologue, and he questioned Belli.

"Have you been to the Wandering Crossroad?"

"I've been a few times, but it's almost as if I haven't." .

Every time Belli went out, multiple Condensers would escort her, some knowing they were protecting the minister's personal safety, others thinking they were pursuing her.

"For us researchers, we basically stay cowering within the Sublimation Furnace Core, the outside world is still too dangerous for us," Belli said.

Every Alchemist within the Sublimation Furnace Core is an important asset of the Order Bureau.

"Alright, I understand." Bologue replied.

The existence of the Tyrant seemed to be a secret to many, even Belli did not know all of this, which increased Nesanel's mysteriousness even further, as this deputy director seemed to understand everything, making one imagine what kind of demeanor the director must have.

"That's roughly the case. We're mutually beneficial here, please keep an eye on the teacher, don't let him do anything crazy." Belli said.

"I thought you wanted me to eliminate Teda if necessary."

"How could that be, I still care about the teacher very much, after all, he led me on this path."

Belli's tone was sincere, differing from her outward expression. Perhaps she truly is someone who respects her teacher, but in the next moment, her tone shifted.

"Mainly because you wouldn't be able to kill the teacher either. Although he's an Alchemist not skilled in combat, he's still a Third Stage Negative Power User. You've never seen pure Illusion Creation; this power can create unreal that doesn't belong to reality and also create madness beyond rationality." Belli warned.

"Alright, I got it."

Bologue hung up the phone, sat on the sofa and thought for a while, then returned to his room, staring at the information web on the wall.

Soon, Bologue lifted the thread, connecting the Tyrant with Teda, and in an instant, a crimson net enveloped everyone.

Chapter 224: Dream

Wandering paths, Teda's Alchemy Workshop.

Aimou sat on a strangely designed lounge chair, surrounded by several mechanical arms, with various pipes crisscrossing around, and different tools hanging on the wall behind, easily within reach.

"Are they going to be stationed here permanently?"

Aimou pulled down the overhead mirror so it could perfectly reflect her body, then she laid back, rolling up her shirt to near her armpits, where there was a socket, and connected the lines lying beside into the socket. A bluish glow swept across Aimou's body.

"Pretty much, it's a deal. They need a foothold, and I need Bologue's Alchemy Matrix."

Teda walked by, frowning as he looked at the documents in his hand, holding a cup of coffee in the other hand, he sat on a chair beside.

"Is this okay?"

Aimou's voice lowered.

As the lines connected, Ether was released from her body, transmitted to the mechanical arms. She laid completely flat, the mechanical arms starting up as if to embrace her tightly on the lounge chair. Thin, pointed ends emerged from disjointed mechanical structures, gently prying open her seemingly gel-like shell.

She looked through the mirror above at herself on the repair table, using Ether to control the mechanical arms, performing maintenance on her own body.

As an Alchemy Puppet, Aimou still had many shortcomings. Every so often, maintenance was required. Fortunately, she had learned all of this and could complete these tasks independently without troubling Teda.

Learning, and improving, upgrading herself.

"There's nothing wrong with it. They won't affect my research. Moreover, with Bologue's cooperation, I might uncover the mystery of Overlord Xilin's power."

Teda held an intense purpose, and it was this purpose that kept him alive and drove him into a feverish pursuit of truth.

"Even possibly, we could utilize them, let them deal with those merchants," Teda contemplated, "I'm not suitable to directly acquire those things, and you lack self-defense ability. If handed over to Bologue and them..."

Soon, Teda finalized his idea.

"You understand the importance of all this, don't you, Aimou?"

He said as he raised his head to look at Aimou on the repair table, conducting maintenance on herself.

"I understand, it's all for her..."

Perhaps because of the ongoing repair, Aimou's voice was low and devoid of any emotion.

She slowly raised her hand, covering her chest, feeling beneath the metal and composite materials, the beating, powerful heart of steel and Ether, and the crimson shadow hidden within.

"As long as you know." Teda's gaze was somber.

"I will strive for it," Aimou looked at her dismantled self in the mirror, hesitated for a few seconds, and tentatively said, "I will do it, father."

Aimou seemed to utter a taboo phrase, instantly pressing the atmosphere down. For the rare occasion, there was a flicker of anger in Teda's eyes. He put down the file and coffee, his voice heated.

"Aimou, I've said many times!"

"Sorry, it was just subconscious..."

Aimou expressed her apology, but she knew clearly, it was not subconscious but a premeditated probe. Unfortunately, no matter how many times she tested it, the result was always the same.

"I hope there won't be a next time, Aimou," Teda said sternly.

"I understand, teacher."

Clearly, Teda preferred "teacher" over "father." If Bologue were here, he'd know that Teda resists recognizing Aimou as a human individual, avoiding the emotional involvement that intimate relationships bring, yet he declines the kin-based title while accepting the master-apprentice bond.

Perhaps, in Teda's eyes, he can manage the boundaries of a teacher-student relationship, or perhaps for other reasons, but only Teda himself understood all this.

"I'm going to sleep."

Teda picked up the file and coffee, walked into the shadows, ascended the stairs, turned into the corner, and opened a door.

This was Teda's room. Usually during the day, he's busy in front of the workshop, resting only minimally on the chair. Outside of sleeping, he almost never came here; sometimes, he even just slept outside, propped on the table for a night.

As if avoiding something, things Teda was unwilling to face.

Indoor dimness and warm décor, the small table filled with photos. Teda walked to the table, picked up a photo showing Teda under the sunlight, raising a girl high up by her hands.

The girl looked much like Aimou, with similar age, stature, hair color—perhaps even Aimou was created based on the girl in the photo.

Teda's face was shrouded in shadow. He gazed at the photograph for a long time, and finally, he put it down, collapsing back onto the bed without a word, like a dead corpse.

The space of the Alchemy Workshop was large. To support Teda's various research and the setting of the Void Realm, when it was built, Teda hollowed out the cliff's interior, crafting it into a small fortress.

There were several laboratories, various large pieces of equipment, and warehouses. The space was immense, but however immense it was, Teda did not prepare a room for Aimou. More precisely, Aimou did have a room—her room was her maintenance chamber, and the repair table was her bed.

Aimou finished her routine maintenance and lay flat on the bench, staring at herself in the mirror, the halo in her eyes constantly shifting shapes.

Due to technical limitations, Aimou couldn't make complex facial expressions. As a result, when she spoke, it was as if she donned a cold mask. But expressions are an important part of communication among humans, so to be more akin to them and to communicate, Aimou let the halo in her eyes express her emotions.

Just as Bologue had speculated back then, the different forms of the halo represented different emotions inside Aimou... if such things could be considered emotions.

Aimou didn't need to sleep. What was called sleep for her was more like entering a low-power state, slowing down the operation of her "Mind Projection."

Usually, before entering hibernation, Aimou liked to stare at herself in the mirror this way, like some sort of sleeping ritual.

She had read in a book that people could determine if animals had self-awareness by whether they could recognize the existence of the mirror and realize the reflection was themselves.

Every time she saw herself in the mirror and recognized it as herself, Aimou was happy. She knew it was herself, that she was alive and possessed self-awareness.

Like a spell, you whisper it repeatedly, and one day it might come true.

Then... comes dreaming.

Aimou wasn't sure if an existence like hers could dream like humans, nor did she know what human dreams were truly like. No matter how depicted in books, it was still ethereal theory, and her own limitations made it difficult for Aimou to practice any of it.

But... Aimou felt that this must be a dream, a bit different from the dreams described in books, but she thought perhaps it was her very own dream.

The sound of tinkling silvery laughter rang out, and Aimou knew she was here.

Every night she descended like a specter. Aimou did not resist this; on the contrary, she was delighted, for she knew each time she would bring surprises.

Slowly closing her eyes, when Aimou opened them again, everything was as usual. She still lay on the repair table, only this time, in her gaze, her reflection in the mirror was no longer alone.

"Alice..."

Aimou whispered, slowly turning her head, and saw the girl leaning beside her. She had the same face, the same posture.

She smiled at herself, reaching out to gently caress her icy cheek, and said warmly.

"Good evening, Aimou."

Alice's voice was ethereal and sacred. She wore a white dress, and though they were indoors, an invisible breeze lifted her clothing.

She took Aimou's hand, motioning for her to follow, and Aimou willingly followed Alice's steps, holding absolute trust in her.

The two pushed open the Alchemy Workshop's grand doors. This should have triggered the Void Realm's alarms, yet the Void Realm remained silent, as if this truly was Aimou's dreamscape.

Alice led Aimou to the aerial corridor. Leaning over, they looked down as blurry ghostly lights wandered in the Sea of Mist, and from the depths, the winds roared as if a colossal entity was deeply breathing in and out.

"Aimou, I know what you're thinking."

Alice sat on the railing, her white legs swinging.

Aimou wasn't surprised Alice could guess. She said, "Then what do you think of this?"

This was a peculiar scene. No matter how many books Aimou had read, she could not find precise answers, nor did she dare tell Teda. She feared Teda discovering the little thoughts she harbored.

An Alchemy Puppet wasn't supposed to have such thoughts.

"Me? I don't have any opinions. As long as it's what you want," Alice smiled as she looked at Aimou, "after all, I'm already dead. Dead is dead, and there's nothing left."

Aimou placed her hands on the railing, standing beside Alice. The two stood above the mist as if they were sprites emerging from a dense forest.

The halo in her eyes slowly rotated. No one knew what Aimou was pondering, and at this moment, Alice exhorted once more.

"If I really had anything to say..."

She lowered her head and earnestly pleaded with Aimou.

"Please, take good care of him for me."

Chapter 225: Desperate Outpost

Soon, it was November, the weather turned cold, and combined with Opus's gloomy weather, the chilling cold swept through everyone on the streets. The gentle sway of skirts was no more; pedestrians donned thick coats, and some wrapped scarves around their necks.

After visiting Teda, Bologue explained these matters to Lebius, initially thinking Lebius might have doubts about establishing a base at Teda's place, given that Teda was no longer a member of the Order Bureau, even though there was still an agreement connecting them.

Unexpectedly, Lebius didn't give it much thought and agreed to Bologue's decision. Bologue suspected that Belli might have already smoothed things over in advance, though it's unclear how much resources she used to get Lebius to agree.

With Lebius's permission, the base for operations inside the Great Rift was temporarily established for Bologue.

But considering the sudden developments, there were no extra rooms left for the two at Teda's Alchemy Workshop. Teda needed some time to clear out some rooms, so Bologue and Palmer waited a few more days.

The elevator quietly descended, and inside the narrow elevator were only Bologue and Palmer, standing one after the other, quietly waiting for the elevator doors to open.

"Sometimes I feel like this elevator isn't moving at all."

Palmer found it difficult to bear moments of silence. Whenever the atmosphere fell into wordlessness, he would say something, regardless of whether Bologue was willing to engage.

"Are you suggesting that it's the building that's moving?"

Bologue found it hard to envision such a scene; the human brain struggles to compute such bizarre spatial distortions.

"Not quite. You've used the Key of the Crooked Path, so you understand this thing," Palmer raised his hand, sketching something in the air, "opening one door through another."

Even after receiving the elite education at the Clarks and serving within the Order Bureau for a while, Palmer still didn't have much understanding of this mysterious Key of the Crooked Path.

"Do you think the various departments and areas of the Order Bureau aren't actually connected? They're merely linked by something akin to the Key of the Crooked Path?" Bologue followed along with Palmer's description.

"About right, perhaps? After all, the 'Cultivation Room' is still too peculiar; who knows what the deal is with this thing?"

Palmer didn't feel like thinking further; he simply enjoyed the comfort of free-thinking.

While on operations, combat occupied only a small portion of their time; most of it was spent in monotonous patrolling and searching. As time passed, the two began to engage in intermittent idle chatter, resembling a pair of well-coordinated partners.

A slight tremor was felt, and the elevator emitted a "ding," interrupting their conversation. They knew they had arrived.

The elevator doors opened, and the two proceeded along the corridor set atop the high walls, then descended along the suspended steps. The vast underground space gradually came into view.

Like the Courtyard of Curves and Pillar Courtyard, this was also a magnificent central courtyard space. In terms of levels, this was the negative first level of the "Cultivation Room." Bologue knew of its existence, but it was still his first time here.

In the center of the courtyard was a gigantic circular lift platform, with multiple intersecting rails crisscrossing above it. As the platform ascended and rotated, the rails on it connected and misaligned with other rails on the courtyard floor.

The mechanical roar was constant, and gigantic mechanical arms lifted train carriages. From the exterior, these carriages looked almost identical to Opus's subway, but according to the information known to Bologue, these were all armed carriages, with bulletproof steel plates installed within the shell's layers; internally, there were no seats or handrails, but weapons racks and medical kits.

Above the courtyard, one could see the colossal insignia etched onto the high wall, gear mechanisms wrapped in chains and interlocked with each other.

This place belonged to the Logistics Department, considered the core area for the Ferrymen; broadcasts echoed within the vast space. Cargo arms placed carriages on the lift platform's rails, connected to the

engines, rotated onto designated rails, and neat footsteps sounded as a group of Ferrymen rushed into the carriages, the subway starting, and heading into darkness along the tracks.

Deep Nest Courtyard.

Those familiar with this place referred to it as such, connecting to Opus's subway system and adding several secret passages exclusive to the Order Bureau. Armed subways from here could rapidly reach any area in Opus.

However, typically, the most frequent users of this place were not the Field Staff, but those hurrying to clean up troubles for the Field Staff: the Ferrymen.

Thinking of the Ferrymen's disdain for the Field Staff made Bologue feel somewhat ill at ease. Previously, during a meal in the cafeteria, he overheard quiet mutterings—someone was cursing about something.

"These damned Field Staff are getting more and more excessive!"

The meal became increasingly irritating, and the Ferryman simply put down the knife and fork, cursing aloud.

"What's wrong?" asked the friend sitting opposite.

"A while back, that stormy night, I was sleeping when I got woken up for a mission."

"Oh! That night, I remember—apparently, half the Logistics Department was dispatched...what happened?" the friend asked curiously.

"What else? There were bodies everywhere, every site looking like a slaughterhouse; and the countryside, they smashed up a stone bridge...actually can't say smashed, but the bridge's structural integrity was destroyed, making it impossible to bear weight or be traversed, which is as good as destroyed."

He clenched the knife and fork, his voice almost becoming a low growl.

"Insane! The regulations clearly state that operations potentially causing major damage must be reported to the Logistics Department in advance!"

Destruction caused by battles between Condensers in surrounding areas was unavoidable. Usually, once an operation was planned and if there was potential for major destruction, the Field Operations Department would contact the Ferrymen from the Logistics Department.

They would operate together, and after the Field Operations Department completed the task, the Ferrymen would immediately step in to handle the scene. But Bologue's operation that night had not been reported to anyone, and no one expected him to do such a thing; in fact, even Bologue himself hadn't anticipated it.

"We loaded four trucks with just bodies!"

In his complaint, Bologue rarely lowered his head in shame.

Arriving below, Palmer waved to the staff, inquiring about the train schedule.

This time, neither of them had an operation scheduled, hence there was no special train prepared for them in the departure sequence. They were just trying to catch a ride, as every trip to the Great Rift was always a hassle.

First, driving through crowded streets, parking, waiting at red lights; the security around the Great Rift's edge wasn't great. Palmer still had to find a safe place to park to prevent his beloved Leica from being stolen.

Next was trekking on foot, passing through heavy smog, and walking along the steep outer wall... much like exploring Deep Nest.

But leaving from Deep Nest Courtyard was different; here it connected to Opus's subway system, allowing them to take the subway directly to Autumn Town, and from Autumn Town reach Teda's Alchemy Workshop.

"Hey! Bologue! This train."

Palmer shouted to Bologue, indicating for him to follow. Guided by staff, the two boarded a train car, but once inside, they felt something was off.

Unlike their impression filled with weapons and medical kits, this car was loaded with various supplies, from drinking water to food, all kinds of daily necessities, and even a few novels to pass the time. From the titles, one book was called "Night Hunter."

"Did we get on the wrong car?" Palmer was puzzled too, asking Bologue in a low voice.

"You're the one who chose this, why ask me?"

Bologue sat in the corner, the seat was small and very hard. These armed subway cars were utterly lacking in comfort.

The mechanical crane was still working, lifting car after car and attaching them behind, perhaps equally filled with supplies.

Footsteps approached, and the Ferrymen boarded the train. The newcomer glanced at the two, and Palmer timely picked up the badge, with the twisted Rupert's Tear engraved on it.

This was the credential for the Field Operations Department's Special Operations Group. It might not work in other departments, but in the Logistics Department, which had a love-hate relationship with the Field Operations Department, this was very useful. No explanations needed, just show it and they would understand your purpose.

But this time was odd; the newcomer's gaze, initially about to move away, was drawn back to the badge, staring at it for a long time. A familiar feeling surged up, and he rasped.

"It's you two again!"

Bologue and Palmer were stunned, what did "again" mean, what did "it's you two again" imply?

Carefully observing the newcomer, Palmer clearly didn't recognize this guy, but Bologue, being an expert, recalled the man's identity immediately.

"Marion Rod."

Bologue uttered the man's name.

He remembered this guy; when he and Palmer dealt with David, it was this man who brought the Ferrymen to handle the scene. It was then that Bologue realized the Field Operations Department had registered a company named Ferryman to facilitate their operations.

"Oh? You remember me, how heartwarming."

Marion sat beside them, the car full of supplies made the space exceedingly cramped, feeling as if they were sitting in a warehouse.

"You're headed to Autumn Town too? With all these supplies." Bologue asked curiously.

"I don't want to go, but it's a logistics mission."

As Marion spoke, the subway started to move slowly, its speed gradually increasing. It left the Deep Nest Courtyard and plunged into the deep darkness.

In the underground tunnel, the subway sped onward, the car swaying slightly. Among the metallic clatter was the roar of compressed air.

"So many supplies, who are they for?"

Bologue continued to ask, pondering why the Field Operations Department suddenly decided to intervene in the Great Rift, given these massive supplies.

"If we're not supposed to know, just forget it." Bologue added, not wanting to make Marion uncomfortable.

"No worries, we'll be delivering supplies to you in the future anyway, just those working in the Great Rift."

Marion took out a booklet, flipping through it, unsure of what was recorded inside, but it was clear Marion knew Bologue was operating within the Great Rift too.

He reached out and patted the supplies beside him, speaking to Bologue.

"These are supplies for the Fourth Group and the Desperate Outpost."

Chapter 226: The Umbilical Cord Connected to the Aberrant

The subway slowly came to a stop, and the doors opened simultaneously, stirring up a slight breeze. The people waiting on the platform were already prepared, pushing carts to unload cargo from the train.

To avoid trouble, the Logistics Department and ordinary citizens use the same track, but the platforms they stop at are different. The Logistics Department's platforms are hidden throughout the city, with personnel stationed to prevent unauthorized access.

According to Marion, there are often reckless individuals who, driven by the idea of exploring urban legends, venture deep into the tunnels, attempting to find these secret platforms.

Most of them are captured and expelled by the Ferryman. Those who know too much are sent to the Border Sanatorium for minor memory adjustments. Sometimes, the Logistics Department even uses newspaper reports on subway accidents to warn overly curious people that venturing deep into the tunnels is dangerous.

Bologue and Palmer stood on the platform. Amid the bustling crowd, their pace appeared extremely slow.

Along the way, Marion and Bologue chatted. Apparently, this guy holds some crucial position in the Logistics Department, so Marion knew many things that surprised Bologue, such as the events on the stormy night.

"Though it caused us a lot of trouble, you did well."

Marion knew he was responsible for everything. He didn't look pleased, but he praised himself a little nonetheless.

From Marion's account, it was clear that the Logistics Department is also responsible for operating all bases, distributing supplies, regulating resources, handling on-site details, and other tedious matters.

It's fair to say that the Field Staff can operate freely within Opus largely because the Logistics Department cleans up their mess. These people are under great stress, and everyone is extremely irritable, especially when dealing with the Field Staff, with anger almost spilling over.

"The Fourth Group really is mysterious."

Bologue glanced at the goods being transported. Some were covered in black cloth, yet Bologue could still vaguely sense the ether surging beneath. He didn't know what they were, but they were certainly extraordinary items.

Marion didn't discuss the Fourth Group in detail. When Bologue probed with his words, Marion changed the topic.

"Everyone working in the Great Rift, you all will meet eventually."

Marion explained this at the end, as if preparing for some surprise that wasn't yet ready to be revealed.

The two left the station. The station's exit was concealed beneath a building that appeared to be a warehouse, but no one would suspect there was an underground station below.

Out on the street, the scenery was quite similar to Opus, the only difference being the sky was gloomier and heavier. Looking around, immense cliffs surrounded the area, with a long, winding staircase climbing along the cliffs, reaching towards the surface.

Qiushang Town, the convergence of Opus and the Great Rift. Here, order prevails, evident in the armed patrol officers constantly alert to disturbances from the Wandering Crossroad.

"Do you know about the Fourth Group, Palmer?"

The wind here was strong; Bologue lowered his hat to prevent it from being blown away.

"I don't know them, I haven't even seen anyone from the Fourth Group. They seem to have been operating within the Great Rift since their inception."

Palmer shook his head. He knew little about the Fourth Group, which existed only in others' words, let alone the Desperate Outpost.

"The Field Operations Department has many action groups, such as the Sixth Group led by Yas, which is the Violence Suppression Action Group, and the Seventh Group, mixed with the Crow's Nest, responsible for external reconnaissance and infiltration, also known as the Invisible Infiltrators. Then there's the Third Group, formed to handle anomalous Void Realm incidents, known as the Wall-Breaking Blade."

Bologue had heard of these action groups and had greeted a few members at the cafeteria before.

"But I've never seen anyone from the Fourth Group."

Bologue glanced towards the distance. Qiushang Town was surrounded by cliffs on three sides, with this direction unobstructed by cliffs, instead an abyssal rift.

"Interested in considering my previous suggestion? Jumping into the Great Rift from here, maybe there's a group of Fourth Group members waiting to welcome you," Palmer joked.

Bologue shook his head, ignoring his words.

Despite Qiushang Town's terrible geographic location, it wasn't much different from any ordinary small town. Streets lined with various shops, and beyond the towering residential buildings, the spire of a church could be seen in the distance.

Compared to the Wandering Crossroad, this place undoubtedly had a livelier atmosphere.

Yet it was so close to the Wandering Crossroad, bordering this rolling Sea of Mist's enigma.

Bologue had a strange feeling that order and disorder, reason and madness, were layered together and maintained in a delicate balance, just waiting for someone to ignite the fuse.

His gaze inconspicuously swept across the crowd, and suddenly that eerie sensation surged through him. The last time Bologue felt this, it was through Nesanel's books.

Unlike the initial panic, Bologue quickly adapted to this strange sensation, as if a pair of cold, clammy hands were caressing the back of his neck, with low whispers carried by the wind.

Bologue couldn't tell if it was a warning or a revelation, but he was sure that something was happening, and he was right in the middle of it.

As the Devil's deputy, Bologue could see what ordinary people couldn't, feel what they couldn't, and that was his connection with the Devil, like the umbilical cord between a child and its mother.

His green eyes slightly trembled as Bologue spotted that unfamiliar yet uncannily familiar figure in the crowd, moving away from him.

Palmer took two steps forward before realizing Bologue hadn't followed. He turned back only to see Bologue standing there, dazed.

"What's wrong?"

Palmer walked over, following Bologue's line of sight, but all he could see was the gloomy street.

"Palmer, have you ever felt like that?" Bologue suddenly started walking toward the crowd, "As if it's some kind of revelation, or maybe an epiphany... In short, you feel a familiar sensation from nowhere, and it confuses you."

"No, never." Palmer followed Bologue's pace.

"Then it seems your Devil doesn't cherish you much, even the umbilical cord between you two is so weak. I can't tell if you're lucky or just unlucky."

With that, Bologue started running, sprinting towards the figure that was almost disappearing from sight.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Palmer called out in shock.

He knew his partner could be a bit neurotic, but this reaction was just too much. Bologue was like a stray dog wandering the streets, suddenly seeing a bird and charging right at it without a care.

Bologue was a cautious person. Even before he became a Condenser, he used to enjoy wandering by car in Opus, strolling the streets, and lingering in dark alleys.

He never wore cologne, as it would affect his sense of smell. During his days hunting Demons, Bologue would often discover some Demons hidden among people by wandering around, just like the Demon he beheaded, codenamed "Poison Fang."

At that time, the guy was having lunch in a restaurant, and Bologue happened to walk in. The delicious food couldn't mask the unique putrid odor on the Demon.

After a brief assessment, Bologue identified Poison Fang, then sat down at his table. Poison Fang appeared very wary of him, clearly reluctant about sharing the table, wanting to leave quickly to avoid complications, but he underestimated the expert's efficiency.

When lunch arrived, Bologue grabbed a table knife without warning and stabbed it through Poison Fang's eye socket. Even as a Demon, Poison Fang couldn't have expected someone to attack in broad daylight, but Bologue didn't care about such matters.

Amidst the blood and screams, Bologue picked up a plate, bracing it against the knife's handle, and with a single punch, drove the knife completely into Poison Fang's skull.

Thus, such a troublesome and cautious Demon died at Bologue's hand. In fact, it wasn't until Geoffrey yelled at Bologue later that he learned the Demon's codename was Poison Fang, that cunning serial killer.

Efficient and deadly, apart from causing a bit of panic and losing a lunch, the expert removed the danger with professional skill, protecting the citizens' safety.

Bologue ran through the crowd, feeling no difference with his past Demon hunts, only that the guide had changed from the Demon's putrid smell to this strange umbilical cord.

He still remembered his mission; Debtors were born to work for the Devil. Bologue didn't want to work for those guys, but sometimes he had to in order to uncover the Devil's true face.

Even so, Bologue enjoyed it quite a bit, eager to see what the world through the Devil's eyes looked like, like unraveling all the mysteries from a detective novel.

The figure vanished into the alley, but Bologue had no intention to stop. He reached into his coat, gripping the hammer handle, which was different from an ordinary Sheep Horn Hammer. This was the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer specifically made for him by Belli at his request.

With this hammer, Bologue was confident he could smash the enemy into a bloody pulp.

Palmer struggled to keep up with Bologue. He had no idea what was happening, but he observed all of Bologue's small actions.

In Palmer's view, there were only two types of people who would slyly ruffle their coats like that: either a second-hand peddler selling prohibited items, or a killer like Bologue who always hides a weapon underneath his coat.

"Expert, your efficiency is just too high,"

Palmer murmured a complaint, then pulled a black mask from his pocket and put it on his head, following Bologue's steps and rushing into the alley.

During this time in the Great Rift's operations, Palmer gradually got used to Bologue's reactions. He remembered a while back when the two were wandering through the wandering crossroads, Bologue suddenly stopped, sniffed the air like a hound, then decisively swung the hammer to smash open the wall.

Behind the wall was a group of Demons surrounding an unlucky soul, with a pattern of the Condensation Ceremony drawn on the ground, preparing to feast on the unfortunate soul's spirit.

Palmer was very familiar with the subsequent plot. Like an orthopedic doctor, Bologue treated the Demons' Bulimia Nervosa. His diagnosis result was euthanasia.

Palmer gradually came to trust the expert's intuition. Bologue was like the brain of the team. All he needed to do was follow orders and loyally execute them.

The two raced through the twisted alleys, like a dark maze, the heavy scent of blood surged from its depths, expanding with the howling wind, the tang of blood grew thicker.

Chapter 227: The Order Bureau at Work!

Since the day Qiushang Town fell, Bane has been living there. As a priest, he struggled to maintain the town's only church. People advised him to leave this troubled place, but he couldn't bring himself to go. Bane thought it was precisely because this place had fallen into darkness that it needed the light of God even more.

Bane believed he could bring a glimmer of hope to this small town, but what was happening before his eyes was gradually breaking his sanity.

All the doors and windows of the church were sealed shut, and for days, it had stopped receiving any believers. Inside the church, all the chairs were overturned and piled into a corner, clearing a large area.

Underneath the painted glass, bodies lay in the center under the gaze of the statues. People dressed in robes bent over, drawing blood from the corpses and using it to draw a massive ritual array pattern.

The floors, walls, windows, and even these people themselves were marked with strange lines drawn in blood, distorting the entire space into a bizarre and grotesque sight.

Bane was bound hand and foot, trembling in a corner, witnessing the priests, one after another, being dragged away.

Bane's face was pale, he knew very well that he was alive not because of the cultists' benevolence. He had read about such situations in books; the cultists were arranging some evil ritual, and they kept him alive because they needed a living sacrifice.

"God... if you truly exist, why haven't you delivered divine judgment yet?"

Bane cried silently, praying softly.

The cultists seemed to have heard Bane's prayers, letting out strange laughter like some mutated birds, mocking him openly.

As the ritual array was gradually completed, the bloody oppressive feeling within the church intensified. The air turned dark and hazy, as if some invisible entity was wriggling in the air.

It existed in another world, but now it had been summoned by the cultists, nearly breaking through the barrier to descend here.

Blood oozed from the walls, the floor, glass, and everything smeared with blood, all seeping blood. The intense cognitive distortion affected Bane, who looked at the golden statues that shed bloody tears, the very things he had served day and night, yet he could no longer name what they were.

Bane knew there was no hope left.

Footsteps echoed as someone emerged from the cellar, Bane struggled to turn his head, barely seeing the person's appearance.

He wore a black robe and a white doll mask on his face; amidst this bloody hell, the white on his face was strikingly glaring.

"So, Delusional, our deal is done."

Another man walked out of the cellar, extending his hand to the Delusional. The Delusional hesitated for a moment but still reached out his hand.

The man scrutinized the figure before him, trying to see through any flaws, but the Delusional was completely wrapped up. Even the hand he extended wore gloves.

"Those alchemy equipment will play a significant role. I hope you won't disappoint me." A cold voice sounded from beneath the mask.

"Indeed, we've never spared those cultists from the Gray Trade Association. Especially since they stole our holy relic and even dared to sell it."

The man gritted his teeth, in the eyes of this mad cultist, the merchants of the Gray Trade Association were also labeled as cultists, as if these merchants too followed something.

"Are you not afraid? The Gray Trade Association is under the protection of their deity." The Delusional was curious about the man's courage.

"But beneath our feet, our chosen, most powerful warrior is quietly resting."

The man's voice carried a hint of fanaticism, his eyes tinted with crimson.

"Oh? Is this your true purpose?" The Delusional seemed to have discerned something.

"Do you know what's beneath here?"

Noticing the Delusional's reaction, the man was somewhat surprised. This guy before him knew more than expected, which prompted him to be more vigilant.

"Whatever, it has nothing to do with me. I just want to get what I want... and the truth of the intelligence."

The Delusional had no intention of getting caught up in these madmen's disputes.

Upon hearing this, the man laughed heartily, while another cultist approached carrying a briefcase.

The man took the briefcase and then handed it over to the Delusional.

"This is what you deserve, the Elixir of Immortality, personally refined by me."

"Oh? It's personally refined by the Crimson Bishop? That's really valuable." His words sound terrified, yet the Delusional's tone remains cold, lacking any trace of reverence.

"And the intelligence you want," as the transaction drew to a close, Crimson Bishop Latis's voice became low, "it's true, all those rumors are true."

"The merchants have found a piece of the eldritch fruit and want to offer it to the Great Tyrant."

This brief sentence stirred a tempest within the Delusional's heart, but fortunately, the mask concealed all his expressions, not a single emotion leaked out.

Turning his head, the Delusional looked at the blood-stained church. The cultists had already dragged Bane out from the corner, placing him among the pile of corpses, preparing for the final ritual.

"Want to see for yourself? How we extract the Elixir of Immortality." Latis asked.

"Calling upon the Devil and then trading with it... or perhaps sacrificing, nothing significant."

The Delusional wasn't interested, he held the briefcase and prepared to leave. But as he reached the door, he paused and warned Latis.

"The Order Bureau has reached into the Great Rift, and now there are two Field Staff active within it."

"So what?" Latis responded indifferently.

"They are Debtors, one of them has an extremely strong connection with the Devil, meaning the disturbance caused by your summoning will surely catch his attention."

The Delusional pushed the door open to leave, his voice slowly echoed back, hitting Latis's eardrums.

"They might already be on their way."

Latis furrowed his brow, then ordered the others.

"End the ritual quickly."

The other Cultists nodded in agreement and quickened their arrangements. Amidst a sharp scream, a Dagger pierced through Bane's palm, nailing him to the ground like a Saint, ignoring his pleas and cries for mercy.

"Belli, you're in charge here. I'm going to inspect the other rituals, we must quickly extract enough Elixir of Immortality."

Latis instructed one of the Cultists, and Belli nodded, drew the Short Knife from his waist, and moved towards the center of the ritual, preparing for the final blood sacrifice.

Everything proceeded in an orderly fashion, the air thickened with an increasingly intense pungent smell, as if a sea of blood was surging.

Latis, seeing this, also pushed open a door, heading towards another ritual location. As the door closed, the cathedral was sealed off once more.

In the design of Alchemy towards the Void Realm, terms like closure and internal cycle are common. Each Void Realm is absolutely closed, with power circulating endlessly within.

As the Cultists smeared blood on the walls and the floor, it was actually an Alchemy Matrix, incomprehensible to humans, exclusive to the Devil's power. The blood stains formed a bizarre Void Realm, calling out loudly.

Mad whispers echoed in Bane's ears, his eyes widened, for a moment he felt detached from reality, as if the cathedral was peeled into a mad Hell.

Amidst painful gasps, he saw it.

Something shadowy squirmed in the air, slowly rotating, until the next moment a dense, complex mirrored surface appeared before him, reflecting his image into countless shattered forms.

This... this was no mirror, no one explained it to Bane, but his mind bizarrely acquired knowledge about it. He understood, it was a gigantic, insect-like compound eye.

It was watching him.

"Fresh blood and fresh flesh!"

"Intact bones and complete brains!"

Belli stepped forward and spoke with deep affection to the illusory compound eye, then raised the Short Knife in his hand.

Tears filled Bane's eyes as he prayed incessantly alongside Belli's invocation, praying for the deities to rescue him, but there was no response, nothing at all.

Bane's steadfast faith began to waver, filled with cracks, but it no longer mattered now, for he was about to die.

"We offer all of this to you!"

Belli sang, his expression extremely fervent.

"Great one..."

He loudly recited the forbidden name, making the squirming, illusory compound eye seem more real, as if when Belli uttered its name, it would truly descend here.

But Belli couldn't say it.

A piercing shattering sound disrupted everyone's thoughts, behind the blood-stained idol, colored glass shattered into countless pieces, breaking the cathedral's "closure," the illusory compound eye blurred and almost completely dissipated.

Bane watched all this, the glass shards reflecting his image, in a trance as if God really responded to him, sending the Angel of the Fire Sword.

Bologue landed abruptly, the Face of Horror erupted, engulfing nearby Cultists in a swell of fear, leaving them stunned, unable to react.

Bologue then drew the shotgun from his waist, firing at the nearest Cultists, the heavy rain of bullets pinned them against the wall, leaving large blood stains and dense bullet holes.

Palmer, wearing a black hood, followed closely, continuously pulling the trigger, shouting excitedly.

"Order Bureau business! Those who don't want to die, get out of the way!"

Chapter 228: Raid

Most of the time, Bologue feels that his hunting style should be cold and oppressive, but ever since Palmer joined in, the tone has been quite off.

That guy seems very keen on playing the role of a bandit, with lines and actions so standard that Bologue suspects Palmer might have received training somewhere.

But none of that matters now. The battle erupted in an instant, the short-barreled shotgun suppressing the cultists with its firepower, pellets smashing into walls, floors, flesh, piercing and grinding through everything in their path.

Soon Bologue ran out of bullets, but he managed to gain time for fire suppression. While firing, he swiftly approached the cultists and then swung the heavy hammer.

The sheep horn shock hammer smashed onto the chest of one cultist, a dim glimmer flickering across the hammer's surface. In the next moment, the entire chest collapsed completely, bones shattered, and blood and flesh were hammered into pulp.

The corpse collapsed powerlessly, yet more cultists charged forward, wielding ritual short knives, their eyes blood-red, vowing to kill Bologue, the disruptor of their ritual.

Bologue immediately threw the short-barreled shotgun in his hand like tossing a brick, it hit the first cultist's body, slowing his actions for just a moment.

In that moment of hesitation, Bologue swung the sheep horn shock hammer in his hand with force, striking his jaw from below like a fierce uppercut, instantly shattering his head into a cloud of blood mist, dense droplets splattering across the wall.

But this was not the end. Bologue stepped forward, delivering a straight kick to the headless body's abdomen, the body leaned backwards, blocking the path of other cultists. Immediately after, Bologue flipped out a short knife, piercing through the heart of the headless body.

Gripping the short knife, Bologue pushed against the corpse and ran, the short knife further pierced through the cultist behind the corpse. He wailed, swung the ritual knife chaotically, but there was still a corpse between him and Bologue. The swing couldn't reach Bologue until Bologue pinned him against the wall.

With one hand gripping the short knife, Bologue made a fist with the other hand, hammering the handle like driving a nail, slowly pinning the short knife into the wall, and the cultist was thoroughly nailed to the wall.

Scattered gunshots rang out as Palmer fired rhythmically, and those cultists close to Bologue were each blown away, their heads burst.

Unlike Bologue, Palmer's marksmanship was impeccable, each shot precisely killing a cultist.

While firing, Palmer didn't forget to cheer. The revolver "Thunder Piercer" in his hand was a new toy obtained from Belli. He always wanted to test the gun on some unlucky souls, and judging by his current appearance, he seemed very satisfied with this new gun.

The duo's surprise attack briefly suppressed the cultists, but soon these bloodthirsty maniacs reacted, more cultists heard the gunfire and rushed out from small doors on both sides. They no longer wielded ritual short knives but cold, stark firearms instead.

Pulling the trigger, a downpour of dense bullets rained down.

There was no cover around for the two to hide, but in the next second, Bologue hammered the ground with one hand, and an earth wall rose up from the ground, blocking all the bullets.

"Something feels off, my summon from the ground is a bit challenging."

Bologue said, it was as if there was another force residing within the ground, hindering Bologue's ether invasion.

"It's normal, a ritual is being held here, every inch of land is permeated with evil powers."

Regarding such evil rituals, Palmer knew more than Bologue. Back in the day, he had made a deal with the Devil during such an evil ritual, becoming a debtor.

Palmer even mused that if these cultists completed their ritual, he might encounter acquaintances, like the Devil he had bargained with.

Hearing Palmer say this, Bologue immediately understood his implication.

The Void Realm was a sealed alchemy domain, where the condensers within were bound by its rules, but the most common feature was the suppression of power.

This cathedral was the Void Realm forged by cultists with blood; every brick and stone was soaked in blood. Just like the phenomenon of Ethereum mutual exclusion, Bologue needed to expel the power residing within to summon these materials.

"Do you think they have condensers?"

Bologue asked Palmer while picking up another short-barreled shotgun, he removed the ordinary bullets and replaced them with ones engraved with the alchemy matrix.

"Who knows? Anyway, there's an expert like you here."

Their conversation was extremely leisurely, as if that dense gunfire behind the earth wall wasn't shooting at them. However, they didn't notice Bane lying numbly on the ground, letting the blasting gunshots hit his eardrums.

Perhaps a deity was truly watching over him because despite the frantic gunfire, not a single bullet hit him; at most, some hot shell casings struck his face. He endured the pain, trying his best not to cry out.

"Same old tactics?"

"Let's do it this way!"

Palmer nodded excitedly, speaking in coded language with Bologue that others couldn't understand.

Creating such an eerie Void Realm couldn't be accomplished by ordinary demons. From Bologue's observation, the opponent must have condensers, although the number remains unknown.

Bologue flipped straight out from behind the crumbling earthen wall, ignoring the barrage of bullets coming his way, he pulled the trigger, and scorching flame burst from the muzzle of the short-barreled shotgun.

It was as if a giant dragon was breathing its Dragon's breath, the high temperature swept over Bane's head, landed on the other side, and exploded into a dazzling sea of fire.

This Dragon Breath Bullet is an alchemical warhead, and its effect is just as seen now, able to create a vast sea of fire to divide the battlefield, many cultists were crying in the sea of fire, wild flames crawling over their bodies, dying in painful struggles.

The sea of fire continued to spread, soon about to reach Bane. At this moment, he suddenly realized that these two guys were indeed here to fight against evil, but they didn't seem to care much about their own lives. Perhaps neither of them even noticed that he was still alive.

Bane also didn't notice, he no longer prayed for anything but struggled forcefully, moving his right hand bit by bit, gritting his teeth and exerting force, along with the short knife piercing his hand, he pulled it out from the ground.

A wail emanated from his throat, Bane bit the knife handle with his teeth, inch by inch withdrawing it from his palm, then moved the now free right hand to the left hand and pulled out the short knife piercing it.

He slightly raised his head, looked around, and could see Bologue's figure walking through the sea of fire, with constant heavy crashing sounds. He was like a wild bull, each advancement smashing a cultist to smithereens.

Bane realized this was a good opportunity to escape from this hell, but before he could get up, the cold muzzle of a gun was pressed to his head.

A bandit with a black hood over his head crouched beside him. Bane remembered him; he was one of the two who broke in through the window.

"Damn! There's still a civilian here?"

Palmer briefly sized up Bane, easily deducing the role Bane played here from the victim's miserable state.

He was the living sacrifice who almost got offered.

For a moment, Palmer's emotions were a bit complex. Once upon a time, he too was a wretch who almost got sacrificed, seeing Bane's miserable appearance inevitably felt like meeting a brother covered with the same fate.

"I'm the priest here; they killed everyone."

Bane said to Palmer frantically, compared to those cultists, this bandit-dressed guy in front of him seemed particularly holy.

"Who are they?"

Palmer pointed at the struggling figures in the sea of fire, Bologue was fighting them to the death.

"I don't know, they just burst in suddenly, saying they were going to offer flesh and blood to their god." Bane said and shed tears; he witnessed others dying miserably.

"Huh? This is troublesome, gotta leave some alive."

Palmer propped his chin, showing a somewhat troubled expression. While talking, burning corpses were continuously thrown out from the sea of fire.

The roar went on, resembling a demonic stage play. Palmer and Bane were the audience, leisurely chatting below the stage, while on the stage Bologue labored to crush every cultist's skull.

The chaotic gunfire gradually scattered, and Palmer suddenly thought of something, clapped his hands, and pulled Bane up.

"You should be familiar with this place, right? Find a place to hide, don't get in the way."

Palmer helped Bane up, motioning him to hide away, Bane wisely nodded, his body was aching painfully, but he still dragged his fatigued self to move.

The two professionals had chopped the cultists into chaos, the surrounding walls also became shaky under Bologue's hammering, the cracks tearing apart the blood drawn on them, collapsing along with the bizarre Void Realm.

Seeing the summoning ritual failed, these cultists became increasingly furious, each emanating waves of corrupt air, Bologue determined all these people were demons.

Unlike the carefree Palmer, after controlling this area, Bologue was constantly alert to these attacking cultists; no one knew where the Condensers might be hiding.

"Palmer, there's more than just these." Bologue suddenly said this.

"So... Expert, what's your meaning?"

While saying this, Palmer already roughly understood Bologue's meaning, he raised his hand, pressing the thin iron piece affixed below his ear.

Whistle signaling started, connection established.

"I'll go pursue; you control here."

Bologue's voice directly resounded in his mind, and then he smashed the door with one hammer and left through the broken door.

Chapter 229: Battle

During field duty, there are always unexpected situations, and for this reason, in recent times, the Whistle, a seemingly inconspicuous item, has become the most commonly used alchemy armament for Bologue and Palmer.

Without Yuriel's support, the Whistle cannot establish a vast Heart Core Net, but for ordinary sudden situations, its short-distance communication capability is sufficient.

Bologue and Palmer acted separately, raiding the entire church to completely clear out the potential dangers here. This seemingly reckless separation was done with the understanding that Bologue would not die.

The Undying Body is an extremely powerful ability, making many things simpler under this condition. Palmer didn't have to worry about Bologue's survival; he only needed to focus on his own safety. Bologue, like a hunting dog unleashed, relentlessly pursued the enemies.

Bologue would step into all sorts of dangers on his behalf, transmitting crucial intelligence to Palmer at the rear. All Palmer needed to do was deliver that fatal shot when the time was right.

Thinking of this, Palmer reached for his waist, where a small belt of bullet chains hung, loaded with exceptionally expensive alchemy warheads.

"One shot is half a month's salary."

Palmer muttered softly, echoing what Bologue had said when handing this over to him.

Screwing open the bullet chamber of the Thunderbolt Revolver, Palmer ejected one of the bullets and loaded the alchemy warhead from his waist, rotating the chamber to position the alchemy warhead at the sixth shot.

Palmer sat beneath the statue, holding the gun.

On the job, he might not match the expertise of Bologue, but it's worth noting that Palmer joined a year earlier than Bologue and even won the Best Newcomer award the following year. Most importantly, when dealing with these cultists, Palmer was quite experienced.

He couldn't help but be experienced. Palmer's unlucky beginnings were all due to these damned cultists. If it weren't for the identity of a Debtor, Palmer felt he should have been working in the Ninth Group, which is responsible for hunting cultists.

Now in his current position, he was at the core of this sacrificial ritual. As long as he guarded this place, no matter what the cultists did, they couldn't complete the final sacrifice to summon the Devil they worshipped.

"But... the blood and flesh sacrifice."

Palmer frowned, staring at the corpses scattered all over the ground. Most had their bellies slit open, intestines spilling everywhere, forming circles of ritual patterns.

This brought back some unpleasant memories for him, and Palmer muttered softly.

"These lunatics wouldn't happen to be from the Ape Rot Sect, would they?"

In the gradually deafening silence, some viscous sounds squirmed, as if footsteps were treading through a thick pool of blood. Palmer snapped his head up, but saw no one else present; only corpses littered the ground.

Even so, Palmer could determine that something was approaching. He didn't know if it was a Condenser or some other sinister entity, but he was sure it came with full malice.

"Bologue, you were right, this matter isn't that simple."

Palmer muttered to himself, drawing a folding knife from his waist, holding the knife in his left hand and the gun in his right.

By now, Palmer also felt the eerie atmosphere, the peculiar, ominous sensation specific to Devils, similar to countless sharp claws scratching at the lining of your stomach, or a cold breath lingering at your neck.

After becoming a Debtor, his old folks at home rarely showed concern, but during phone calls, their aging voices sounded strange; they were both happy and worried. In their view, "Blessing" was a double-edged sword.

The most crucial thing was that they kept saying,

"You'll see things you shouldn't see, and feel things you wouldn't normally be able to feel."

At the time, Palmer didn't understand what these words meant, but seeing Bologue's intense reaction on the street and then himself encountering the same sinister aura deep within here,

Palmer more or less understood. It was like being promoted from a regular person to a Condenser, as if he had an extra organ out of thin air, allowing him to perceive the presence of Ether. The Debtor identity was similar, granting him another qualification to perceive these eerie auras.

With these thoughts, Palmer couldn't help but lament his partner's misfortune. He could sense these things from so far away; it was unimaginable what kind of dealings Bologue had with the Devil during the transaction.

"Bologue, I've encountered the enemy, and they want to reclaim this place."

Discarding all those chaotic thoughts, Palmer calmly declared, as intricate light trails spread across his skin, as if a storm descended upon this place, shattering the remnants of the stained glass windows with a whistle, the raging winds pouring inside.

...

Palmer's words echoed through his mind, but they didn't slow Bologue's pace. He trusted his partner, believing that Palmer wouldn't die so easily, and even if he faced an overwhelming enemy, Bologue trusted his luck, along with the speed granted by the Secret Energy-Wind Source.

The entire cathedral area was controlled by these cultists. What Bologue killed inside the cathedral was only a portion; more cultists were hiding in different buildings, such as the cellar, chapel, living quarters, and bell tower.

As an expert, Bologue never liked letting anyone slip by. He advanced quickly in the side corridor, and during the battle amidst the sea of fire, he heard Bane's words. There were no survivors in the cathedral area. Apart from the three of them, everyone else was an enemy, and there was no need for him to hold back anymore.

Bologue smashed open the main door with the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer. Amidst the rolling smoke, a dark figure loomed, but he didn't hesitate at all, swinging the hammer down and smashing the figure into a mist of blood.

The Face of Horror was in a released state, a faint white mist entwining the blood aura, spreading a strong sense of dread.

The Contract Object was an extremely eerie weapon. Coupled with Bologue's brutal fighting style, many enemies thought they were scared by Bologue himself, but in reality, the fear they had for Bologue was only part of it; more so, it was the influence of the Face of Horror.

Yet, the enemies couldn't imagine that Bologue, in their eyes, was like a nightmare breaking through the boundary of reality.

The cultists screamed in agony, with large swathes of fresh blood staining the walls. Some took the opportunity to hide, slipping into small rooms, closing the doors, locking them tightly, and blocking them with cabinets in an attempt to stop Bologue's advance.

They lowered their breathing, trying hard to calm their restless hearts. Little did they expect that, the cultists who always hunted others, would one day be hunted themselves.

Trembling, they raised their guns, aiming at the blocked door. This was their last stand, but the anticipated death did not arrive. The surroundings were extremely quiet, as if the bloodthirsty Evil Spirit had gone far away.

One person heaved a sigh of relief, grateful for surviving, but the next second, a tremendous crash resounded, causing the entire room to shake violently, as if a giant was pounding it.

They tensed up, raising their guns again, but the vibrations weren't coming from the door. Instead, the wall they leaned against collapsed.

The wall shattered, and a hand emerged from the crack, grabbing a nearby cultist. Before he could resist, he was squeezed and dragged out through the gap.

Amidst the knocking sounds, accompanied by piercing screams from the fissure, the remaining few were completely engulfed by fear, petrified in place, while some roared, trying to rouse their frenzy for the uncanny.

Logically speaking, these cultists were all madmen, but in the face of greater fear, everyone briefly regained their sanity. A sinister figure stepped out from the smoky dust behind the breach, using the hammer to break open the fissure until it was wide enough for him to pass through easily.

He pulled the trigger, firing a volley of gunfire.

Countless bullets struck the figure, but they couldn't tear through his flesh and blood, instead sparking heavily, as if under that gray-black coat, he wore stern Iron Armor.

Bologue quickened his pace, his gaze calm as he smashed the indoor enemies into blood and gore.

As he emerged from the collapsed wall, the blood-stained courtyard was once again filled with cultists, holding their guns aloft, the muzzles uniformly aimed at him.

From their numbers, it seemed all the cultists were there, saving Bologue the time of searching for them one by one; it also meant that the battle was reaching its finale.

"It seems I've also encountered a Condenser."

Bologue murmured, only the existence of a Condenser could rally these routed cultists.

Without any warning, gunfire roared instantaneously, but Bologue was faster than them. He never strayed from the collapsed wall, his left hand secretly touching the wall.

The bricks crumbled, then twisted into a wall shield in front of Bologue. Not only that, but Bologue also took advantage of the brief moment his figure was obscured, continuing to slam the ground, causing irregular earthen walls to rise, creating several covers in the once open courtyard.

This not only protected Bologue from gunfire but also allowed him to assault the enemies from behind cover.

Yet just as Bologue thought he had mastered the battlefield, Ether surged abruptly, pouring in from another direction. The rising earthen walls reversed, blocking Bologue's view. He knew the opponent's Condenser had appeared, but he couldn't observe him immediately.

The obstructing earthen walls crumbled in an instant, scarlet light trails scattered across the sinister figure, resembling a savage beast with blade-like claws, slashing out cold arcs.

Bologue didn't hesitate, immediately throwing out a grappling hook. Modified by Belli, the hook's range was greatly extended, easily embedding into the higher bell tower.

The figure leaped swiftly, Bologue landing steadily on the high bell tower. From here, he could overlook the entire cathedral. Only then did Bologue realize that the scarlet blood not only covered the inside of the cathedral but also spread outside, turning the entire land into an evil ritual ground.

Looking down at the courtyard below, amidst the clouds of dust, Belli's robust figure appeared where Bologue had just stood, the ground beneath fracturing.

"Palmer, I'm engaged in battle as well."

Bologue's voice was calm. Belli slowly arched his body, his expanding muscles like armor, his entire body filled with violent power.

Belli leaped fiercely, and after a resonant thud, Bologue didn't even see Belli's jumping trajectory. He simply appeared in front of him, swinging his claws.

Chapter 230: The Chips

After a thunderous roar, the outer wall of the clock tower shattered, and the great bell let out a heavy lament. Belli tried to find Bologue's figure but saw a silhouette leaping into the air.

Bologue flung out a grappling hook, swinging towards the spire of the church.

Bologue was much more agile than Belli imagined, and in these days swinging around the Path of Uncertainty, his use of the grappling hook had improved significantly.

Belli, on the other hand, was fiercer than Bologue anticipated. From Belli's Ether strength, and his posture, one could easily discern his Secret Energy discipline—this was a Condenser of the Ascended Body School.

Most Condensers from the Ascended Body School have relatively simple Secret Energy nature, affecting only their own bodies. This makes them appear brute and straightforward, yet they are often tough to deal with.

Swelling muscles and brute strength were endowed upon Belli, gradually causing him to lose human form, turning into the appearance of a rampaging beast, with fur growing more luxuriant, akin to a true beast.

More harrowing were the extensive, bizarre tattoos on his skin, intertwining with the glow of the Alchemy Matrix, forming ever more grotesque patterns.

Bologue remained cautious; from these guys' ability to summon the Devil's aura and provoke the umbilical cord's agitation, it was clear that these cultists were unlike those he had casually dispatched before. At least the things these guys worshipped truly existed.

The Devil can grant debtors "Blessing"; no one knows what kind of blessings will be bestowed upon these fervent believers by the Devil.

"Palmer, you've dealt with cultists before. Any new discoveries?" Bologue asked.

"Wait a moment!" An impatient voice sounded in his mind, Palmer's tone was a bit flustered, "I'm a bit busy over here."

"Need help? We are partners," Bologue asked again.

They were partners, and partners were supposed to act together, but for efficiency, to eliminate all enemies more quickly, they usually selected their opponents and fought separately.

It wasn't that they lacked tacit understanding, they just had not encountered an enemy that required them to team up yet.

"No need, still under control."

"That's good."

Bologue severed the contact with Palmer. Looking at it now, everything was still under control. He gazed at the other end of the clock tower, where Belli, eyes crimson, stared at him.

His strength and speed were extremely fast, but like Bologue, he was merely a First Stage Condenser, and the effects of his Secret Energy were not comprehensive. For instance, after gaining strength and speed, he would certainly be weak in some areas.

As Bologue pondered this, Belli launched another fierce attack, his body glowing brilliantly for a moment and then releasing. Bologue guessed that the reason he could move so rapidly was because of the addition of Ethereal Amplification, further enhancing his body's strength and speed.

This time Bologue did not dodge, but rather stood his ground, awaiting Belli's arrival, the distance between them rapidly closing until they were in close combat.

Ever since Bologue assaulted the church, Belli knew that the two were field staff of the Order Bureau... it was impossible not to know—Palmer shouted too loudly.

Belli couldn't figure out how these two found their way here. They had already established the ritual site, an alternative and sinister Void Realm, sealing the entire church district. Unless deliberately sought, the outside world would hardly notice what was happening within.

Out of caution, he did not reveal himself, instead using other cultists to probe Bologue's Secret Energy, gradually uncovering Bologue's strength while hidden in the dark.

Unlike before, Bologue rarely exposed his Secret Energy, but now he was deliberately using his own Secret Energy in combat, even with someone secretly observing everything.

Previously, his caution stemmed from having too few trump cards; Secret Energy was his only bargaining chip. But now it was different. The guy possessed multiple Alchemy Armaments, each with very cunning effects.

With more cards in hand, a gambler becomes more reckless.

Most importantly, by actively exposing his Secret Energy, he could somewhat lower the opponent's guard, as he did now, luring Belli to strike voluntarily.

If Belli chose to hide, with his status as a Condenser, if he wanted to escape, in this godforsaken Great Rift, Bologue would indeed find it difficult to capture him. But now, by selling a flaw, he gave the opponent hope of victory.

Their figures merged as one, and in an instant, the roaring sound continued endlessly, with the rooftop's bricks and stones trembling and about to collapse.

Belli delivered a fatal strike, sharp claws combined with his powerful strength, like a descending giant blade, capable of easily crushing life.

But now, this once fierce heavy blow was unexpectedly stalled in mid-air, with intense aching reverberating from his flesh and blood.

Bologue raised the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer, with the aid of Ethereal Amplification, the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer collided with the claws.

The immense force transmitted over, twisting Bologue's arm; he felt his bones fracture, but Belli's sensation was worse. Even with the Secret Energy's Protection, the force of vibration still flooded into his arm.

What was worse was the gunshot wound in his chest; unbeknownst to him, Bologue had taken out a short-barreled shotgun. He calculated the distance until the moment they faced each other, with no chance to evade, he pulled the trigger.

The dense pellets directly hit Belli's chest, with various sizes of blood holes covering his flesh where the pellets dug deep.

The body has been enhanced to a certain extent, but only to a certain extent.

Information flickered through Bologue's mind as he observed Belli, who resembled a mighty giant bear. Many secret energies of the Ascension School are based on beasts, transforming the human body into that savage form, endowed with its power.

Agonizing pain swallowed Belli, but it wasn't enough to topple him. He let out a deep roar, the sound waves crashing towards Bologue, raising a gale that brought down the roof's bricks and stones.

The shockwave even knocked Bologue back several meters, and in the chaotic vision, Belli's figure overlapped with that of a giant bear.

Secret Energy·Roaring Bear Form.

A secret energy of the Ascension School, it grants the Condenser the power of a Roaring Bear, greatly enhancing strength and speed, along with the fortification of one's flesh, and can release a brief shock through roaring.

Amidst the chaos, a hook darted through the air, accurately embedding into Belli's shoulder. In the next second, the figure of the Evil Spirit broke through the flying debris, heading straight for Belli's face.

"That's why I really hate the Ascension School."

Bologue muttered, as the shock hammer and short-barreled shotgun in his hands disappeared, replaced by two crossed folding knives.

His knives were swift, and under Ethereal Amplification, the dual blades would be even swifter.

A ghastly white cross exploded in front of Belli, followed by a slender wound splitting open along his chest, the horizontal slash reaching his shoulder, while the vertical slash traced Belli's nose and chin. Just a few more inches deeper, and it could have split his skull.

Belli let out a painful gasp, trying to retaliate with a punch, but just as his claw was about to clash with the folding knife, his claw struck at air.

It wasn't that Belli missed, but that the folding knife acted first. Driven by Secret Energy-Summoning Hand, it twisted into bizarre thorns, stabbing directly into Belli's wound, trying to take root.

Condensers of the Ascension School fight in a savage and direct manner, yet external injuries are hard to kill them, while internal injuries are fatal to them.

The Iron Thorns nimbly burrowed into the flesh. Belli quickly tore it out, but a large spurt of blood mixed with torn flesh burst out regardless.

Belli felt an indescribable sensation. The Ascension School, which was supposed to dominate the battlefield, was now being suppressed. Every attempt to counterattack met with a storm-like retaliation, leaving him no room to breathe.

The Alchemy Matrix burst into brilliant brilliance as Belli abandoned defense. Under Ethereal Amplification, he poured all his strength against the Bologue before him, just like boxers brawling on a ring.

Bologue's assault was indeed fierce, but he didn't possess the same robust body. If he could hit him even once, this guy would be dead for sure.

If it were other Condensers, Belli's decision would be fine, but he couldn't imagine facing a Debtor now.

A Debtor blessed with Undying Power.

Claws tore through Bologue's clothes, revealing the Iron-Repelling Armor beneath. This armor's effects were exceptional, yet the force still penetrated the defense, acting on the body, the faint sound of bones cracking reverberating.

The body leaned back; logically, Bologue should withdraw now, allowing Belli to continue pursuing him and smashing the prey completely.

But Bologue clung tightly to the hook embedded in Belli's shoulder, suddenly raising his hand, discarding the folding knife for the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer, swinging the twisted arm towards Belli.

The vibration, coupled with Ethereal Amplification, roared forth.

For a moment, Belli felt as if hit head-on by a truck. The struck area, flesh indented, bones misaligned, even the roof beneath quaked, nearing collapse.

Belli was confused, Wasn't this guy afraid of death? Like a stubborn evil dog, even at the cost of life, it was determined to bite him fiercely.

Looking towards Bologue, who clutched the hook, the hand holding the hammer hung low, with an eerie frenzy in those azure eyes.

"You don't seem that easy to kill."

Bologue clearly sensed that unique, fiendish madness of the Devil revolving around Belli. At the same time, Belli's slashed-open chest, the flesh visibly squirmed, healing back together.

"Coincidentally, I'm not that easy to kill either."

The fractured bones realigned under muscle pressure, blood flowed backward, and in Belli's numb gaze, Bologue raised the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer with a hint of delight in his voice, as if he'd found a beloved toy, no matter how he hammered it, it wouldn't break.

The Sheep Horn Shock Hammer descended, transforming into a storm, breaking arms, shattering legs, crushing the chest, and finally striking the head.

The mighty body collapsed in an instant. Even with impressive regenerative abilities, under Bologue's relentless onslaught, Belli's self-healing proved utterly futile.

As the hammer struck continuously, Bologue also drove silvery spikes into his body. Belli couldn't figure out where this guy pulled out so many weapons, but soon his body was covered with spikes, like a condemned criminal, and under the final blow of the Heavy Hammer, the roof collapsed, plunging into the rubble.