

Endless 261

Chapter 261: The Present Moment

"I think she might not actually like alchemy."

Bologue commented coldly, and Teda looked at him in confusion, unable to understand why Bologue would say such a thing.

"You've seen her talent, and you acknowledge it too," Teda said.

Putting aside Aimou's extremely special identity, she truly is the best student Teda has encountered over the years. As an Alchemy Puppet, she possesses an innate keen sensitivity to the Alchemy Matrix.

"Yes, indeed, there's no doubt about that." Bologue nodded, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid perfectly matched his abilities, and Bologue loved it dearly.

"But these two things don't conflict," Bologue muttered, then asked, "Have you ever raised a dog?"

"I had one when I was young."

Teda grew increasingly confused, as it was always like this when chatting with Bologue, with topics jumping rapidly.

"Then you should understand, the dog strictly adheres to all your commands... But this doesn't mean the dog is very smart or that it knows how to execute your commands. It simply knows that if it does so, you'll pat it, nothing more."

Bologue said with a feigned relaxed demeanor, and Teda, listening on the side, gradually had his expression darken.

"Just a joke, don't mind it," Bologue added.

Teda snorted coldly, saying nothing, the two conversing like outlaws speaking in a code only they could understand.

"I'm very rational, I can control myself, what about you?" Teda turned back and whispered.

"Me? I don't care, it doesn't concern me," Bologue admitted honestly. Only Teda was entangled, nearing the point where he couldn't distinguish things clearly, whereas Bologue was not troubled by such issues.

Teda didn't respond, not knowing what he was thinking, but from Bologue's probing, Bologue increasingly sensed the complexity within.

It's truly vexing.

"Do you have any plans for the Vow Festival?" Bologue asked, leaning against the wall.

"I'm going out for the Vow Festival," Teda said.

"Where to?"

"Personal matters, nothing to do with you."

"Oh, so I'll be on duty alone for the Vow Festival then."

Bologue murmured, his gaze scanning around the room until it landed on Aimou through the glass.

Her facial expressions were minimal, primarily conveying emotions through the halo in her eyes, but Bologue still sensed a serious attitude from her, with a brilliant light trail rising and swirling in her hands.

Bologue thought, many years ago, there must have been a girl similar to Aimou, studying earnestly under Teda's watch, and though time has flown by and everything seems different, yet somehow unchanged.

"So, what do you truly think, Teda?"

Bologue asked himself, "This feeling must be unbearable, right? She resembles your daughter so much, you could even say she's a projection of your daughter's shadow, but you are well aware that she is not Alice. No matter what, Aimou is not her..."

The voice paused, and Bologue tried to articulate that twisted, conflicted emotion but found himself at a loss for words.

Then, as if waking from a sudden realization, Bologue looked at Teda with astonishment.

"Yes, you knew all this from the start, aware of these forbidden principles, so why did you create her to resemble your daughter? To use her as a way of coping? Yet, when she truly came to life, you began to fear, fearing the blurring of her tool-like essence."

Teda remained silent, turning his head slightly, his profile concealed in shadow, but Bologue could clearly perceive the gaze within, sharp as a sword.

"It's like... an illusory sun."

Bologue, unfazed, almost seemed to be compelling Teda to admit everything, continued speaking.

"The death of Alice plunged you into a cold winter night, so you desperately needed a sun. You succeeded, you created another sun, but as she emitted light and heat, you paradoxically became more fearful.

I think it's not just about blurring her essence as a tool, is it?"

Bologue walked towards Teda, the distance between them gradually closing, like tigers meeting on a narrow path, the atmosphere tense and heavy.

With teal eyes gazing down at Teda, Bologue thought but did not say anything, merely looking at Teda expressionlessly.

"What is it you truly want to say, Bologue?" Teda responded coldly.

"Solve the problem."

Bologue waved his hand dismissively, speaking casually.

"I don't like this feeling of suspension, your hesitations only complicate the problem further, it's like avoiding the issue, and evasion won't solve these matters."

"So what do you think I should do? Aimou is just an Alchemy Puppet, she is not a true human being, the true human was Alice!" Teda shouted angrily.

"Hmm? Then do you think I count as human?" Bologue suddenly countered.

Teda was stunned, finding it hard to keep up with Bologue's leaping train of thought.

"Yes, humans are flesh and blood, not alchemy shells, so Aimou is not human. But humans also die, whereas I do not. Does that still make me human? This kind of thinking is too limiting.

"I think, what determines us is not the difference of our shells, but the inner self beneath the shell."

Bologue explained his understanding of humanity.

"When you think Aimou is human, then she is human."

Teda was silent for a long time, staring into those blue eyes, and questioned, "Are you defending Aimou?"

"Probably, it's strange, I actually feel a bit... sympathetic towards her."

Recalling the time spent with Aimou, Bologue did not avoid the question and admitted frankly, "Of course, the more important point is that we need to solve the problem."

Solving the problem, that is what Bologue needs to do. As a rational observer, only he can end it all.

"I understand your thoughts, Teda, Aimou is too much like Alice, you instinctively want to pour your feelings into her, but you also remind yourself, she is not Alice.

You can't treat her cruelly, tell her this harsh truth, nor can you be cruel to yourself and sever all feelings completely."

Bologue suddenly switched to another topic, asking Teda.

"If your research ultimately ends in failure, Teda, what would you do then?"

For a moment, Teda didn't know what to say; he hadn't thought about such a future.

"Is it acknowledging Aimou's existence, or..."

Bologue didn't continue, as if uttering a forbidden curse, if spoken, this dark fate would become reality.

"I know what I'm doing, and I've never wavered," Teda's voice was emotionless, "and you've crossed the line, Bologue; we're just collaborators."

"If you have time during the Vow Festival, go back to the Order Bureau and visit Belli," Bologue completely ignored Teda's threat, "although she may seem that way... she genuinely worries about you. I haven't crossed the line; I was just commissioned by her to keep an eye on you."

The two of them locked eyes, with a slight smile on Bologue's face, he continued.

"Have you seen me fight, Teda?"

Teda shook his head; he was used to Bologue's damned way of thinking and wouldn't be surprised by anything he said next.

"I'm a straightforward person, I hate twists and turns. If there's a wall in front of me, I'll smash it; if there's someone, I'll chop them down."

Bologue expressed his peculiar life perspective.

"So, I'm actually quite honest."

Teda very much agreed with this point—Bologue was too honest; few people with a mental disorder openly admit to being mentally ill while trying to reason with others seriously.

"Most importantly, I'm a person who lives in the moment. I believe if you have feelings, you should definitely express them; keeping them inside, saving them till the end, only results in a mess."

"Are you lecturing me?" Teda laughed angrily at Bologue's condescending tone.

"Shut up, Teda, how old are you this year?" Bologue scrutinized Teda's wrinkled cheek, "Fifty? Sixty? Strictly speaking, I'm already over ninety; there's nothing wrong with teaching the younger generation from a senior's perspective, is there?"

No problem? There was quite a problem; saying this, Bologue couldn't help but laugh.

He completely disregarded Teda's murderous gaze and continued, "I had a good friend who was very good to me. I wanted to repay her kindness, had accumulated a lot of emotions, but before I could say anything, she passed away, leaving these emotions nowhere to be placed..."

Bologue appeared somewhat melancholic, trying his best to describe the friendship with Adelle more beautifully; thus, he did not say that those emotions, with nowhere to go, turned into uncontrollable rage.

"From then on, I made a change, no longer looking forward to later, and only focusing on the present.

If I like someone, I will immediately tell her I like you. If I hate someone, I will also immediately smash his head, never leaving it for the next day.

So, do you understand what I mean?"

Bologue exuded considerable pressure, even though he was just a Condenser, while Teda was a Negative Power User.

Teda looked deeply at Bologue, who slowly backed away and said with an indifferent tone.

"Be honest, life will feel much easier that way."

Teda didn't know what to say; perhaps Bologue was indeed a philosopher, or maybe truly a critically ill madman. When faced with his words, Teda was left defenseless.

Seeing no response to his inquiry, Bologue expected this; if a few words could sway Teda, he would have underestimated how deep Teda was engulfed in this vortex.

Bologue turned and walked towards the glass window. Through it, he could see Aimou busily working indoors, and his voice slowly rang out.

"Have you ever considered her thoughts? She thinks that by earnestly learning Alchemy, she will gain your attention, but you are as unpredictable as the sky, sometimes drizzly, sometimes thundering."

Bologue recalled previous conversations with Aimou.

"She can't figure out what she did wrong, because she did nothing wrong; it's you who are avoiding the problem."

Bologue turned back to look at Teda, delivering the final blow.

"Or is she just a tool, and you don't need to care about the thoughts of a tool?"

Teda did not respond; he silently left, fleeing in defeat.

Chapter 262: Blood of Evil

Teda stepped onto the dark spiral stairs, placing his hand on the banister, climbing up step by step. He rarely found himself so defeated by someone else's words.

He wanted to retort, but in the face of Bologue's words, Teda really couldn't find a way to defend himself.

Teda understood that Bologue was right; he was indeed a hesitant coward, afraid to face such brutal truths. He was also a selfish person, dragging more and more people into the mire to satisfy his own desires.

But Teda couldn't stop, like a boulder rolling down a mountain, it had thundered forward, crushing everything in its path—no one could stop it, not even Teda himself.

Reaching the third floor, this was Teda's private domain, not allowing anyone to trespass. Bologue once fantasized about what kind of secrets might be hidden here, but the truth was, the third floor was simply arranged.

A long corridor, with doors lining both sides, their panels tightly shut and locked, as if some monstrous beast was imprisoned behind them.

Teda seldom came here; it sealed his nightmares within its walls.

He pushed open the nearest door, and the room beyond was piled with black boxes. Teda casually opened one, and under the dim light, a brilliant golden glow rose up.

Countless Mammon Coins were neatly arranged in the box, and Teda ran his fingers over the cold coins, the chill wrapping around his fingertips.

He closed the box, then looked towards the other boxes in the room, his mind recalling the contents stored behind other doors.

If Bologue saw this scene, he would surely scream in shock. No one would have imagined Teda possessed so many Mammon Coins; these brilliant coins were piled like mountains, nearly filling the entire third floor.

The golden glow reflected off Teda's face, his features subtly distorted and aberrant in the light, as a gentle melody flowed from his lips.

He was humming an ancient ballad, with an expression of tenderness, as if lulling a child to sleep.

Accumulating these Mammon Coins wasn't easy. Teda spent many years embedding Alchemy Matrixes in people, generating endless value from crossroads of bewilderment, to gather this sum.

Teda knew the terrifying nature of his goal. To avoid attracting any attention, he never used these Mammon Coins but stored them here, nurturing his wishes in silence.

Closing the door, Teda walked toward the end of the corridor, the ballad echoing in the dark.

Gently pushing open the door at the end of the corridor, Teda feared waking the person asleep behind it, cautiously stepping inside.

The room's arrangement was simple, with no furniture or clutter, filled with a hazy blue light and a faint mist spreading across the floor.

It felt akin to walking into a cold storage; the room's temperature was noticeably lower than outside, with Teda's breath emerging as white mist.

Teda's strides became hesitant, his aged face showing both joy and fear, but in the end, he couldn't restrain his emotions and moved forward.

A hospital bed lay in the center of the room, surrounded by various instruments and devices, with Ether rolling within them, emitting a slight hum between the machines.

Teda pulled up a chair, sitting beside the bed, resting his head in his hands.

After a long time, he composed himself, his bloodshot eyes gazing at the girl on the bed.

She looked very similar to Aimou, like sisters, appearing in a deep sleep, with her eyes tightly shut, as faint spectral light danced over her body like a shrouded mist.

This was a commonly used Alchemy Armament in the medical department, known as the "Static Gauze Mist."

On the surface, it resembled a glowing mist. Once attached to a human body, it significantly reduced metabolic consumption, putting the person in a near-hibernative state.

This Alchemy Armament was often used to protect long-comatose patients, greatly preserving their frail bodies. Under Teda's modification, it was used to protect Alice's body.

Gazing at Alice's peaceful face, intense sorrow surged within Teda.

He still remembered that nightmare of a day when Overlord Xilin descended, indiscriminately conscripting everyone in the domain, with rampant Ether easily invading each person's Rectangular Soul Critical.

Condensers could still resist somewhat, but ordinary people were completely torn apart in soul by the explosive Ether.

Alice was affected by Overlord Xilin at the time, but fortunately, she wasn't fully conscripted. Just as Overlord Xilin released this powerful force, the Seeker of Glory from the Order Bureau had already arrived, stopping him.

But the tragedy still occurred.

The power of the Seeker of Glory was at the pinnacle of this world, capable of causing devastating destruction with a mere gesture, let alone Alice at that time.

She was not yet of age, her soul not fully stable. Under the power of Overlord Xilin, her already unstable soul was utterly disrupted.

Like a Condensation Ceremony, the process was interrupted halfway, and Alice's soul could not be seized and condensed into the physical Philosopher's Stone, yet her soul couldn't return to its normal state either.

Listening to the steady ticking sound, Alice still had an incredibly weak heartbeat. After all these years, with Teda's meticulous care, her body remained intact under static condition, as if time had frozen on her body; she looked just like that day, yet her soul could never reset.

According to the medical department's assessment, Alice was considered dead, but Teda refused to accept this and continued the Condensation Ceremony, aiming to condense Alice's soul into a Philosopher's Stone while her body was protected, keeping a feeble semblance of life.

"I need the activation key, an activation key..."

Teda mused, from an alchemist's perspective, Alice's body could actually be seen as a perfect shell, yet he couldn't find the activation key. He had tried reversing the condensation of the Philosopher's Stone to return the dispersing soul to the body, but all ended in failure.

Indeed, in the study of alchemy, many have tried reversing condensation, but according to current research, it is irreversible.

After countless failures, Teda shifted his research goal to another direction; since the soul could not return to the shell, he would create another shell for Alice.

The shell of an Alchemy Puppet.

"Why isn't it you who woke up?"

Teda murmured, his thoughts crawled like snakes over his spirit, leaving him utterly exhausted.

He remembered that day, the alchemy puppet began to move, and beneath this iron shell, another consciousness began to emerge.

It was like a bizarre dream, Teda thought it would be Alice who awakened, but under this shell, it was another consciousness that emerged.

A naive, unfamiliar consciousness.

Teda was extremely disappointed upon knowing it wasn't Alice, and the rejected consciousness named itself Aimou.

Teda looked terrible, the ghostly blue light cast upon his face, he was like a withered tree, the slender shadow cut his cheeks into a gruesome and fearful visage.

Opening the cabinet beside the sickbed, cold air gushed out, causing Teda's palm to quickly lose sensation. He took out a syringe inside, solidified with vibrant crimson.

After leaving the cold, the frozen crimson in the syringe became lively and agitated in a matter of seconds.

"Elixir of Immortality..."

Teda whispered softly.

If alchemists, through the understanding of the "Secret Source," could create numerous alchemy materials and used these as the foundation to forge Alchemy Armament.

Then the Elixir of Immortality was considered a contractual material, just as the Contract Object corresponds with Alchemy Armament, this peculiar material was born from the Devil's power.

To keep Alice's body from dying, solely relying on the Medical Department's resources and Teda's knowledge was entirely insufficient. He needed some power beyond the norm, even if it involved forbidden methods.

Initially using the Elixir of Immortality, Teda hesitated greatly. Unlike many Condensers, as a former head of the Sublimation Furnace Core department, he knew many secrets, such as what the Elixir of Immortality truly represented.

"Blood of Evil of this world."

Teda spoke without any emotion, as if he had invoked some kind of taboo, he vaguely sensed that the entire Alchemy Workshop was gently trembling.

It wasn't only the Alchemy Workshop, it was the entire Great Rift; the creature sensed its own blood and desperately wanted to recover it.

Teda knew what was going on but wasn't ready to become completely hostile to the Order Bureau, he had never thought of awakening the Calamity of this world with such madness.

Injecting the Elixir of Immortality into Alice's body, the extremely vital blood blended into her body, and her sickly physique rapidly regained healthy coloring visible to the naked eye, even the faint heartbeat grew stronger.

Teda grabbed Alice's hand, pressing it against his forehead.

"The Abyss Sect is coming to awaken the Calamity of this world, but the Immortal Heart is in the hands of the Gray Trade Association, conflict will surely erupt..."

Then Teda murmured another incantation.

"The soul decides the body, but this can be reversed, the body will also affect the soul..."

Crazed fantasies weaved in his mind, looking at the sleeping Alice, Teda's voice was resolute.

"I will bring you back, Alice."

Chapter 263: A Simple Life

Upon awakening from sleep, Bologue slowly climbed out of bed. This time, he wasn't in a narrow single bed; he awoke in his own home.

The warmth of his body lingered on the soft quilt. Bologue sat up against the bedhead, light falling through the curtains onto his front, the air carrying a slight chill that made Bologue reflexively pull back into the covers.

He reached out to open the curtains—still the same familiar city, yet with a subtle difference: heavy snow fell like goose feathers, leisurely blanketing the streets in silver-white.

As cars passed by, the pure white snow was trampled into gray-black slush, strands of black interwoven with the silver-white world.

Winter had arrived, covering Oubos with snow.

Witnessing this scene, Bologue's feelings were complex for a moment, filled with nostalgia.

The same city, the same day, yet some things had changed forever. Fortunately, Bologue had walked out of the shadows, with plenty of time to enjoy everything life had to offer.

He dressed himself, stood before the mirror, and tidied his appearance. Today was Vow Festival, a day of national celebration marking the birth of Oubos.

Yet on this day, Bologue had to go on duty... In truth, he wasn't required to work. Lebius considerably gave everyone a holiday, with the sole requirement to wear Whistle, ready to execute sudden tasks.

But Bologue really had nothing to do. He felt it better to work, to keep himself busy, because once busy, his mind wouldn't wander away.

Taking out the Key of the Crooked Path, Bologue opened a realm of the unknown and stepped inside.

...

"Yo! Bologue, happy Vow Festival!"

Serey greeted Bologue warmly as he emerged from the wine cellar.

Bologue nodded to Serey, reaching out to the wall, trying to suppress the dizziness in his mind.

The Key of the Crooked Path was convenient, saving him a significant amount of time commuting to work; the only downside was the nauseating sensation of spinning, which was tormenting. Despite feeling he's getting used to it, when nausea surged, it was unbearably painful.

Sitting at the bar, Serey handed him a glass of water and a breakfast.

"You're really considerate, Serey."

Bologue drained the water in one go, then picked up the fork and skewered the sausage on the plate.

Since starting work, Bologue usually passed through the Undying Club every time he visited the Cultivation Room. Over time, Serey got used to Bologue's daily entrance, even placing bets with Wei'Er on which door Bologue would come through.

Apart from these, the Undead also thoughtfully prepared breakfast for him. Bologue did not refuse this orderly arranged life; he did not resist.

"Are you preparing for the party tonight?" Bologue asked.

Inside the Undying Club, everyone was busy. Serey was setting up decorations, Bode bringing in boxes of beer, and even Wei'Er was working, carrying flowers and scattering them in corners of the room.

Apart from these, some rare characters were also present at the Undying Club.

Scott... that statue, Serey moved it out and placed it at the entrance of the Undying Club, draping it with ribbons and holding a small sign with the time and details of the party.

The "old undead" remained his mummy-like self, sitting in a wheelchair, and Wei'Er dressed him up as a gigantic bouquet and placed him in the corner.

"Are you planning to officially open to the public?" Bologue asked.

The Undying Club wasn't always closed; sometimes it opened briefly. Surely, to avoid alarming people, usually only Serey handled these things, with Wei'Er sometimes present but remaining silent, posing as a real black cat.

Moreover, occasionally, Serey would bring women back, similar to previous situations, the eccentric Undead would hide in their rooms.

But seeing this setup now, the regular members of the Undying Club had all emerged. If Geoffrey saw this scene, his blood pressure would undoubtedly spike, suspecting that these idle folks were up to something big again.

"No, it's Vow Festival! For us, it's a grand event once a year!"

Serey was extremely excited, his scarlet eyes slightly glowing.

"Meow!"

Wei'Er howled together, jumping between chairs, even Bode hummed a tune, its melody carrying a sinister chill.

Bologue was accustomed to the neuroticism of these Undead, but seeing them collectively acting mad, with symptoms this intense, was a first.

"There's a masquerade party tonight, the theme is Horrible Castle," Bode explained, "Everyone's dressing up in all sorts of odd ways."

"So you undead don't need to hide anything anymore, do you?" Bologue understood his meaning.

Bode nodded, with a touch of emotion, "After becoming undead, due to various limiting factors, it's hard for us to integrate into the crowd; moments of cheering together like this are rare."

A hollow skull stared at him, and Bode said enviously.

"At times like this, I really envy an undead like you who can still integrate into the crowd in a human form, while we can only stay at a distance."

Bologue didn't know what to say, so he just smiled at Bode and said.

"Happy Vow Festival, Bode."

Bode nodded vigorously, barely taking a few steps before stumbling almost to a fall, a whimpering sound came from under him, and Sai Zong was biting Bode's calf forcefully.

Cursing, Bode kicked at Sai Zong's dog's head forcefully, but this obviously couldn't stop Sai Zong, and before long, the Undying Club was once again in an uproar.

Bologue smiled and shook his head, and at that moment, Serey called out to him.

"Are you spending the evening with Palmer?"

"No, I'll be staying at the base tonight."

Bologue waved his hand, he didn't want to join the crazy drinking party and wake up with a splitting headache the next day. He often saw Palmer in such a state, sometimes even throwing up as he walked.

Fortunately, the Great Rift is a place that accommodates everything, so it probably wouldn't mind if Palmer threw up a bit.

Pushing the door open to leave, when he arrived at the "Cultivation Room", even the usually stern and oppressive Order Bureau had a rare touch of relaxation. Bologue first went to Lebius's office to report on the current situation and inquire about the progress of the task.

"There's still no progress on Yas's side?" Bologue asked.

"No, but it's certain that the Gray Trade Association hasn't left the Great Rift; they must be brewing something in the dark."

Lebius frowned and said that if the Gray Trade Association was causing trouble every day and keeping them busy endlessly, he wouldn't mind, but now the entire Great Rift was as quiet as death, and no one knew what was lurking in the deep water.

"These damn guys, making me have no holiday even," Geoffrey complained from the side. On this important holiday, he had to work overtime with Lebius.

"You don't have anything going on anyway, do you? Or are you saying you want to join the young people's drinking party?" Lebius said, "Geoffrey, leave the space for the young people; showing up there would just make everyone uncomfortable."

Geoffrey was at a loss for words by Lebius's remark, he looked at Bologue, and Bologue waved his hand, "I don't mind that much, but Palmer does often say that drinking with you feels like having a gathering with the boss, unable to let loose."

Geoffrey sighed, though they were colleagues, each person's social circle was different, and he asked, "And you, Bologue, how are you planning to spend it?"

"Going to the base to be on duty, just like you, with nothing else to do," Bologue answered.

After exchanging greetings, as usual, he took the elevator down to the Deep Nest Courtyard, and then took the subway to Qiushang Town, arriving at Teda's Alchemy Workshop.

Apart from his own work content, Bologue felt he was no different from an ordinary office worker, commuting by car, transferring stations, clocking in to work.

No matter how strange the life, after enough repetition, it becomes routine, sometimes when passing some shops, Bologue would stop to buy something.

Life was extremely normal, yet extremely abnormal.

Bologue pushed open the door; the Alchemy Workshop was eerily silent, with only the mechanical hum as its sole sound.

Looking around, Bologue didn't see Teda's figure, as he had said earlier, Teda would be going out during the Vow Festival.

For the arrival of the Vow Festival, there was no decoration in the Alchemy Workshop, as if the place was unrelated to the holiday, which Bologue found a bit strange. Even the stern Order Bureau would hand out candies to employees at the front desk today, and even the Great Rift, that ghostly place, had people putting up vibrant lights to set the holiday atmosphere.

But this place was like it had been abandoned, and if Bologue hadn't shown up, there wouldn't be any guests today.

Bologue didn't think much of it; he directly headed towards the small base hut. On the way, he passed by Aimou's repair station. Aimou seemed to be still sleeping, lying quietly there, with several mechanical arms resting on her body, slowly moving, adjusting machinery and correcting the Alchemy Matrix.

She must be optimizing herself or maintaining, and the intricacies Aimou dealt with were too complex for Bologue to understand.

After standing at the door for a moment, Bologue didn't disturb Aimou. His job wasn't to accompany an Alchemy Puppet to understand human nature, but to monitor the movements of the Great Rift and Teda.

He pushed open the door to the small base hut, organized files and equipment, and Bologue tried hard to find something to do for himself, but since he was usually quite diligent, it wasn't long before he found himself idle.

After hesitating for a while, Bologue lay flat on his single bed, trying to relax his tense mood. Today was the Vow Festival; he reminded himself there was no need to be so stressed.

People need to relax, and so do the undead.

Chapter 264: Uniqueness

After a moment of contemplation on the single bed, Bologue decided what he should do today and sat at the desk, sketching on paper.

Bologue's drawing skills were average, but fortunately, this was only for himself to see. As long as Bologue understood it, it was fine. It didn't take long for a design of ether goggles to appear on the paper.

Picking up the design, Bologue pushed the door open and left.

The space in the Alchemy Workshop was quite large. Aside from the lab area on the second floor, there were some corners on the first floor with simple workbenches for easy metal crafting.

Space was limited in the small cabin of the base, so Bologue often used these workbenches to handle some things.

Since becoming a Condenser, Bologue had been diligently studying knowledge related to Alchemy. Though he couldn't study the Alchemy Matrix like an Alchemist, he had the ability to craft simple gear with existing materials.

Taking two ether goggles, Bologue dismantled all unnecessary components without affecting their function, fetching some straps and metal parts from a pile of discarded pieces, scattered them across the workbench.

After starting mechanical training, Bologue's mastery of Secret Energy deepened considerably, and many fine, complex parts were no longer challenging for him.

While looking at the blueprint, Bologue activated the Summoning Hand, shaping the metal parts in his hand. In the paths of azure light, the shape of the metal began to change.

The Summoning Hand was indeed an extremely convenient Secret Energy. Earlier, Teda even said it suited him to be a graceful Blacksmith, while others laboriously pounded and heated metal, he just needed to reach out and touch it.

The ether goggles dismantled by Bologue now were reduced to two cylindrical bodies, and the writhing metal bound them together, forming a telescopic shape.

Bologue picked it up and placed it on his face, adjusting the angle, then making more precise adjustments. When finished, he threaded a strap onto the ether goggles and wore it on his head.

After a brief delay, the vision turned into countless ghostly ribbons, entangled and woven together.

The normal world was no more, replaced by the world of Ether.

Bologue wore his self-made ether goggles and walked inside the Alchemy Workshop. Previously used ether goggles were monocular, limiting the view, but now it was entirely open, with Ether rolling like tangible wind.

The entire building's ether trajectories gradually emerged, swirling and finally converging at the central spire of the building, which was the core of the Void Realm, stabilizing its operation.

To Bologue, it was a brand new world. He was engrossed until the flickering lights discomforted his eyes, prompting him to remove the goggles and hang them around his neck.

His eyes were somewhat sore, Bologue blinked forcefully and rubbed them, feeling much better.

Looking at the blueprint and his creation, the joy in Bologue's heart didn't last long. A surge of boredom and emptiness washed over him.

Bologue sat expressionlessly on the chair.

At this moment, Bologue's mood was peculiar. He still remembered the beauty he experienced at last year's Vow Festival, at Adelle's home, where he and her children cheered at the table.

In just one year, everything had changed beyond recognition. Bologue wasn't mourning Adelle's death; he was more concerned about the beauty he could no longer touch.

Everyone needed companionship on this important holiday. Even Palmer was calling his fiancée.

In contrast, Bologue was solitary.

Loneliness?

Bologue didn't care about loneliness. He had spent long years in the Black Prison and knew better than anyone how to handle solitude.

He was just somewhat... somehow unable to blend in.

Like anxiety disorder, when a festive holiday arrived, everyone fell into the celebration. Watching the excited crowd, Bologue always felt alienated, standing out in the reveling crowd, like an outsider.

Bologue also wanted to join, but he couldn't find a reason to participate nor could he empathize.

The more he wanted to blend in, the more he felt alienated, and the more anxious he became. So he wanted to escape the revelry, coming alone to this Alchemy Workshop to avoid this critical day.

Recalling the members of the Undying Club, for them, the arrival of the holiday made these reclusive monsters incredibly happy; it was their day to return to the world. As for Bologue, wandering as a Debtor among people, it meant nothing to him.

Bologue stopped thinking about it. Footsteps echoed from the corridor, and perhaps out of curiosity, Bologue put on the ether goggles before they arrived.

In the world outlined by Ether, all ether reactions became clear. At this moment, Bologue realized the ether goggles could achieve a kind of perception but could only penetrate objects with ether reactions.

Like Aimou.

Ether flowed, woven into a vague humanoid form, with a dazzling light burning at the heart's position.

While curiously observing, Bologue suddenly found Aimou stopped moving, as if eavesdropping, hiding in the corridor, hesitating to move.

"Aimou?"

Bologue called tentatively.

No response.

"I see you." Bologue said again.

After a moment of silence, Aimou walked out, slightly embarrassed, the halo in her eyes constantly trembling, although Bologue did not notice these.

He was wearing Ether lens now, and in his eyes, Aimou had completely transformed into another form, the blurry outlines became clear.

Ether flowed within Aimou's body, intertwining and interspersing, forming patterns similar to blood vessels and nerves, and ultimately all flowing towards the Constant Motion Core in the chest.

"How did you see me?" Aimou asked curiously.

Bologue tapped the Ether lens, Aimou knew exactly what it was and was not surprised by it.

Bologue took off the Ether lens and then asked Aimou, "Is there something you need?"

On this important holiday, everyone went off to celebrate and revel, now only Bologue and Aimou stayed here, as if abandoned.

"Aren't you celebrating today?" Aimou asked, "For humans, this should be an important holiday, everyone has left."

Bologue thought that, in Aimou's eyes, he should be a freak, tinkering with these little gadgets while others joined the celebration.

"Such important matters vary from person to person." Bologue explained.

"Vary from person to person?" Aimou didn't quite understand.

"The important thing is not the holiday itself, but the people you spend it with." Bologue said indifferently about his situation, "My friend passed away, and along with that, the holiday lost its meaning, that's just how it is."

Upon hearing about the passing, Aimou seemed somewhat lost.

"Because when you spend it with friends, the holiday takes on special significance," Aimou's voice lowered, "just like a name."

Mentioning names, Bologue remembered what Teda said before and expressed curiosity.

"Aimou."

"Ah?"

Bologue suddenly called out her name, which made her feel a sudden panic.

"Why did you name yourself Aimou?" This name was not given by Teda, but Aimou chose it for herself, Bologue was quite curious about this, "Why do you feel the need for a name?"

Aimou did not answer immediately, she pondered over the answer, then said.

"Follow me."

Aimou unexpectedly took the initiative, reminding Bologue of the scene when he first spoke with her, when she mischievously teased him.

Bologue nodded and followed Aimou, walking through the winding corridors until she arrived at a dust-covered door.

Aimou didn't have complex expressions, but Bologue could still sense the pressure within her, she became increasingly uneasy and restless, as if there was something sinful hidden behind the door.

"Initially I didn't care about names, after all, they are things humans use to designate something, I'm not human, so it seemed to be unnecessary for me."

Aimou placed her hand on the door handle, mustered her courage, and forcefully turned it.

"But that day, I saw these things, although I'm not human, I roughly understood what life and death are and developed an infinite fear towards them."

The door was pushed open, and in the dim light, choking dust filled the air, Bologue coughed several times before recovering, then he saw a room filled with bodies.

They weren't strictly corpses, but one after another broken Alchemy Puppets, the surface metal oxidized and rusted, the accumulated dust filled mechanical seams, more bizarre though was, each Alchemy Puppet bore the same face as Aimou's, as if countless Aimou had died here.

Bologue walked in, his gaze sweeping over these iron remnants, for humans these were just failed experiments, but for Aimou, they represented how she "died."

"Since then, I felt the need for a name, so I wouldn't just be some Alchemy Puppet labeled 001, 002, 003, only with numbers."

Aimou lowered her head, wiping dust from the broken cheek, in some sense, these scattered bodies were all former versions of herself, lacking self-awareness.

"I am Aimou, even if one day I join them here, I am the special one, no longer a vague, coded identity, but one with a clear name."

Aimou turned around and expressed her innermost thoughts to Bologue.

"A name possesses magic power, it makes me no longer a fuzzy collective entity, but a specific, real, acknowledged individual."

Chapter 265: Birthday Cake

"Just for this reason... Do you think it's laughable?"

Aimou observed Bologue's reaction. It was the first time she expressed her thoughts to someone else, and more importantly, all this time, Aimou hadn't interacted with many humans.

"There's nothing laughable about it; such matters can be considered humanity's ultimate question."

Bologue shook his head with a smile, appreciating Aimou's self-awareness, and continued.

"Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?"

"I've read such words in books, but I don't quite understand them." Aimou's understanding of books was still somewhat superficial, unable to grasp deeper meanings.

"Actually, I don't fully understand either. Some say it's the past, present, and future, while others say it's the summary of a human life." Bologue explained.

"Recognizing who you truly are, what you live for, and what you're willing to die for... At least now you know who you are, congratulations, Aimou."

Bologue gazed at Aimou standing amidst the piled up broken bodies; in the gray coldness, she was like a splash of vibrant color.

"I am... Aimou."

Aimou said softly, as if self-hypnotizing; the more people affirmed her, the more real she became.

"And what about the rest?" Aimou excitedly turned to Bologue. This was the first time she was acknowledged, filling her with immense joy.

"The rest? You mean where you come from? Where you're going?"

Speaking on these matters, Bologue also fell silent. Such philosophical questions typically lack clear answers.

Bologue knew who he was. He was the Evil Spirit, punishing those who violated the iron laws of justice. But as for where he came from, that was a genuine mystery.

He was still unclear why he came to this world, which also remained Bologue's greatest secret. As for where he was going?

"I don't know. Few people can figure these out. More often, everyone lives in the present, leaving these worries for philosophers to handle." Bologue said, but quickly added.

"But, you see, I am the Undead. If nothing unexpected happens, my fate is without an endpoint."

"So, you mean you don't have a 'where to go'?" Aimou asked.

"Perhaps so. Like a road movie, I'm driving on an endless road. Wherever I stop is my endpoint."

"Road movie?"

"A type of film... Haven't you seen a movie?"

"No, apart from regular check-ups at the Border Sanatorium, I've hardly moved within the city," Aimou spread her hands, revealing herself, "I'm too special, easily noticed."

This was true; every time Aimou went out, she disguised herself thoroughly to avoid direct observation by others.

"Hmm... Then your life truly feels full of regrets." Bologue felt heartache for Aimou who hadn't seen a movie.

"Are movies really that good?" Aimou was tempted by Bologue.

"These things can extend human life."

Discussing movies, Bologue became serious; besides punishing villains, movies were one of his few hobbies.

"Extend life?" Hearing about life extension, Aimou's eyes lit up but soon calmed down, "How could it be possible? Human lifespan is predetermined, even if it can be extended, it can only be achieved through some extremely expensive Alchemy Potion."

Aimou cared a lot about life and death, for which she had acquired much relevant knowledge. Unfortunately, she was an Alchemy Puppet, rendering potions useless to her.

"A different kind of life extension."

Bologue explained, but after saying a few words, he was choked by the smoke and dust in the room, coughing repeatedly.

"Let's change places to talk... I don't mind, but don't you feel standing here is like standing in a morgue? A morgue for Alchemy Puppets." Bologue used a peculiar metaphor.

Upon hearing this, Aimou finally realized it, and the halo in her eyes dimmed. Her fear of the place wasn't just due to its deathly vibe but the presence of 'corpses.' Should Aimou be destroyed one day, she would likely become one of them.

The two came to the table, with Teda not home, allowing them to talk casually sitting across each other at the table.

Bologue liked this place quite a bit, its space felt larger, without such oppressive feelings.

In actuality, the entire Alchemy Workshop felt to Bologue similar to a "Cultivation Room," or perhaps all these Void Realms shared similar traits.

Closed, absolutely closed.

There were no windows here, walls sealed everywhere, and many places were quite cramped, constantly disturbed by humming sounds.

Normal people living here would mostly develop some mental illnesses, but fortunately, Bologue wasn't that fragile. He was highly adaptive and had become accustomed to working under pressure.

"Rather than extending life's scale, it's more about making finite life more meaningful." Bologue tried to express his thoughts to Aimou.

"Like an ordinary farmer trapped in a mountain farm all his life, spending a mundane existence in toil without ever leaving this land. But what if there were movies?"

Bologue grew more excited as he spoke; sharing something he loves with others felt very pleasant.

Chapter 266: Birthday Cake_2

"Through films, a farmer sees a story he could never touch in his lifetime, another life, a bigger world..."

"It's like an illusory experience, feeling what we can't feel through this medium, becoming what we can't be." Aimou said with half-understanding.

"Perhaps, and what's even better is that when you immerse yourself in the story, you can forget the chaos of reality and enjoy a moment of peace in that fictional world."

Bologue's tone softened, "Some experiences you may never get, but through these mediums, you can somehow touch its texture vaguely, which is a kind of inner comfort."

"Sounds wonderful."

"It's very wonderful." Bologue confirmed again.

"Yes, very wonderful." Aimou nodded in agreement.

The topic ended, and the two fell silent at the same time, not knowing what to say next.

"Will you be here all day today?" Aimou broke the silence first.

"Yes, on duty here, it's also a way to find a place to hide for a while, I don't want to join the lunatics' drinking party." Bologue joked.

The guys from the Undying Club may be lunatics, but they never forced Bologue to do anything. The greatest influence they had on Bologue was making some flashy moves beside him, trying to amuse themselves, while Bologue sat seriously at the bar.

These bored guys often make bets on boring things, besides betting on which door they would come out from, they also bet on how to make themselves laugh.

Wei'Er would perform a backflip, while Serey would do a pole dance... Bologue wanted to maintain his serious and cold image, but holding back laughter was truly uncomfortable.

"The teacher usually comes back the afternoon of the next day," Aimou said, "It's been like this for the last few Vow Festivals."

"Hmm?" Bologue thought of something and asked, "Aimou, when did you become aware?"

"Are you asking about my birthday?"

"Birthday?"

"The date of birth? According to you humans, when I became self-aware, it counts as a birth, right?"

Bologue nodded in affirmation. Aimou is an Alchemy Puppet, but she is deeply influenced by humans, even her actions and thoughts resemble those of humans.

"Approximately two years ago? I gained self-awareness two years ago, celebrated two Vow Festivals since then, and after today, it will be the third year." Aimou calculated.

"So, you are barely... three years old?"

Bologue felt it strange to say it out loud, since by human standards, three years old is still in infancy... but Aimou is an Alchemy Puppet, and common sense doesn't apply to her.

"Uh-huh." Aimou nodded.

"Alright, alright."

Bologue said as he got up, and before leaving, he told Aimou, "I'll be in the little house at the outpost, call me if you need anything."

With Teda gone, the reliable one in the Alchemy Workshop was only himself. If anything unexpected happens, it would be up to him to resolve.

But hearing Aimou saying she is here alone every year, Bologue believed there shouldn't be any issue.

Back in the outpost house, sitting on a chair, Bologue wanted to find something to busy himself, but he had been busy for so long, and many things were already handled. Thinking it over, Bologue still didn't know what to do.

He leaned back in the chair, squinting his eyes, and was attracted by a cluster of hazy color blocks.

It was a poster on the wall, depicting a detective in a brown trench coat and a hound beside him.

This was a movie poster, put up by Palmer. Palmer had mentioned this movie to him, trying to describe the plot, but after a few sentences, the guy broke into laughter... at least from his reaction, the movie seemed pretty good.

Bologue had considered watching it but never found the time due to work and other reasons.

"A day off..."

Staring at the poster, Bologue murmured softly.

...

The Alchemy Workshop is completely sealed, with no windows to observe the outside scenery, and the Great Rift is shrouded in thick fog, making day and night indistinct, rendering it impossible to judge the passage of time.

Therefore, everyone in the Great Rift is accustomed to wearing a watch, to perceive the passing of time in this area where time flow is not apparent.

Bologue put down the "Golden Thesis," glanced at the time; it was nearing evening, and he had spent the whole day reading. The prolonged reading made his eyes sore, but it deepened his understanding of Alchemy and its nuances.

If not for Belli being hard to deal with, Bologue would have applied to learn at the Sublimation Furnace Core for a while.

Many people spend all their lives refining a single skill, but Bologue, as an Undead, has a long lifespan, granting him the time to refine these skills one by one.

As long as he didn't turn into someone like Serey, a boring Undead who spent endless time learning trivial things, like his current pride in pole dancing.

Leaning back in the chair, Bologue tilted his head back, pondering over the knowledge he had read in the book.

In this world, the source of all things Extraordinary, the mysterious "Secret Source" seems to have existed alongside the world from the very beginning, and those deceitful Devils, too, appeared around the same time.

Chapter 267: Birthday Cake_3

The author attempted to find the starting point of the story, but evidently, he failed. In fact, the Alchemists' quest for the "Secret Source" is itself the tracing back to the beginning of the "Secret Source," but all these years, no one has truly reached it.

Thinking of this, Bologue once again recalled that mysterious presence.

King Solomon.

Not only in books, but from the mouths of Belli and Teda, Bologue often heard them mention that King Solomon was the greatest Alchemist in modern times, the one closest to the "Secret Source."

The closest Bologue ever got to this mysterious presence was during the battle that changed his fate, the Fall of the Holy City.

Bologue is still investigating that battle to this day. After becoming a member of the Order Bureau, he also secretly investigated a lot of materials. What Bologue did not expect was that there were conspiracy theories even within the Order Bureau.

No, it cannot be said to be just conspiracy theories, but various speculations of abnormalities and delusions.

Apart from the rumor of the "ray of light," Bologue also learned that some people suspect King Solomon might really be the Alchemist closest to the "Secret Source." He not only approached the "Secret Source" but might have completely touched the "Secret Source."

Bologue is not an Alchemist, and for this elusive knowledge, he's only read the popular science in the "Golden Thesis." Some suspect that the Rhine Alliance and the Kagader Empire seemingly aimed to seize the Holy City as a stronghold but in reality, they felt the threat of King Solomon and chose to join forces to destroy him.

King Solomon touched the "Secret Source," gaining the "truth" that countless Alchemists were passionate about. He surpassed everyone, and for that reason, everyone wanted to destroy him first.

Everything is interconnected; an invisible net traps everyone.

The disputes troubling Bologue now all stem from a secret war seven years ago, and that secret war from seven years ago is a continuation of the Fall of the Holy City...

Then, which war is the Fall of the Holy City a continuation of?

A continuation from the era deeply buried, forgotten, where everything had yet to begin?

Bologue felt a slight chill crawl over his body. He thought that by joining the Order Bureau, he would be able to fully understand this strange world. But in fact, the world did not become any clearer in Bologue's eyes; instead, it grew even more mysterious.

The more one knows, the more painful it is.

Bologue read such words in the "Golden Thesis," and Alchemists call it "the pain of clarity," "the curse of knowledge."

Now, Bologue can more or less understand what it means.

After stretching his stiff body forcefully, Bologue thought these matters weren't that bad. There are still unsolved mysteries in the world, which for him, is a good thing.

As an Undead, he can keep his unquenchable curiosity alive in the long years ahead.

Living beings require curiosity, or perhaps... a goal.

Curiosity keeps people young. When one loses all curiosity, they become a living, gradually decaying corpse.

Like the members of the Undying Club, they no longer hold interest in this world. Their actions are merely to slightly fill their empty hearts.

They seem endlessly cheerful every day, yet to Bologue, it appears somewhat like a forced smile, leaving only a sense of sorrow.

Bologue stepped out of the hideout cabin; it was evening. He was about to go to the kitchen to make something to eat.

Palmer often said the best thing about living here is that Teda generously shares his refrigerator and kitchen.

The kitchen echoed with the sound of clanging, a constant buzz of activity. It must be Aimou busy inside. She doesn't need to eat, and Teda wasn't home tonight. Bologue thought she might be making dinner for him?

Recently, Bologue and Aimou reached a strange tacit understanding... or should we say, a deal. Aimou would knock, bringing in a large tray of food, and Bologue would eat her creations while chatting with her.

The topics they discussed ranged from philosophical reflections to various anecdotes about Opus. Sometimes Bologue felt like he'd become a bridge connecting Aimou to the human world.

Thus, instead of drawing knowledge from cold texts, she would hear it directly from Bologue, a living human.

As Bologue walked into the kitchen, the scene before him was somewhat unexpected.

Aimou, wearing an apron, was engrossed in spreading cream onto a cake base. As she worked, she flipped through a book, following the steps inside.

But evidently, Aimou wasn't doing this for the first time. Her movements were deft, only requiring the tutorial for confirmation. Under her manipulation, beautiful frosting adorned the cake, smoothing the cream on top, with sprinkles of chocolate shards.

She hummed a song while making the cake, completely immersed in the process, unaware of Bologue's presence. Bologue did not make a sound, just leaned against the door quietly, observing.

This must be a birthday cake, a birthday cake for Aimou herself.

Bologue guessed this could be her... third birthday? There were three candles placed by the table; that much was easy to deduce.

So, today is Aimou's birthday? She became self-aware on this day, during the Vow Festival three years ago, as her vague consciousness clearly saw this world.

After a while, Aimou finished her birthday cake. The cake was small and exquisite. The halos in her eyes flickered between circular and star shapes. She walked around the table several times, observing her work from all angles.

Chapter 268: Birthday Cake_4

Picking up the three candles on the table, just as Aimou was carefully placing them on the cake, she finally noticed Bologue standing behind the door.

Bologue looked at Aimou expressionlessly, Aimou hesitated, she pretended to be calm, but the halo in her eyes trembled, bent, and shrunk into an ellipse for a moment.

"How... how long have you been here?"

Taking advantage of the optimization needed for her vocal cords, Aimou's voice carried a calm coldness.

"Since you started applying the cream."

"Why didn't you... make a sound? Isn't that like peeping?"

"Hmm? Is it? I was just watching you make the cake, and you were quite absorbed. If I spoke, I'd certainly disturb you."

Faced with Bologue's answer, Aimou lowered her head, as the atmosphere sank into dead silence, Bologue picked up the Ether monocle hanging around his neck, in his view, Aimou's body brightened, Ether surged and collided.

"Actually... you can let it out." Bologue removed the monocle, still expressionless.

After a few seconds of silence, Aimou emitted a wail.

"Ahhhhh!"

...

Bologue could understand this feeling of shame; when one's behavior greatly contrasts with their usual self, individuals usually don't want others to see this hidden side in order to maintain their image.

Solving this dilemma is simple, just achieve consistency between inside and outside.

Bologue felt he was a consistent person inside and outside, he felt whatever he did, whenever and wherever, would always align with his own style, he didn't need to care about these things at all.

Also like Serey, at first glance, he resembles an elegant ancient noble, but the next second he would be dancing with a steel pipe or wearing a slit shirt up to his navel, mixing drinks for you behind the bar.

You think Serey's image collapsed, but in Serey's view, his image is just that, Serey never collapsed, it's just that you don't know Serey deep enough.

"What are you thinking?"

A voice came from in front, between Aimou and Bologue was a table with a birthday cake.

Since Aimou wailed, the two sat across from each other, the atmosphere as oppressive as a negotiation table.

"Quite interesting, are you celebrating yourself?" Bologue said.

"Probably...probably..."

Aimou felt ashamed of being discovered, she didn't even dare to look directly at Bologue, even though Bologue didn't mind.

"Does Teda know?"

Bologue curiously pursued, with a growing understanding of Aimou, Bologue felt Aimou seemed more like a genuine human.

"The teacher doesn't know," Aimou shook her head, "Every year during the Vow Festival, he leaves."

"So this is your secret?"

Bologue realized this was a secret that belonged only to Aimou, unknown to anyone, but she seemed to have forgotten there was a new tenant here.

"Hmm."

Aimou nodded.

"But you don't have the ability to eat, nor have taste... for you, is this just a ritual?"

Talking about this, as if empathizing with Aimou, Bologue felt a bit sad, this innocent life striving to emulate human behavior, even birthdays.

If Aimou understood the meaning of birthdays, what was she thinking when celebrating her birthday alone?

She meticulously crafted a birthday cake but couldn't taste it, Bologue hated this powerless and sad feeling, but at this moment, Aimou spoke.

"Do you want to try it?"

She looked at him curiously and pushed the birthday cake towards him.

Chapter 269: Shared Chord Body

Aimou couldn't eat or taste anything. When she cooked, she strictly followed the guidelines, adhering to each step. Despite her limited senses, Aimou still made delicious dishes, not to mention the birthday cake carrying her birthday wishes.

Wielding a knife, Aimou cut a piece for Bologue. After tasting it for a while, with Aimou's expectant gaze upon him, Bologue said.

"Very nice," Bologue praised, giving a thumbs up, "If you open a bakery, you'll definitely rake in the dough."

Bologue was sincere; the things Aimou made were truly delicious, far exceeding his own culinary skills.

It was evident that besides studying alchemy, Teda's daily life was well cared for by Aimou. Having such a capable helper made life much easier.

Bologue ate two bites and paused, looking at Aimou, who was resting her chin on her hands, gazing expectantly at him.

Whenever Aimou brought food for him, she always wore this expression, which reminded Bologue of stray cats he often fed in the alley. He would stand nearby watching them devour the food he had laid out.

Being watched while eating didn't make Bologue uncomfortable, but Aimou's gaze was somewhat... intense, as if she was eagerly expecting him to finish everything.

Finish... everything...

Like Bologue's healthy lifestyle, his diet was balanced—not overly greasy nor overly bland. Yet the sight of this entire large plate of birthday cake brought him a hint of pressure.

"You... you made all this, but can't taste it. How do you feel about that?"

Bologue changed the subject, voicing his inner thoughts.

He pondered about his curiosity toward Aimou, and after careful contemplation, he realized it might be because Aimou viewed the world from a completely different perspective.

Bologue wanted to know what the world looked like through Aimou's eyes and how she perceived these things.

"Perhaps... regret?"

Aimou thought for a moment and then replied to Bologue, "Having made something so good, yet I can't eat it or taste anything."

She appeared slightly disappointed, and the glow in her eyes dimmed. But soon, the glow brightened again, and she fixed her gaze on Bologue, filled with anticipation.

"But... not entirely."

"What do you mean 'not entirely'?"

Bologue felt a bit uneasy under her gaze, sensing something unfavorable was about to happen.

"Uh..."

Aimou seemed conflicted and hesitant, as if she found it difficult to reveal the next subject to Bologue.

After nearly a minute of internal struggle, Aimou finally mustered the courage to speak to Bologue.

"Do you know what my secret energy is?"

"Huh?"

Bologue was utterly surprised by Aimou's statement, yet he remained vigilant. Every time Belli made an excessive request of him, she'd always offer something as a prelude. Perhaps Aimou was doing the same now.

"Do you have secret energy?" Bologue asked.

"I'm not sure, but it should be considered secret energy, right?" Aimou replied uncertainly. "I'm between an alchemy armament and a condenser, carrying multiple alchemy matrices on me. Under their mutual influence, a certain ability has also emerged, which is why I can study alchemy efficiently."

"So what's your secret energy?"

"According to secret energy school classifications, I should belong to the Elevation School or the Secret Initiation School, but it's quite unique, so my mentor categorized me in the Deceitful Structure School."

"Deceitful Structure School?"

Hearing this, Bologue became intrigued. Having been a condenser for so long, he had yet to encounter the rare Deceitful Structure School.

This type of secret energy is complicated and difficult to classify, thus is grouped into the Deceitful Structure School. In condenser confrontations, this school is particularly challenging, as conventional judgment cannot bind it, making each battle a gamble with the unknown.

"Mm-hmm, I've named it 'Shared Chord Body.'

Aimou spoke mysteriously, and before Bologue could further inquire about the nature of her secret energy, she requested from him.

"Give me the Etherflow Monocle."

Bologue removed the modified Etherflow Monocle from his neck and handed it to Aimou. After accepting the item, she carefully examined it, and the glow in her eyes waned.

In her view, Bologue's handiwork was almost ruining this piece of alchemy armament, but Bologue had little to say, as his modifications were minimal—merely using metal to attach two single scopes together.

Ether surged within the room, coiling around Aimou's body. She extended her palm covered with iron-repelling paint, dense golden light trails spreading across her fingertips.

Secret Power·Shared Chord Body.

Under Bologue's gaze, Aimou's fingers actually penetrated the metal, as if upon contact with the substance, her body turned into a shadow of nothingness.

This was not the end. The blue glow in Aimou's eyes transformed into a blazing gold, and although her fingers became illusory, they were outlined in a gold trajectory, entering the metal.

Accompanied by Ether's roar, the alchemy matrix engraved on the Etherflow Monocle resonated with Ether. Aimou's golden fingers easily touched those woven threads.

Chapter 270: Shared Chord Body_2

"Can you etherealize your body? Thus touching the Alchemy Matrix."

Bologue speculated that he had seen a similar situation during his implantation ceremony with Belli. Belli, who is from the Secret Arts School, had secret energy that allowed her to directly prune the Alchemy Matrix, and it seemed Aimou could do the same.

But Aimou was from the Deceitful Structure School, so she must have something unique, which Bologue soon witnessed.

After briefly touching, two golden trajectories began to merge... Aimou integrated the Alchemy Matrix of the Ether-flow Monocle into her own Alchemy Matrix. Bologue found it hard to comprehend what was happening in front of him, while Aimou timely explained.

"As you've seen, a Shared Chord Body allows my body to etherealize, interfering and connecting with the Alchemy Matrix in its pure energy form, enabling me to freely adjust the arrangement of the Alchemy Matrix.

Most importantly, I can even 'empathize' with it."

"Empathize?"

"You could consider it as me experiencing the Alchemy Armament as if it was my own body. It sounds odd, but I am also considered an Alchemy Armament with self-awareness. My existence is very unique, and so I can roughly sense what form the power of the Alchemy Armament will take, creating even more peculiar properties from it."

She explained while glancing at Bologue.

"That's how the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid was born."

Aimou could connect with the Alchemy Matrix, making precise adjustments to the Alchemy Armament, thereby guiding the direction of power. The strange characteristic of the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid was a result guided by Aimou through countless adjustments.

Such a peculiar aberration product could only be captured by someone like Aimou, with such power, amidst countless trials and errors.

After a brief shock, Bologue accepted all of this. Aimou herself was a complex Alchemy Puppet, constantly needing adjustment and evolution. Such secret energy was more than suited for her.

"And then... it's the birthday cake."

Aimou stood up, a golden halo looking down at Bologue. She hadn't dismissed her secret energy, with Canyin's tracks winding beneath her somewhat translucent skin.

"What are you going to do?"

Bologue was instantly on alert, not thinking Aimou would attack him, but feeling Aimou was brewing something bad.

"Actually, I seem to... be able to apply the Shared Chord Body on a Condenser as well."

Aimou winked at Bologue.

"You... you mean... you want to occupy my body? Use the empathy of the Shared Chord Body to feel what I feel, to taste the birthday cake?"

Bologue's mind froze, and even his speech became intermittent. This plot twist far exceeded his imagination.

"Uh-huh."

Aimou nodded, looking at Bologue with great anticipation.

"The teacher was very resistant to this, but besides the teacher, I haven't encountered many outsiders. This is also my first experiment on a Condenser... Want to try it?"

"Is there any risk?" Bologue hesitated.

"Aren't you an Undead?"

At this point, Aimou mentioned the Undead, her anticipation and curiosity maximized, with the golden halo in her eyes as bright as headlights, making Bologue squint.

In the long hesitation, Bologue didn't know what kind of madness he had, yet impulsively responded.

"Then... try it?"

...

The moment he agreed with Aimou, Bologue started to regret it, feeling the situation might evolve into something uncontrollable.

But to truly refuse Aimou, he felt some hesitation and reluctance.

He seemed to be the only connection between Aimou and the outside world, like the string of a kite, unwilling to refuse Aimou's anticipation, thus eventually agreeing with her.

The result was the current situation: Bologue standing with his back to Aimou in the room, ether calmly rising, with Canyin's brilliance casting from behind, sometimes steady, sometimes flickering.

A rustling sound came from behind, prompting Bologue to ask.

"What are you doing?"

"Packing clothes."

"What? Why pack clothes?" Bologue was baffled.

"My Shared Chord Body can etherealize my body, but clothes can't. The clothes aren't covered with my Alchemy Matrix."

Aimou said while folding the clothes and putting them in a suitcase, then looked at Bologue with a suspicious gaze.

"You're not thinking of sneaking a peek, are you? I often see this kind of plot in courtship novels."

"What's there to see!"

Bologue exclaimed.

What could he see by turning around? A steel body capable of punching through concrete with full power? What was she even thinking! Her perception of humans had been twisted into what!!

Aimou responded with a burst of giggles and laughter.

"I'm teasing you."

Bologue's face darkened. Perhaps because they were from the same sect, sometimes Bologue thought Aimou was just like another person he knew.

"You remind me of a friend. She sometimes also likes to tease me, watching me make a fool of myself, and she'd derive immense joy from it."

"Who?"

"Belli, you know her, right? Technically speaking, she's like your senior sister."

Back then, it was from Belli's hands that Bologue obtained the Deceitful Snake Scale Silver, and Aimou should also know Belli.

"Belli..."

Aimou whispered, her voice trembling slightly, evidently stirred by many unpleasant memories associated with the name.

"What, did she mess with you too?" Bologue asked.