

Endless 311

Chapter 311: Ether Prohibition

In this moment of life and death, the long-awaited Sixth Group finally arrived for Bologue. His tense nerves slightly relaxed, and he let out a deep sigh, causing even the restless Soul Shards to fall silent.

Yas did not launch an attack; instead, he stood in place, maintaining the Ethereal Prohibition to contend with the King's Shield Guard, handing the battle directly over to his squad members.

Faced with an Ethereal Prohibition from a Negative Power User, the First Stage Condensers offered brief resistance before their Rectangular Soul Criticals were invaded.

Even though they hadn't been completely breached, the overwhelming oppressive force still severed their connection to the Ether, rendering them no different from ordinary mortals at that moment.

A squad member stepped out from the group, hoisting a machine gun whose ammo chain extended into the backpack behind him. Without any warning, he pulled the trigger.

In an instant, dense bullet rain showered the crowd; flesh and bone, losing their ethereal support, shattered under the onslaught of steel, as the mighty Condensers fell like mere mortals.

Some tried to retaliate, struggling under the Ethereal Prohibition's constraint to muster a bit of Secret Energy, summoning various peculiar forces to fiercely strike at the Sixth Group.

At this moment, Sido entered the scene, wielding a Warhammer and Giant Shield, or rather, Hart. Hart raised the Giant Shield, a milky white barrier appeared out of thin air, encapsulating all the squad members.

Whether it was the gunfire from the King's Shield Guard or the impact of Secret Energy, all were completely absorbed by the raised barrier. Each collision brought forth small electric arcs, but as the sparks dissipated, the barrier remained intact.

One of the Ether Skills: Ethereal Barrier.

"Order Bureau..."

Nade knew very well who had come; he understood the operating style of the Violence Suppression Action Group. However, he couldn't fathom why they were appearing at this moment.

If they had targeted the Gray Trade Association from the start, they should have stormed the venue as soon as the auction began, rather than waiting until the various factions were indeed caught in chaotic combat.

Nade didn't ponder for long, as Yas's actions directly revealed his intentions.

A strong sense of suffocation gripped Nade's heart. First, the surrounding Ether plunged into silence and dispersion, followed by his own Ether gradually being sealed.

Prohibition and Silence fell upon Nade simultaneously.

From the beginning, Yas's target was himself... the Order Bureau's target was himself, and the King's Shield Guards.

A strong sense of crisis rose in Nade's heart; they thought they had perfectly hidden themselves, yet in reality, they had already been exposed to the Order Bureau's scrutiny. They had remained unreactive all along, intending to catch everyone in one fell swoop at this decisive moment.

Countless thoughts flashed through his mind. Nade roared as he unleashed all his Ether; both he and Yas were Negative Power Users, and Yas's Prohibition and Silence could not completely bind Nade. At most, they barely affected him.

But even a slight influence was enough to pose an extremely strong threat to him amidst this cluster of Origin School Condensers.

Oddly, Nade did not retreat; instead, he engaged in fierce combat with the fully empowered Violence Suppression Action Group, sparks flew as if from a volcano exploding.

Nade no longer restrained his power; the immense Ether seeped from the Alchemy Matrix, and under excessive Ether output, his body began to blur and twist until he lost human form, transforming into a demonic entity.

Bologue could vaguely see that fearful figure; this was not Nade being affected by his own Secret Energy, but rather the authority inherent to him as a Negative Power User.

Upon reaching the Third Stage, the intimacy between the Negative Power User and the Ether almost fuses into one, elevating the mortal body and hence achieving energy transformation... that is Etherealization.

The reason Negative Power Users are notoriously hard to kill and why their lifespan extends far beyond ordinary people is precisely because their flesh has long shed mortal constraints and fused with Ether.

Nade had laid eyes on that revered "Secret Source" and was graced with its favor and blessing.

"For my King!"

A twisted, hoarse voice arrived with waves of heat; Ether altered Nade's body, akin to a mythological creature stepping out from a story. The extreme heat vaporized all surrounding matter, forming his bat wings, sharp claws, and long tail until he transformed into the Flame Demon descending upon the world.

Secret Energy·Ghost of Blazing Flames.

Bologue dared not look directly at that beautiful yet evil figure anymore. Everyone present averted their gaze, save for Yas who stubbornly continued to stare at him.

Raising his hand, Yas lifted his palm from the void and clenched his fist forcefully.

An invisible pressure came from all sides, as if a shield encapsulated Nade. The rampaging flames were bound and trapped in a spherical cage, transforming into a blazing sun in the sky.

"What a pity, in the end, he is merely a Negative Power User."

Yas muttered softly, pure white light emanated from his eyes. He walked the most extreme path, of absolute Origin School, where all power inclinations pointed towards coexistence with Ether.

His clenched fist trembled slightly but continued to firmly grasp everything, as a splendid Alchemy Matrix emerged from his body, its burgeoning brilliance clashing with the burning flames.

Until a certain moment when Nade could no longer resist, the invisible cage suddenly tightened, piercing through the flames and Nade's body, transforming into countless silver-white chains in the void, binding Nade's body, and then dissipating without a trace.

It seemed as if nothing had happened, but Nade could clearly feel the stagnation of his own ether flow. Another ether transformed into countless chains around his Alchemy Matrix, constantly eroding his Rectangular Soul Critical.

Under prohibition and silence, an absolute seal would bind everything.

The howling wind rushed down, and before Nade could attempt to break through Yas's restraint, another shadow appeared above him. Hart, who had been in a defensive stance, abandoned his Giant Shield, wielding the heavy Warhammer with both hands.

Ethereal Amplification.

In the thunderous roar, even the Flame Demon's form was smashed into the ground by this heavy strike. Nade struggled to stand up, spewing flames like a Fire Dragon, trying to incinerate Hart to ashes, but the dense bullets pierced through the flames, leaving bloody holes on his body.

The machine gunner fired at Nade. Ordinary bullets couldn't affect Nade under high temperatures, but the machine gunner wasn't using ordinary bullets; every bullet he fired was an expensive Alchemy Warhead.

In a matter of seconds, the machine gunner spent a month's salary of Bologue, but if it could kill a Negative Power User, the cost was more than worth it.

Nade struggled to weave together a fiery defense, with the Ethereal Prohibition and Ethereal Silence limiting him, and the combination of the two forming an Ethereal Seal, further trapping his Alchemy Matrix.

Those guys from the Origin School are so tricky. Like vicious hyenas, Nade had no fear in one-on-one battles, but once encircled by them, he could only be slowly worn down to death.

But it is worth it.

Nade had no fear of death, but was rather fanatical; he had stalled the Violence Suppression Action Group here, giving Jiamon the chance to escape. Jiamon carried the Blood Transfer Sword beneath him and was the most likely to leave this place alive, bringing the Immortal Heart to the Shadow King.

His sacrifice had value.

The gunfire ceased, and Hart swung the Warhammer once again. He was never one to linger in battle, always retreating immediately after a swing. If Nade attempted to pursue, he would encounter attacks from other team members.

The hand crossbow occasionally shot out cold arrows. The arrowheads were not expensive Alchemy Warheads, but they were explosive arrowheads, releasing large amounts of Alchemy Poison Gas with each rupture, further intoxicating Nade.

Other team members excelled in different Ethereal Skill techniques. They cooperated, and all of Nade's resistance resembled a trapped beast's struggle, merely a futile struggle leading to his total demise in mere seconds.

Yas stood at the forefront, intimidating Nade, one hand raised for the seal, while the other hung by his waist, gently resting on the Military Sabre, his movements graceful yet revealing authority.

The hazy glow flooded; a violent ether tangled on the blade. With Yas's power, he could at any time use the Military Sabre as a medium to manifest a deadly Ethereal Blade.

"Report on the mission."

In work mode, Yas was extremely reticent, much like Lebius. He continued to watch the struggling Nade, but Bologue knew he was speaking to him.

The range of Prohibition and Silence gradually narrowed under Yas's control, allowing Bologue to escape from this suffocating feeling, and he overlapped once again with Aimou.

Admittedly, in this hellish world, overlapping with Bologue gave Aimou a strange sense of reassurance, although sometimes when Bologue was injured, it brought immense pain, but it was all bearable.

Bologue's shell was like a shelter, keeping all the wickedness outside.

"The King's Secret Sword mentioned by Lebius, he escaped with that Contract Object Secret Sword, carrying the Immortal Heart. There's also a Crimson Bishop, a Negative Power User, chasing that King's Secret Sword."

Bologue paused, then continued.

"I haven't found Teda, but he should also be pursuing the Immortal Heart."

Yas nodded after hearing this, the roaring blaze several times threatened to reach him, to swallow him, but each time an invisible barrier repelled the flames.

"Then what are you waiting for, Bologue?" Yas said again.

Bologue did not react for a moment, and just then, another lively voice sounded in his ear.

"Yeah! What are you waiting for? Leave this to Yas, and let's chase after it! Kill that guy!"

Bologue turned his head sharply, not knowing when a bandit had appeared beside him. He looked quite disheveled, but judging from his tone, his spirits were quite high.

"What's wrong? Haven't seen me in a few minutes and already miss me?" Palmer said.

After a moment of silence, Bologue punched Palmer in the stomach, cursing angrily.

"Palmer! You bastard!"

Chapter 312: A Joke

Amidst the constant dangers, Palmer initially thought that after reuniting, Bologue would realize the importance of having Palmer as a partner, embrace him with tears in his eyes, and say that without Palmer, he couldn't take a single step.

In reality, Bologue did seem to have tears in his eyes; at least, his emotions appeared quite intense.

"Where the hell have you been!"

Bologue punched and kicked Palmer with all his might, showing no mercy. Palmer narrowly escaped from Olivia's clutches, only to now face death at the hands of Bologue.

Bologue was angry, as he had always been extremely tolerant of Palmer.

"This unlucky guy, at least he's alive."

Bologue often muttered this to himself as a form of self-consolation. But this time, Palmer's disappearance was utterly ridiculous.

He had been fighting round after round in this cursed Beast Fighting Arena, with opponents changing multiple times, but Palmer was nowhere to be seen from beginning to end.

It seems he really needs a new partner, even an Undead shouldn't be bullied like this!

"Wait a minute! You think I was hiding?" Palmer's tone hardened.

"What else?" Bologue retorted.

"Who do you think brought these guys in? It was me! It was me! I blew open the door to the Void Realm to let these guys in."

Palmer was crying his heart out, acting as if he were the hero of the day.

"Then where's your Whistle?" Bologue asked clearly.

Before entering the venue, he had discussed with Palmer that no matter what happened, they should first use the Whistle to contact each other. Yet, Palmer never contacted him, and the channel remained silent.

"Oh, that, it broke."

As Palmer spoke, he pulled out the Whistle, broken in two, from his pocket.

"You see, there were too many people at the time, I was in such a hurry, I slipped and fell while going down the stairs, not only banging my head but also breaking this thing."

Palmer said as he rubbed his head, indicating that his head injury was self-inflicted.

Bologue was momentarily speechless; he really didn't know what to say, so he muttered low curses.

"Palmer, you bastard..."

Before he could finish cursing, a strong surge of Ether erupted, bright flames descended instantly above them, but Hart was even quicker than the flames. As the Giant Shield fell, the Ethereal Barrier activated, easily separating the sea of fire.

"How long are you two going to chat?"

Amidst the dancing flames, Hart turned his head and shouted at the two, "Do what you need to do."

Only then did they break free from their argument; the battle wasn't over, and the fight for the Immortal Heart was far from concluded.

"Okay! Sido!"

"Thanks! Sido!"

Bologue and Palmer synced perfectly, and as the flames subsided, they ran directly towards the passage where Jia Meng and others had come from.

Nade tried to stop them, but Yas gave him no such chance. While suppressing Nade, Yas stepped forward, continually closing the distance.

Slowly, he drew the Military Saber from his waist, and with the addition of Ether, the metallic blade completely transformed into pure Ether, seemingly capable of cutting through everything in the world.

Regrettably, Bologue had no chance to witness such a scene; he and Palmer ran into the dark corridor, sprinting with all their might.

Bologue knew why Yas had assigned him to the chase. With his extremely keen lifeline, when dealing with these troubles, Bologue was like a hunting dog with an incredibly sharp sense of smell.

Indeed, Bologue could sense a vague direction, and from that direction came a continuous, unsettling aura.

"Better be careful, this mission involves too many weirdos."

Palmer became serious, after a brief rest and medication, he was in much better shape than before, "When I was trying to destroy the Void Realm, I even encountered a Night Race member."

Upon hearing about the Night Race, Bologue immediately thought of Olivia.

"Did you fight her?"

"No."

Palmer shook his head nonchalantly, but no matter how carefree his actions seemed in Bologue's eyes, it was just a black hood wagging about.

"She was enchanted by my talents and charms, but unfortunately, I have a fiancée, so I had to reject her with tears."

While speaking, Palmer removed the black hood, the numerous battles had left it tattered.

He used it like a rag, vigorously wiping the dirt and blood off his face, then pulled another black stocking from his pocket and put it over his face, making two holes for his eyes.

"But don't worry, when she asked for a name, I gave yours."

Palmer raised his eyebrows at Bologue.

"Now you have a Night Race admirer, partner."

"You son of a—"

Listening to Palmer's nonsense, Bologue couldn't help but want to curse him again.

"Don't rush! Don't rush! I'm just doing this for your own good."

Palmer was animated, his expression was clearly visible despite the sheer stockings.

"Think about it, Bologue, as an Undead, you can't stay single forever, right? The other party is also an Undead, why not give it a try?" Palmer's voice suddenly rose, "Although you're not very respectful to me, as a member of the Clarks, I possess the necessary tolerance."

Bologue looked at Palmer in disbelief, starting to think Palmer was truly crazy.

Aimou listened to their conversation from the side, thinking both of them were insane. In such a perilous situation, they were chatting away while on the move, and their topic was so random.

"Of course, the Night Race isn't important in this operation. She seems to be just a simple buyer, unexpectedly caught up in this conflict."

"Our real target is the one who escaped and his associates," Palmer suddenly became serious again, "The King's Shield Guard... I never imagined things would turn out like this."

"King's Shield Guard?"

Bologue couldn't figure out what Palmer was talking about; it sounded like a name of some organization, the one Nade and Jia Meng belong to.

"This matter is quite a long story."

For a moment, Palmer didn't know how to explain it to Bologue.

"Long story short."

"Well... In brief, a division occurred within the King's Secret Sword, and the part that broke away is called the King's Shield Guard, which is the group you just encountered. They support a figure known as the Shadow King."

Palmer explained to Bologue, "The confidentiality level of this information is very high. It was only when I encountered Yas that I was informed of all this."

Hearing this, Bologue suddenly had an epiphany.

"That means..."

"Yes, the real target of this mission was not the Gray Trade Association or the Corrupt Sect. As for Teda? No one cares about him; the real target is the King's Shield Guard."

Saying this, Palmer couldn't help but feel a chill.

"It's a trap, a trap that deceives everyone involved... all just to eliminate these King's Shield Guard."

Before Bologue could say anything, Palmer loudly complained again.

"Damn, these bastards don't treat people like humans at all; they didn't even tell me about the dangers of this mission," Palmer shouted at Bologue, "To bridge you with that Night Race, I almost got killed by her!"

Palmer's shouting left Bologue bewildered; he could clearly sense that Palmer's words were nonsense, yet he found himself unable to keep up with Palmer's train of thought to refute him.

In the art of nonsense, Palmer had a certain skill more refined.

The two continued to rush through the narrow corridor, vast as a maze, bewildered why the Gray Trade Association would construct such a place.

But if viewed as a blood-stained ritual site, Bologue felt it made some sense. He imagined the Tyrant must be hidden somewhere, high above, admiring the foolish antics of others.

En route to chasing Jia Meng, Bologue spotted numerous fallen bodies, their deaths were tragic as if their bodies were crushed by some mighty force in an instant.

This was certainly not Jia Meng's doing. Bologue grew cautious; it seemed there was another Hunter making their way through this vast maze.

Teda Yazhede.

The current situation was perfect for Teda. What he needed was complete chaos, and now various forces were entangled with each other, the injured Jia Meng fleeing alone.

Bologue couldn't think of a better opportunity to strike, and Teda's power was also hard to discern.

Teda's path was one of pure, classic Illusion Creation. Under his Secret Energy, all Teda's thoughts and ideas became reality, meaning his power was ever-changing, with no basis for judgment.

Also a Negative Power User, Nade gave Bologue an impression of brutal aggression like the blazing sun, while Teda felt eerie and cold like a venomous snake.

"Aimou, we might face Teda next. What do you think?" Bologue suddenly asked, "If you don't want to, you can leave."

"Is the teacher going to do something terrible?"

"Probably? This guy Teda doesn't talk to anyone; who knows what he's thinking."

In Bologue's view, Teda lacked the steadiness of an elder, and instead resembled a turbulent young man with extreme stubbornness, keeping all his thoughts to himself, not communicating with others.

Aimou fell silent, not responding.

Bologue shook his head helplessly, thinking it might be too difficult to let Aimou make such a decision.

Teda didn't love his child, but the child still loved her father; this was understandable yet unfortunate.

"And you, Palmer," Bologue suddenly turned to his partner beside him, "If you still want to maintain your image in my mind, you better be reliable from now on."

"Heavens! I actually still have an image in your mind, I thought it had already crumbled to pieces."

Palmer looked astonished.

"What?"

Bologue was so taken aback, he lifted his hand ready to draw his saber against Palmer.

"Just kidding, just kidding."

Palmer repeatedly shouted, glancing at the gradually collapsing corridor, countless crimson tentacles emerging from the walls, trailing after them.

"In times like this, I think it's appropriate to crack a few jokes to lighten the mood... don't you think so, Bologue?"

Chapter 313: Revenge

Bologue didn't have many hobbies, but music and movies were among them. He had seriously considered how to spend his long life as an Undead. To this end, Bologue once jotted down thoughts of making movies and music in his diary.

If he were to shoot a film himself, it should be a violent, bloody, and thrilling curiosity piece with a touch of comedy. In that case, Palmer as the protagonist would be most fitting.

Bologue always felt that this unlucky guy wouldn't stop his goddamn jokes even when staring death in the face. After hearing Palmer's nonsense so many times, sometimes Bologue wanted to crack open Palmer's head to see what he was really thinking.

It's work time now; as an expert, he couldn't let this comedian lead him astray. Bologue tried to forget the bizarre ideas that emanated from Palmer and turned his thoughts to that unfamiliar term.

King's Shield Guard.

"So, the King's Secret Sword who fled on the stormy night, the guy I just beat up, he's actually the King's Shield Guard?"

Bologue loudly questioned, "They weren't even carrying out the King's Secret Sword's orders on that stormy night. They had already betrayed then?"

"That's how it seems! Yas mentioned that an internal purge had already begun within the King's Secret Sword, so everyone's been at peace lately, and there's nothing more suitable than Opus for them to hide from the purge." Palmer continued, glancing at the ground below, fissures constantly cracking open, revealing crimson flesh seeping through.

"They've always hidden in the Great Rift. You know how complicated the situation is in the Great Rift. The Order Bureau hasn't been able to conduct an effective purge, but later intelligence indicated the King's Shield Guards had designs on the Immortal Heart as well, so the Order Bureau set a trap."

Bologue leaped over a flesh tendril rising from the ground, cursing, "But those bastards set up the trap without telling us. I thought our only enemies were the Sanguine Corruption Sect!"

This time, Bologue truly felt the coldness and warmth of human relationships. He was like a boxer deceived into the ring. He was promised that defeating the enemy before him would end the match today, but opponents kept switching out. The referee wouldn't call a stop... even saying excitedly, the referee stripped off his clothes, donned gloves, and stood eagerly before him.

"I've already complained to Yas about this!"

Palmer said, dropping his face and imitating Yas's cold, half-dead tone, "But you're the elite among elites. Who else but you could complete this mission!"

Palmer then continued, "Yas said this mission counts as triple the pay for us."

Both fell silent for a moment. Bologue said, complicatedly, "It's only when collecting my paycheck that I truly feel like I'm at work."

"Who isn't?" Palmer nodded in agreement, "There was a time I saw myself as a fallen noble. With no choice left, I took a job with this violent agency."

"Is pay that important?"

Aimou asked in Bologue's mind, surprised that such a thing could drive these two to run back and forth.

"Aimou, you've never lived alone. In human society, an equivalent exchange is essential." Bologue sighed.

"Even for the Undead?"

"Naturally," Bologue recalled Serey's words, lamenting, "This isn't the chaotic era of centuries past. Comprehensive laws and regulations bind everyone in society."

"What would happen during the chaotic era?"

Bologue pondered for a moment, his tone turning light with a smile.

"Down here, I'd be a renegade; in the mountains, a bandit; and at sea, a pirate."

"Wait, wait!"

Palmer suddenly screamed, looking at Bologue with terror in his eyes, loudly questioning, "You're not talking to yourself, are you?"

"Not at all," Bologue said, "Say hi, Aimou."

The light trails on Bologue's body flickered as Bologue's face overlapped. Another face appeared faintly, and Aimou protruded her head in a very shocking manner.

"Hello, Palmer!"

She briefly returned to corporeal form before once more merging into Bologue's body.

"Whoa!"

Palmer, astonished, looked at Bologue, "You've been keeping her with you all along?"

"What else?"

"You're mad!" Palmer felt he was re-meeting Bologue, realizing he'd been fighting alongside Aimou, "Teda will have your head!"

"Indeed," Bologue agreed with Palmer, "That's why I keep the hostage close."

"H-h-h-hostage?"

Even now, Aimou hadn't figured out her role.

"So who is the Shadow King? Anyone who can cause the King's Secret Sword to split and defect—hasn't the Order Bureau noticed such a person?" Bologue shifted the topic.

"Not clear, I've asked Yas about this too, but it seems he doesn't know much either," Palmer shook his head, "But in his words, the Shadow King just seemed to appear out of thin air."

"Out of thin air?"

"Yes, they appeared suddenly and caused a large group of King's Secret Sword to defect loyally and without hesitation," Palmer felt a heavy pressure when thinking about the Shadow King, "You know, back when the King of Slaughter instigated the Blood Night, the King's Secret Sword remained immensely loyal."

"It's really complicated... So should we capture a live one?" Bologue said.

"That's not necessary, is it? Leave the live ones to Yas and the others, they're really good at it."

Recalling Yas's confrontation with Nade, under absolute Prohibition and Silence, even the most frenzied flame was suppressed, not to mention the Prayer Believers and Condensers below the Negative Power User.

A low tier Condenser in front of the Violence Suppression Action Group is no different from an ordinary mortal; without the support of Ether, they are easily mowed down into a pile of corpses by machine guns.

"To be honest, I always feel that things won't go so smoothly."

Bologue took a deep breath; even with the Violence Suppression Action Group present, he still felt crisis looming.

"Relax, trust your organization." Palmer spoke lightly, not forgetting to give Bologue a thumbs up.

"Do you have something you haven't told me?" Bologue asked.

"No, right? We're partners, something like that is impossible."

The two exchanged words, constantly rushing towards the deepest part of the Void Realm. The more they descended, the heavier the cloying stench became, with darkness shrouding everything around.

It was as if they were advancing inside a monster's esophagus, at the end of darkness lay a stomach filled with corpses and decay.

Bologue was unafraid; he could clearly sense that the bizarre and frantic aura was at the bottommost point, an invisible line connecting him to that thing.

...

A blood-colored sphere appeared out of thin air, after a brief delay, the blood-red membrane began to deteriorate and then completely shattered.

Jia Meng's figure fell out from it, crashing hard onto the ground, gasping painfully.

At this moment, Jia Meng was in extremely terrible condition, with a blood hole pierced by a Bright Light Blade in his chest, the wound deep enough to nearly touch his heart. Then came the Shock Hammer's blow, fracturing bones, and the cost of using the Blood Transfer Sword to escape the Beast Fighting Arena.

Jia Meng groaned in pain, slowly releasing the thorn-covered sword hilt, the dense spikes tearing his arms into a bloody mess.

Fortunately, the cost was worth it; turning his head, he gazed at the container tightly held in his hand, which contained the Immortal Heart.

"Ha... Ha..."

Jia Meng laughed wretchedly, reaching into his pocket and taking out several prepared alchemy potions, which he directly injected into his body, gradually blocking the pain and squeezing life force from beneath his shell.

This made him feel a lot better, staggering up, the Blood Transfer Sword had absorbed the cost, all the thorns retracting and transforming back into that crimson Secret Sword.

Picking up the Secret Sword, Jia Meng surveyed his surroundings; it was a vast underground space, not far from him was a cliff, its end unseen, replaced only by deep darkness.

After confirming safety, he did not let down his guard; Jia Meng, being a Prayer Believer, though heavily injured, his strength was being continually restored under the drive of the alchemy potion.

Such alchemy potion would deplete his life force, but under such circumstances, Jia Meng didn't need to care much.

Then... Then...

A slight pain interrupted Jia Meng's thoughts, subsequently growing intense and heart-wrenching.

He reached for his abdomen, unable to stop the blood from overflowing, the deafening sound of gunfire reverberated in his ears.

Jia Meng coughed up large amounts of blood, turning his head as a figure gradually emerged from between the rocks, the disguise on the newcomer's body gradually dissipating, looking at the disheveled Jia Meng while lowering the gun.

"You..."

The Shadow of Illusion and Reality instantly rose, enveloping Jia Meng, between life and death, Jia Meng no longer restrained his Ether, at full surge, the outline of the towering figure could be seen, accompanied by the intricate patterns on his armor.

"What a mess you are, Jia Meng."

Laughter echoed, the person drew the sword from his waist, bright light tracing along the blade's edge.

Jia Meng froze; he recognized that sword.

"Milasha..."

No... Milasha was already dead, Jia Meng had personally driven the blade into Milasha's body, watching her become a cold corpse in the storm.

"You are..."

Before finishing his sentence, a glow of Ether flashed across the newcomer's body, raising the Secret Sword to instantly reach Jia Meng's presence, Jia Meng decisively raised the Blood Transfer Sword, wielding the crimson crescent.

In the sharp clash of blades, Jia Meng screamed fiercely.

"Gray!"

The Blood Transfer Sword shattered the newcomer's mask, Gray's twisted face full of ecstatic joy was clearly visible.

Chapter 314: Slaying

For everyone caught in the chaos today, everything that happened was absolutely terrible, and Jia Meng was no exception.

First, a series of severe injuries, then the entry of the Order Bureau, and now the appearance of Gray.

If it weren't for the agonizing pain in his abdomen that almost made Jia Meng faint, he would've thought the man before him was just an illusory phantom.

Regrettably, this wasn't a hallucination but an undeniable reality.

Gray hadn't died on that stormy night; he was alive, filled with the vengeful flames, sworn to dismember the man before him.

"How do you feel, Captain!"

Gray laughed as he unleashed his sword, the blinding Alchemy Matrix entwined around his arm; as a Condenser from the Origin School, each of Gray's strikes carried Ethereal Amplification, his blade heavy as if cast from a thousand pounds of steel.

Jia Meng gave no response, severely wounded and hit by Gray's unexpected attacks; if not for the Prayer Believers' power sustaining him, he'd be dead by now.

The Blood Transfer Sword flickered repeatedly, tracing crimson paths as it collided with Gray's blade, illuminating Jia Meng's pale face; every strike from Gray's sword edged Jia Meng closer to death.

"Old friends reunited; don't you have anything to say!"

Gray roared defiantly, pouring all his accumulated rage and resentment over time into the sword in his hand, forging a judgment of revenge.

"I killed you once; I can kill you again!"

Jia Meng hissed; he couldn't fathom how Gray had survived or why Gray had appeared here.

The old Jia Meng might have surrendered amid such circumstances, accepting death with composure, but now it's different; he bore the Immortal Heart, the key that let the Shadow King live, willing to give everything for the true King.

The Shadow of Illusion and Reality surged, swinging its long blade, stirring waves of air, and spreading narrow blade marks across the ground and walls; the entire cliff trembled violently.

Gray's figure was swift and deceptive; under Ethereal Amplification, he was like a phantom, dodging the attacks from the Shadow of Illusion and Reality while still retaliating at Jia Meng.

Just like when he confronted Bologue, Gray carried many Alchemy Armaments; their stability might be inferior, but their quantity sufficed against Jia Meng, heavily injured as he was.

Releasing countless tiny darts with a wave, they were blocked by the solidified Shadow of Illusion and Reality, but in the next instant, they ignited and exploded, the booming sound shaking the Shadow of Illusion and Reality, yet unable to harm Jia Meng.

Unlike many others, Jia Meng hadn't chosen to derive from secondary schools when becoming a Prayer Believer, thus preventing the oddity of his Secret Energy; he pursued the extreme path of Illusion Creation, his Illusion Creations powerful despite their many limitations.

Through the eruptive dust cloud, the Blade of Illusion forged by Ether suddenly swung upward, slicing a massive crevice among the rising rocks, sending countless pebbles tumbling down.

Jia Meng roared madly, swinging the Blade of Illusion rapidly, the blade tailing Gray's figure, turning into aimless frenzied chops.

Gray maneuvered between the descending blades, a Condenser from the Origin School; when alone, his combat capabilities were constrained, not to mention confronting Prayer Believers like Jia Meng, even if severely wounded.

Gray distinctly had the chance just now to shoot Jia Meng's head and end his revenge, yet he felt it insufficient to release his fury; he'd rather endure danger and expose his identity, making Jia Meng consciously meet his demise.

Since Jia Meng idolized his Shadow King so much, then utterly crush all his hopes firsthand.

The glow of Ether rose, Gray's figure slightly stalled, then accelerated forward, transforming into a Sharp Sword; Jia Meng's frantic swings instantly shifted, slashing down the path of Gray's advance.

Jia Meng wasn't a weakling; on the contrary, as a Prayer Believer, he was immensely formidable; just unlucky upon arriving in Opus.

The betrayal operation had barely begun when he encountered Lebius and Geoffrey, finally managing to dominate the Beast Fighting Arena, only to face Bologue.

The Undying Body granted Bologue an almost frightening error tolerance, whereas his deceitful and changing Secret Energy overwhelmed Jia Meng.

Only now, battling Gray, did Jia Meng retrieve some courage as a Prayer Believer, yet this courage felt more like hysteria resisting death.

Facing the descending Blade of Illusion, Gray abruptly halted his advance, then dashed towards another side, while continuing to unleash Alchemy Weapons to disrupt Jia Meng.

Until during one of multiple assaults, an anticipated explosion didn't occur, replaced by rising toxic gas.

Under the Shadow of Illusion and Reality's cover, Jia Meng could effectively resist attacks, but facing gaseous poisons?

The sound of corrosive acid was incessant, accompanied by gleaming ripples across the Shadow of Illusion and Reality, successfully defending against direct poison contact, yet the gaseous toxins dispersed widely, quickly touching unprotected parts.

The skin that made contact started to swell and fester; fortunately, Jia Meng retreated hastily from the poison's range; he was ready to attack Gray again when Gray leaped towards him high.

Gray gripped the Fire-Calling Staff, Ether outputted fully, with blazing flames filling every corner, the violent dragon's breath engulfing Jia Meng entirely.

Amid the scorching flames, the glow of Ether surged abruptly, the Blade of Illusion slicing through layers of the fiery inferno.

Jia Meng's voice was wretched, like that of a dying man on the verge of collapse, yet his pupils were bright and fiery, filled with absolutely pure Ether.

The Alchemy Matrix on the Fire-Calling Staff began to flicker, dense sparks suddenly appearing. Without the slightest hesitation, Gray hurled the Fire-Calling Staff at Jia Meng, and immediately the Alchemy Matrix started to collapse and explode.

The intense explosion caused countless cracks to burst across the entire cliff, beneath which scarlet flesh sprawled and grew. If the battle between the two became any more fierce, the whole ground seemed likely to collapse into the profound darkness below.

Jia Meng successfully withstood another round of Gray's attacks, his pupils bloodshot and crimson, his hair wildly entangled with blood on his face.

"Gray, you can't stop all this!"

Jia Meng shouted at Gray, his extreme fanaticism overwhelming his fear of death.

"He will eventually take his throne!"

"Do you mean that so-called Shadow King?" Through the dust, Gray held Milasha's Secret Sword, sneering, "I no longer care about those, Jia Meng."

"You were a good teacher, Jia Meng."

Gray said warmly, yet his voice was laced with venomous resentment, "You taught me all of this, the cruelty and ruthlessness of this world, and the thrill of revenge."

Slowly raising the Secret Sword, just as Grey had once learned.

"I care not for any Shadow King, nor for the King's Secret Sword and the King's Shield Guard."

Ether filled every part of his body, singing triumphantly in the Alchemy Matrix, bestowing Extraordinary Power upon his mortal flesh.

"All I desire is revenge, to thoroughly exterminate you, along with that pretender king, everything and everyone!"

Gray crushed the ground beneath his feet, his silhouette distorting into a sharp, elongated Light Blade.

In his fury, Milasha's Secret Sword also shone with ether's radiance. It was activated, and Extraordinary Power was bestowed upon this steel.

Jia Meng, dazzled by the lingering brilliance, briefly lost focus before recalling the power of Milasha's Secret Sword. Desperately, he swung the Blade of Illusion to meet the descending Secret Sword.

Ether unleashed with full force, constructing a real blade amidst fantasy. The phantom constantly solidified, as if fantasy became reality, materializing as a true entity in Jia Meng's Illusion Creation, solely to intercept this lethal strike.

At the moment the blades crossed, Gray suddenly shifted his body, turning, allowing the Illusory Blade to tear through his left arm, then raised the Secret Sword with his right hand, brushing past the Blade of Illusion, thrusting toward Jia Meng's heart.

"This is Milasha's revenge!"

Amid Gray's roar, the Shadow of Illusion and Reality solidified into sturdy armor, heavily covering Jia Meng, but this time, this absolute defense couldn't block Milasha's Secret Sword.

Silence Sword.

This was the name of Milasha's Secret Sword, and its effect was as the name suggested, able to silence the ether touched by the blade, making it unusable. Its range was extremely limited, yet at this critical moment, it became the armor-piercing edge that killed Jia Meng.

Blood and pain were cleaved in two by the Silence Sword, along with all the hatred and venomous resentment completely purified.

Everything became much smoother after that. After a difficult piercing, the Silence Sword easily penetrated Jia Meng's chest. Gray pressed down the blade with all his strength, the Silence Sword viciously slicing downward, splitting several ribs, shredding organs, and then slashing out from Jia Meng's waist, opening a ghastly wound.

Fragments of flesh and tainted blood, mixed with broken internal organs, spilled all over the ground. The thick stench awakened the rampant flesh below, sprouting through the earth like tender shoots. Scarlet stalks dug into Jia Meng's broken body, gnawing at his flesh.

The radiance of the Shadow of Illusion and Reality gradually faded until it completely dissipated behind Jia Meng, leaving only dim light struggling to sustain the operation of the Alchemy Matrix. Jia Meng sluggishly lifted his head, looking at the one-armed Gray.

"You... you have no idea what you've done."

Jia Meng's voice carried a hint of distortion, as if crying out in pain.

But such sorrow did not last long, as he slowly fell back, dense scarlet stalks wrapping around his body.

On his pale face, blood-red eyes stared intently at Gray, a cursed voice resonating.

"It's alright, Gray."

Jia Meng chuckled faintly.

"He will return... it's destined..."

Jia Meng, like a fanatical devotee, continued muttering to his god till his last breath.

Gray was indifferent to all this, not even glancing at the container that fell to the ground. He simply strode forward, impaling Jia Meng's heart with the Silence Sword, pinning him completely to the earth.

Chapter 315: For Whom to Fight

In the dim space, amidst the silence, a labyrinth of noise slowly rose, crimson sprouts pushing open the soil, prying apart rocks. They, like crazed weeds, crawled densely over every corner.

Gray stared long at Jia Meng's corpse. He had completed his revenge, yet there was no surge of joy inside him. His emotions had long turned as cold as metal, even the pain from his severed arm had dulled.

A slight prickling sensation came from his ankles — those crazed sprouts were trying to gnaw at Gray's flesh. Gray broke free from the bind, stamping down hard, grinding them into a mass of blood and filth, but soon new sprouts grew from beneath the bloodied soil.

"Milasha..."

Gray whispered softly, recalling his former self.

A newly enlisted member of the King's Secret Sword, he initially believed he could make a difference, yet ended up losing everything to betrayal. This all happened within less than half a year, but to Gray, this short time felt as long as a lifetime.

Gray once imagined his final battle with Jia Meng, expecting perilous risks, but clearly, someone else had severely injured Jia Meng ahead of time for him. Without that person, Gray had been prepared to pay with his life to attack Jia Meng.

In the end, he didn't manage to die, only losing an arm. But at this moment, Gray felt somewhat lost, as if he had lost his purpose, while the sharp pain in his severed arm gradually became clear, reminding him he was still alive.

He needed another driving gaze, a reason to continue living and moving forward.

"Shadow King..."

Gray whispered, his gaze moving toward the container about to be enveloped by flesh and blood.

He slowly raised the Silence Sword. Just as Gray prepared to cut through the flesh and take the container, a strange voice echoed.

"Gray, don't touch that thing."

Gray looked down and saw the sprouts turn to foul blood, reflecting a blood-red mirror in front of him, with his own reflection speaking.

"Doing that will affect the script," the voice carried a tone of laughter.

"Tyrant."

Gray recognized this frenzied will, a sinister force he'd been accompanied by all this time.

"Script?" Gray chuckled, "Who are you trying to drag into the Abyss now?"

"How could it be said to drag them into the Abyss? I'm merely giving them a little help on their way to realizing their wishes," the Tyrant replied, "The choice has always been theirs."

Gray fell silent, often feeling the mockery of fate after sobering up.

Jia Meng's betrayal, the help of the Delusional, the gifts from the Tyrant... It was like a mire pulling Gray deeper, as though he was wrong from the start.

"Tyrant, was my coming to the Great Rift, pursuing this revenge, also part of your plan?"

"How could it be? The choice has always been in your hands, hasn't it?"

The Tyrant's laughter was piercing.

"You had every opportunity, Gray.

You could fully recover from your injuries and leave Opus, returning to your homeland. You could have given up revenge and calmly accepted death on that stormy night. You see, you had countless choices, yet eventually, you chose this path.

It was you who drove yourself down this road."

The scarlet reflection became increasingly hideous and terrifying, while the Tyrant's words echoed like a curse.

"I just gave you a little help."

Gray took a deep breath. The Tyrant was right; Devils never lie. Their words and actions are always true, but like some vile curse, it all ultimately leads to tragedy.

"So are you now going to give someone else a little help?"

Staring at the container wrapped in flesh, Gray suddenly understood what the Tyrant meant by the script.

The Tyrant gave no direct response but instead let out an eerie laugh.

The Immortal Heart, which mesmerized and obsessed many, was in the Tyrant's hands, merely a piece to further the script. He, like a childish child, sat on high, treating everyone as toys, just to fulfill some meager pleasure of his own.

Devils were noble and mysterious, yet they would speak to you kindly and even drink with you. Gray understood that such esteemed status meant nothing to them.

Gray wanted to say something, but stopped himself. The Tyrant clearly knew what he wanted to ask, and the sinister voice arose again.

"Are you sure about this, Gray?"

The scarlet reflection questioned Gray, with ripples spreading through the blood, as the reflected image began to distort and deform, as though becoming some grotesque monster.

"You were ready to die but fortunately survived. You have already killed Jia Meng; you could stop here."

The Tyrant showed concern, advising him like a friend.

"Bring back Milasha's Secret Sword and Jia Meng's head, return to the Pillar of Royal Authority. Report everything about the King's Shield Guard to your king..."

The voice became obsessed.

"I can see such a future, Gray. You will be valued, continuously promoted, even inheriting a position..."

The beautiful dream shattered, and the Tyrant's tone became stern.

"But if you ask that question, you will take a different path."

Gray was momentarily lost in thought, seemingly drawn into that beautiful dream, yet another voice echoed incessantly within his heart.

"Should you stop here?"

"Leave with all your doubts, retreating timidly."

"You have nothing left to care about, so why not forge ahead fearlessly?"

Blood filled Gray's eyes, and he tightly grasped the Secret Sword in his hand, feeling a warm sensation emanating from it.

He still remembered that time; as a newcomer, he made many mistakes. Milasha didn't harshly judge him but comforted him instead.

"Everyone was a newcomer once; there's no need to blame yourself."

"But... is this okay?" Gray knew the King's Secret Sword was stern, and gentle Milasha seemed out of place in all this.

"There's nothing wrong with it. When I was a newcomer, I made mistakes too and was scolded to tears several times."

Milasha ruffled Gray's hair, showing enough patience for this newcomer.

"I thought it was awful, so I decided that if one day I started bringing newcomers, I wouldn't treat them like that."

Gray wanted to express his gratitude, but Milasha seemed to know what he was going to say and spoke first.

"No need to thank me. If you really want to express gratitude, be kind to the newcomers when you're mentoring them in the future."

Gray gazed at the crimson reflection, laughing at himself; indeed, no one can reject the Devil's words, even if aware of that dark fate beforehand.

"Who is the Shadow King?"

Gray asked.

The response to Gray was the Tyrant's wild laughter, and at the same time, the blood pool boiled. It was a small puddle of blood, yet it reverberated to another dimension of blood, with a large amount of blood surging until it soaked Gray's feet.

"Gray, this information comes at a price, a very steep price, one that even your soul cannot fill."

Amid the spread of the pool of blood appeared a monstrous creature entangled by countless threads, and a hundred crimson arms waving; its voice was like a thunderous roar.

"Do I need to surrender my soul?" Gray asked coldly.

"No, someday you'll willingly offer your soul to me, as an interesting wager."

The Tyrant broke through the boundary of reality and illusion, dressed in a meticulous black suit, standing on the crimson pool before Gray.

"Just a wager?" Gray shook his head, "I still don't understand you devils."

"There's no need to understand us," the Tyrant shook his head, asking in return, "Do you think devils have a stance?"

Gray was caught off guard, while the Tyrant continued his disturbing laughter.

"Do you think the Gray Trade Association represents my will? Or does the Putrid Sect represent her will? No, it was never like that. They are just toys we use for entertainment."

The Tyrant slowly opened his arms, as if to embrace Gray.

"None of that matters; what matters is value."

His hands rested on Gray's shoulders, and face to face. Gray tried to discern the Tyrant's appearance, but he could only see a head encased in countless cables. Between the gaps in the threads, crimson eyes occasionally opened.

"The Shadow King's name is..."

The Tyrant leaned in close, whispering softly in Gray's ear, revealing that name, which incites madness.

The moment the name echoed in Gray's ear, his soul seemed to detach from his body, his body stiffening like a stone sculpture, all the blood in his veins frozen, even his heart paused briefly.

He was unsure what feelings were coursing through him now, but his body trembled uncontrollably, whether from excitement or fear, a violent wave of emotions, which even induced a feeling of nausea as if he'd vomit out all the filth in his heart.

Gray's mind went blank, the name reverberating by his ear. He couldn't believe any of it and looked at the Tyrant before him, preparing to berate him loudly, when he remembered something.

The Devil never lies; every word and action is absolutely truthful.

It's all real.

The Shadow King is him, it's...

"Gray, your expression right now is superb."

The Tyrant's voice interrupted Gray's erratic thoughts, his wave of the hand revealing Jia Meng's battered corpse in the bloody pool, the body already stripped of most flesh, leaving just bare bones amidst the devouring roots of decay.

Gazing upon the ragged visage, the Tyrant murmured in pity, "So pitiful... It seems he was right, and you are the one thwarting everything — the true villain."

As the Tyrant spoke, he turned around, looking again at the dazed Gray with a smile.

"It's time to choose, Gray."

Gray's eyes gradually solidified, the Tyrant in them turning wickedly insane, embodying all the sins of the world.

"Will you kill the Shadow King, or fight for him?"

Chapter 316: Thank you, Boss

For... whom am I fighting.

Countless thoughts collided in Gray's mind, until a fierce pain nearly tore his consciousness apart, and he suddenly woke up.

Looking around in a daze, Jia Meng's corpse and the container were enveloped by scarlet branches. The Tyrant and the sea of blood had disappeared, as if everything that happened just now was merely an illusion.

Cold sweat mixed with blood soaked through Gray's clothes. He opened his mouth wide, taking deep breaths with all his might, trying to dispel those complex and indescribable emotions deep within.

The hand gripping the sword couldn't stop trembling, and Gray suddenly realized that holding a sword was such a difficult task for him.

Footsteps sounded from behind him, Gray turned his head, and a blurred silhouette emerged on the road from which he came; someone was chasing after him.

His figure gradually revealed itself, and a ghastly white mask appeared before his eyes.

"Delusional..."

Gray said in confusion, not understanding why the Delusional was here. In their previous deal, wasn't it agreed that Gray would be the one to seize that thing?

Thinking of that thing, Gray felt a headache. The Tyrant's sudden whim disrupted everything, and he didn't know if he could fulfill his promise.

Yet just as Gray was about to say something, a crazed illusion emerged beside Delusional, iron-cast arms appeared out of nowhere, each wielding countless knives and swords.

The Negative Power User's strength was unleashed in an instant, and almost immediately, Delusional appeared in front of Gray, the icy blade tracing a predetermined arc that, once it fell, would cut Gray into countless pieces of flesh.

The remaining Ether surged, Gray placed the Silence Sword horizontally in front of him, protecting his torso as best as he could.

He couldn't understand why Delusional suddenly attacked him, and Delusional's actions were swift and clean, without the slightest hesitation, as if facing a stranger competitor.

What shocked Gray the most was Delusional's power. In their few exchanges before, Gray had tested Delusional, and he didn't sense any strong Ether response from him, but this time he appeared directly at the Negative Power User's tier.

Gray was powerless to ponder these things further; his mind was filled with too much information, countless thoughts were nearly bursting his brain.

After the flashing sparks, Gray's body was covered with several hideous wounds, and his entire body heavily slammed onto the rocks on one side, coughing up a large amount of blood.

Delusional tried to pursue, aiming to completely kill Gray, but at this moment, a pair of arms extended out of thin air, grabbing Gray's shoulders from behind.

A biting cold spread along the arms onto Gray's body, and Delusional stopped his footsteps, for he could see the figure standing behind Gray.

"I anticipate your next decision."

It was unclear if he was speaking to Gray or to Delusional, but the Tyrant forcefully pulled Gray into the vague darkness, disappearing from sight.

Once again, the world fell silent, and Delusional stared for a long time at the place where the two had vanished, then picked up a Sharp Sword to cut through layers of flesh and was about to reach for the blood-soaked container when a gunshot rang out.

The shooter pulled the trigger six times, and six deadly Alchemy Warheads were completely unleashed, tracing lethal paths toward Delusional.

For a Negative Power User, the threat of an Alchemy Warhead was greatly reduced, but that didn't mean it posed no threat.

Ether surged, weaving heavy steel in the void, a shield wall appeared beside Delusional, blocking the heavy gunfire, but the shooter had no intention of letting him off so easily. Howling winds rose, carrying several Flying Knives rushing forward.

With precise control, the Flying Knives easily bypassed the shield wall's defense and swung towards Delusional, but such attacks clearly underestimated him.

As swords were swung, the Flying Knives were chopped into fragments of iron, and Delusional looked at the attacker, seeing him awkwardly looking at him, while still keeping the motion of reloading.

"G... good morning?"

Palmer thought about it and started the conversation in this clumsy way.

Delusional hadn't been dragged into Palmer's dim-witted chat; he knew very well that when Palmer appeared, another person must be nearby, and that person was the most troublesome one.

To admit, Delusional's judgment was correct, but clearly, he had somewhat underestimated these two's audacity. When Delusional noticed the abnormality, a hook had already coiled around the container and flown out right in front of him.

Delusional tried to intercept it, but Palmer had finished reloading and mercilessly pulled the trigger, sealing Delusional's movement trajectories with heavy bullets.

Yet such an offensive was too fragile for a Negative Power User, not to mention facing this pure Illusion Creation.

Ether intertwined to form chains, layer upon layer locking onto the container, fighting against the hook, while more shield walls rose from the ground, blocking all of Palmer's shooting routes.

At the end of the hook, above, the rocky wall shattered, and hidden within it Bologue leapt out.

Indeed, things weren't as smooth as he'd hoped. Before it all started, when he'd begun to be wary of Teda, Bologue had carefully considered how to deal with Teda if confronted head-on.

The result was, no result.

Faced with this pure Illusion Creation, Bologue found that for Teda, the only limitations were Ether consumption and his own imagination.

He needed flames and could create flames, needed waves and could summon waves; within Teda's realm, whatever he thought would become fantasy becoming reality.

Against such an enemy, Bologue truly didn't know how to fight, he could only rely on improvisation.

The sharp blade appeared out of thin air, ready to cut Bologue's hook. However, before it could sever the hook, dense iron branches extended from it, pushing away all the attacking blades.

Countless serpents crawled along Bologue's arm, touching the container along the hook, and then the iron branches extended again, severing all the Illusion Creation chains.

The Deceitful Snake Scale Silver transformed into an extended arm, firmly grasping the container, and flew back towards Bologue.

"Palmer! Do something useful!"

Bologue shouted loudly.

Palmer gritted his teeth, raised the Revolver high, and took a deep breath.

The Delusional abandoned defense, eight arms rose from its back, holding knives, spears, swords, and halberds, charging toward the two.

"Do something! Blessing!"

Palmer had no idea whom to shout at, so he shouted inexplicably and then pulled the trigger, firing the last Alchemy Warhead in the cylinder.

He had been unlucky all day and it was about time for his luck to change. The Alchemy Warhead spun out, the lone bullet heading towards the murderous Delusional.

Expectedly, the Alchemy Warhead would be slashed open by the Delusional, followed by a storm of sharp blades that would tear both of them to pieces.

Everything went exactly as Palmer expected, the Illusion Creation's blade ripped the warhead apart, the ghastly white mask like a specter claiming lives. But just as the Delusional was about to catch up with the container and sever the arm built of Deceitful Snake Scale Silver, the ground shook violently and collapsed.

Crimson tendrils suddenly wrapped around the Delusional's ankle, shattering rocks like swaying seaweed, winding around again and again. Although the sword could easily cut them into mush, it still slowed down the Delusional's pace.

"Thank you, boss!"

Palmer shouted excitedly. He wasn't sure if his Blessing had taken effect, or if the Delusional was just that unlucky, falling victim to the Corrupted Root's attack.

But either way, shouting thanks to the boss was not a problem, considering that whether it was his own Blessing or the Corrupted Root, both sources came from that scarlet lady.

"Successfully recovered!"

Bologue shouted triumphantly as if in defiance.

But the two were not happy with the success of their mission for long. Bologue and Palmer stood side by side, facing the Delusional, who remained silent, exerting the full pressure of a Negative Power User.

"What now, expert?"

Palmer swallowed hard, facing the pressure from a Negative Power User was not insignificant, let alone now without the unlucky ones from the Scarlet Decay Sect to share the damage.

This time Palmer's eyes were full of expectation. Every time at such a critical juncture, Palmer had great faith in Bologue, because only an expert like Bologue could break through such hopeless situations.

Bologue did not disappoint, his eyes heavy and steady as he thought. If Palmer were a woman, seeing such eyes in this desperate situation, Palmer thought he would certainly fall in love with Bologue. Then he heard Bologue say.

"Do you know the first thing everyone does after a bank robbery?"

"Huh?"

"After the robbery, you run!"

Bologue turned and ran with the container in his arms. Palmer hesitated for a few seconds, until the Delusional's violent Ether reaction was almost upon him, he finally understood what Bologue was saying.

"Is that all you've got?"

Palmer chased after Bologue, running for dear life.

"What else? Fight a Negative Power User head-on?" Bologue didn't forget to mock Palmer, "I'm an Undead, can you do that?"

Bologue knew one thing very clearly, after the long battle, both he and Palmer were significantly drained. Faced with a fully powered Negative Power User, they wouldn't stand a chance.

The most important thing was, this Negative Power User was Teda Yazhede. Who knows how many Alchemy Armaments he was carrying. Reflecting on the previous encounter with Gray, Bologue thought, if Teda wanted, he could smash the two of them just with Alchemy Armaments.

Confrontation was not feasible, so the only option was to grab the stuff and find reinforcements.

"Where to escape!"

Palmer screamed, feeling the Delusional was getting closer and closer. The continuous collapsing sound was proof enough.

The Delusional was furious, chasing while destroying everything in its path.

Bologue thought for a moment, then shouted back at Palmer.

"Dealing with two Negative Power Users at once, Yas should be able to handle it, right?"

"What?"

Chapter 317: Perils Abound

According to the Order Bureau's regulations, when Bologue, as a Condenser, carries out missions, the enemies he encounters are mostly of the same level, rarely involving Prayer Believers as enemies, and the possibility of encountering Negative Power Users is even lower.

Clearly, today's mission doesn't fit these rules, let alone Prayer Believers, there were even several Negative Power Users that appeared.

Experts can handle tricky situations, but that doesn't mean experts can deal with matters beyond their own capabilities, in such cases, they don't need experts, they need a Savior.

Is Bologue a Savior? Even if he believes himself to be a Savior, unfortunately, he currently lacks the abilities of one.

Two figures dash rapidly one after the other, in the deep corridors, Bologue really feels like he is robbing a bank now, holding the Immortal Heart in his arms, the frantic intentions simmering in his embrace.

Bologue is separated from it by a layer of containment, yet he can clearly feel the Immortal Heart continuously calling to the surrounding corrupt roots and buds, as if it possessed a certain consciousness.

The road behind collapses, crumbles, and the surrounding walls seep out countless crimson tendrils, Palmer initially able to let out screams, but now he doesn't have the strength to make any noise and can only flee together with Bologue.

The speed when they came was very fast, because Bologue could feel the fluctuations of the Immortal Heart, but it's different now, the Immortal Heart is in hand, and this labyrinth is so complex, they don't know where these roads will lead, they can only charge forward heedlessly.

"Is that the teacher?"

Aimou's voice arises in the mind, the violent Ethereal Fluctuation behind her is clear and visible.

"It should be... but it's not certain," replied Bologue, "maybe once the mask is removed, it's another person."

This situation is quite bad, Teda's ugly form is laid bare before Aimou, and who knows what kind of mood he would be in if he knew Aimou was also present.

Perhaps Teda wouldn't have any feelings, originally treating Aimou as a tool or a substitute, why should her thoughts matter to him?

And Aimou?

Bologue chooses not to continue guessing, nor does he speak definitively.

"Why? We all know the person under the mask is him." Aimou's voice is devoid of emotion.

"Sometimes underneath the mask, there might still be a mask."

Bologue recalled the performer who died by his hand, to this day Bologue remembers this principle.

Everyone wears different masks, beneath the mask, still is a mask.

"I say, expert, are you sure you have no plans?" Palmer quickened his steps, moving alongside Bologue, "I'm about to exhaust myself, even the Ether is running out, soon he'll catch up!"

Palmer feels like he's running a marathon, except it's a deadly marathon.

Behind them the din is continuous, glimpses of the Delusional's mask can be seen in the deep darkness, the once pallid hue now painted in blood from the tendrils.

"Threaten him with Alice's Philosopher's Stone?" Bologue came up with such a bad idea.

"Ha, that's not good, is it?"

Palmer's remaining nobility bursts forth, making such a decision difficult.

"Remember our roles?" Bologue said, "We're the villains! What's wrong with villains acting this way?"

"Don't drag me into this! You're the one playing the villain all the time, okay?" Palmer's tone shifts, "But that idea is actually great! Hurry, let her out!"

Bologue gives Palmer a complex look; he really shouldn't have put any expectations on him.

"Aimou, now our lives are in your hands," Bologue thinks for a moment and adds, "to be accurate, Palmer's life is in your hands."

He himself is an Undead, at most he'll be knocked unconscious; the most important thing is not to lose the Immortal Heart.

"Okay..."

Aimou is unclear about what Bologue plans to do, but from listening to the recent conversation between Bologue and Palmer, she can discern this isn't likely a good thing.

Bologue opened his mouth, ready to explain to Aimou their despicable strategy, when the entire hallway plunged into violent shaking, a terrifying tremor sound continuously echoed, the pervasive dust completely veiling the vision, followed by crimson flesh emerging from the ruptured walls.

Without understanding what is happening, Bologue can acutely sense the frantic agitation erupting from his arms.

The Immortal Heart is agitated, seemingly possessing self-awareness, calling the corrupted roots and buds to arrive, crimson tendrils charging rampantly, Bologue dodging several times narrowly avoiding

being hit, while behind, the Delusional exerts himself fully, wielding blades and swords grinding these flesh into pieces.

"The heart!"

Palmer shouted beside him, the intense agitation, even Palmer the Debtor could sense it.

Bologue's palm feels a sharp sting, crimson thorns gnaw at his hand, it's only then he notices, after consecutive battles, the shell of the containment has developed some cracks, crimson flesh struggling through the gaps, escaping confinement, still expanding the cracks.

"So bad..."

Bologue couldn't help but sigh in the face of this situation.

In his short career, this was probably the most difficult situation he had encountered. Behind him was the Delusional, a persistent pursuer, and outside were the raving monsters of Corrupt Roots. He was also holding a bomb, unsure when it would completely explode...

No one knew the scale to which the Corrupt Roots had grown. Under its pressure, the road ahead was collapsing bit by bit. Several times, Bologue was nearly hit by falling rocks, and he had no time to determine his path, only able to dash toward the end of the darkness.

Pressure, injuries, Ether exhaustion...

Everything was constantly slowing Bologue's body until the Delusional caught up with him.

Another mutation burst out, like the mouth of the Abyss breaking through the corridor, replacing the road and confronting him.

"What should we do!" Palmer shouted.

Continuing forward would mean rushing into the monster's mouth, but stopping would mean getting captured by the Delusional. There was no other way out.

"Take deep breaths! Hold your breath!"

Bologue quickly stepped forward, running ahead of Palmer, Deceitful Snake Scale Silver covering his body, shaping into heavy Iron Armor.

"And... don't look, Aimou."

Bologue, showing rare concern, said, as he gathered a silver-white lance from the snakes in his hands.

"Don't block the way!"

With Bologue's furious roar, the silver-white lance pierced into the monster's mouth, dragging Bologue's whole body into it.

The anticipated penetration of flesh did not occur. The monster's body was significantly larger than it appeared outside, and Bologue felt like he had crashed into a mass of meat mountain.

He did not stop; driven by Ethereal Amplification, he unleashed even stronger power, piercing through flesh, snapping bones. The monster let out a series of groans and wails, while Bologue laughed loudly, rampaging through its body.

Bologue was breaking the path ahead, Palmer closely following behind. He had to stay tight, as the flesh Bologue destroyed was regenerating, internally twisting into countless tendrils attacking the two.

Extremely dangerous, yet full of vitality.

The flesh monster was blocking both the two and the Delusional, more crucially, its body spanned the entire underground. The two might carve a path through its body into another area.

The only thing not quite right was the feeling of traversing through flesh; it was too much like roaming in Hell.

Aimou didn't heed Bologue's words. She didn't look away, but constantly observed everything happening in front of her.

Inside the monster's dark body, the glow of an Alchemy Matrix illuminated one corner. Amidst chaotic dimness, scarlet flesh rapidly writhed, its sticky surface covered in blood threads and darkened veins, pierced entirely by the silver-white lance, spraying large splashes of fresh blood.

It felt like being submerged in a deep sea of flesh, with pale skeletal corals and branch-like sprouts rising like seaweed... a group of pitiable souls drowning in a hellish ocean, struggling to escape to heaven.

Eventually, the lance pierced through the last layer of flesh, the suffocating stench weakened considerably.

Heavy flesh had wrapped Bologue into a blood-covered figure, his visor blocked, unable to see the road ahead, relying only on the feeling from the lance to advance.

Now the resistance on the lance vanished, his whole body lifted and fell, surprisingly piercing through the monster's body, emerging from it.

His entire body crashed heavily onto the ground. After a brief pause, the Armor popped open, tearing apart the flesh covering it as well.

With steaming heat, Bologue struggled to crawl out of the discarded Armor. Before he could stand, he leaned on the ground, retching.

Another retching sound came from Palmer, who looked terrible. At least Bologue had the protection of Iron Armor, whereas Palmer had a close encounter with the flesh.

Now Palmer was covered in a thick layer of sticky flesh. After gagging several times, he reached out with effort and tore the flesh stuck on him.

Palmer let out a cry of lamentation, as the flesh clung to him while also devouring his own flesh. Tearing off the Corrupt Roots' flesh was like tearing off a layer of his own skin, leaving his skin surface bloody.

But Palmer had no choice; letting this flesh continue to grow would result in his body being entirely consumed.

Once Bologue recovered, he walked over, accompanied by the sound of tearing and lament, exerting great effort to clean the flesh off Palmer, leaving him unconscious due to the severe pain.

After ensuring his partner wouldn't die for the time being, Bologue turned to inspect the surrounding environment. Above was a blood flesh construct slowly healing; it was where he fell from.

Regarding the Delusional, Bologue could not detect his Ether response for now. He guessed he might have shaken off the Delusional.

Then...

He looked down at what was in his hands. The container was already covered in flesh, its surface started hardening like some tough Armor, under the shell with bulging protrusions, faint heartbeat sounds were emanating.

Bologue took a deep breath, comforting himself that the situation couldn't be worse, when footsteps approached from ahead.

Chapter 318: Fickle

Bologue called upon the Ether, trying to forge an Iron Armor to cover himself, readying for battle, but this time the Ether did not respond to him.

A strong sense of crisis surged in his heart as Bologue tried to pull out the folding knife and the Sheep Horn Shock Hammer from his waist, but now he couldn't even perform such actions, his body completely froze on the spot, unable to move.

A bright light fell from above, not shining on the ground, but onto the wooden floor, footsteps continued to draw near, a blurry figure gradually appeared in sight, finally stopping at the edge of the light, Bologue could only see a pair of polished shiny leather shoes.

"We meet again, Mr. Lazarus."

A familiar voice sounded, a white glove swept across in the dimness as Bologue suddenly sat backward, he didn't fall but sturdily landed on a chair.

The light above brightened, dispelling the surrounding darkness until Bologue could clearly see the coming mad shadow.

"Tyrant..." staring at that sinister figure, Bologue whispered.

"It feels so good to see you again."

The Tyrant's voice carried a smile, sitting opposite Bologue, examining Bologue's bloodstained body, he continued.

"You look a bit rough, need some help? The kind without any cost."

"Really?" Bologue chuckled, "Would you really be so kind?"

"Helping you would indirectly help me," the Tyrant candidly said.

Bologue didn't immediately respond but looked around, just as when he met the Tyrant before, he found himself in a mysterious space where the Tyrant was the sole Sovereign.

"So... in this chaos, you also have something to gain." Bologue said.

"Of course," the Tyrant nodded.

"The things I am about to do will help you, but because my condition is so bad, I may not be able to accomplish it, thus you choose to help me."

"Yes."

The Tyrant seemed to know what was in Bologue's mind, he crossed his legs and placed his hands on his knees.

"The power of choice is yours, Mr. Lazarus, you can accept my help and achieve mutual benefit for both of us.

You can also destroy my plans... as long as it fails, but would you really do that?"

Another beam of light fell, illuminating Palmer sprawled on the ground, blood pooling beneath him, continuously spread until it passed Bologue's feet.

"Or perhaps you would resign to failure, handing over victory to others just like that."

Another light fell, the container like a work of art was placed on a pedestal.

Bologue fell into silence, his condition was terrible, Aimou couldn't provide Ether endlessly, admittedly, after consecutive battles, even an expert was trapped in a stalemate.

He couldn't sit by and let Palmer die, nor allow the Immortal Heart to be taken by Teda, let alone the rotten roots spread across the ground...

"Tyrant, what exactly are you trying to do?"

Bologue questioned, "What role are you playing here exactly?"

"Me? Mr. Lazarus, there's something you need to know."

The Tyrant let out waves of laughter, "The Devil and I have no stance."

"Everything I do is purely in pursuit of value."

"Value?" Bologue was puzzled, "Isn't the value you've gained enough?"

"Enough? Yet never enough, I am a greedy person, regretfully, my desire for value can never be satiated."

"And the auction? This sacrificial offering to you has been botched, aren't you angry?" Bologue said.

"Botched?" The Tyrant responded, as if hearing a joke, he said meaningfully, "Really botched?"

Bologue froze.

"Not at all, Mr. Lazarus, it hasn't been botched; in fact, it's proceeding quite smoothly, you see, the light you all shine in the face of death and hardship..."

The Tyrant's body started to tremble, not out of fear, but excitement.

"I hope you can understand one thing, sometimes we're not in opposition, instead we can cooperate," the Tyrant calmed his emotions, "though it sounds like dancing with wolves."

Suddenly the Tyrant appeared in front of Bologue, lifting Bologue's chin, gazing into his teal eyes, as if piercing through the boundary of reality and illusion to see the soul hidden within the shell.

"You must admit one thing, in such a crisis, gods won't help you, the only one who can extend a hand is me, the Devil you spurn."

His narration was very calm, yet as it fell into Bologue's ears, it was filled with temptation, awakening the deepest Original Sin within his nature.

Before Bologue could respond, the Tyrant disappeared, reappearing on a nearby chair.

Bologue stared intently at that mad shadow, the lights went out one by one, leaving only him and the Tyrant sitting opposite each other in the darkness.

Repeated deep breathing, as if engaging in some sort of inner struggle, fortunately the struggle didn't last long, Bologue came up with a new idea, this idea was terrible, but he was willing to give it a try.

"Are you... interested in my soul?" Bologue suddenly asked.

"Oh? That's a rather surprising proposal."

The Tyrant's emotions rarely showed a bit of fluctuation, his words were full of astonishment.

"Unfortunately, I cannot take your soul right now."

"Why?" Bologue curiously asked, "Is it because the soul is fragmented?"

"No... I have nothing to offer you now, Mr. Lazarus, you have no wish for me to fulfill, how could I take your soul?"

The Tyrant waved his hand helplessly, hearing it, one could tell he craved for Bologue's soul greatly, whether or not Bologue was related to the person he was seeking, Bologue's soul in his view was extremely valuable, even if it was a fragmented soul.

"And what about the next matter?" Bologue asked.

"This counts as mutual aid, I helped you, you helped me, we're even."

Bologue was slightly dazed, repeatedly observing the Tyrant's words, "If I hadn't known in advance, I would find it really difficult to associate you with something like the Devil."

The Tyrant's demeanor hardly resembled that of a Devil, more like... an unpopular businessman.

"Devil... My brothers and sisters are all bound by different desires, which leads to our diverse personalities. Some are so arrogant they can't communicate at all, some are consumed by anger, which devours everything that approaches them, and others..."

The Tyrant chuckled.

"That's how Devils are, whimsical, ever-changing, fickle in their moods... Fortunately, I am the most rational among them, capable of conversation."

"I can see that," Bologue nodded, affirming, "Compared to a Devil, you're more like a businessman."

The Tyrant laughed again, taking Bologue's words as praise and acknowledgment.

"However, why did you suddenly mention your soul?" the Tyrant asked, "You don't seem like someone who would voluntarily sell your soul."

"I... I'm like you, I'm also searching for someone, one who could be considered your sibling, it was he who took my soul," Bologue said, "I want to find him."

"Sacrificing another part of your soul just to find him... doesn't sound very worthwhile," the Tyrant smiled.

"No, I just want to know how he would react if I were taken by another Devil," Bologue said nonchalantly, "It's not often you get a chance to toy with a Devil."

"Haha, you're quite amusing, Mr. Lazarus."

The Tyrant was amused by Bologue; whether he was willing to cooperate with Bologue's crazy idea was unknown.

After a moment of calm, Bologue looked at the Tyrant and asked again, "So can you foresee the future?"

"Foresee the future?"

"You seem able to see what happens next, hence we are having this conversation, right?" Bologue asked.

"It's not foreseeing the future, it's just that everything is proceeding according to the script I've written. However, a script is still a script; if the actors don't cooperate, many variables can arise, disrupting the plot's direction."

"Sounds like a madman's self-entertainment," Bologue joked, "Are you filming your own movie?"

"Hmm? Self-entertainment, I like that term."

"Well... what if someone eventually breaks the conclusion you've set? Would you feel angry about it?" Bologue chatted with the Tyrant.

"No, quite the opposite, I would feel delighted."

"Why?"

"Few can break free from their script, resist their conclusion... or in other words, escape from the story, shattering the end fate has handed them."

Rather than being a script, it's more the fate manipulated and influenced by the Devils in the shadows.

"Those who break free from fate signify a high value."

Bologue fell silent, seemingly pondering the information revealed in the Tyrant's words, then remembered his first genuine understanding of the Devil during his conversation with Geoffrey.

"You interfere with the world's process, constantly revising history to the way you want it."

Bologue sensed something; he wasn't sure if it was his own conjecture or the Tyrant deliberately revealing it to him.

"Resisting fate, shattering shackles... those who can sway the trajectory of history are the ones with value, and they're the ones you Devils desire to hunt."

In response to Bologue's words, the Tyrant made no reply, only emitted that meaningless laughter.

Bologue realized he couldn't get anything out of asking further, and shifted the topic, looking around this strange space.

"In your territory, you're omnipotent, right?"

"You can think of it that way."

Previously, Bologue had needed a certain ritual to summon the Tyrant, but in the Tyrant's territory, he appeared unbound, able to manifest at will, even bestowing his protection upon everyone.

The physical restraints had already disappeared before; Bologue stretched his body vigorously, like warming up before a battle.

"So, before I leave here, and for our mutual assistance efforts, I have a few small requests."

"Like what?"

Bologue thought for a moment, testingly asked.

"A glass of orange juice?"

The Tyrant paused for a second, laughed again, then snapped his fingers, and a glass of orange juice appeared out of thin air in Bologue's hand.

Bologue took a sip; the taste was unchanged from the orange juice he remembered, even chilled by the Tyrant himself.

"Anything else?" the Tyrant asked again.

"Hmm? A bit of music."

A light shone down, illuminating a record player in the darkness, which, if Bologue looked correctly, was the same one from his home.

"Hmm... nice."

Bologue slowly stood up, and just then the Tyrant also appeared before him, suddenly extending his hands, tightly gripping Bologue's head.

The cables on his face began to twist and split, revealing a hundred scarlet eyes, all looking into Bologue's gaze.

"You... are extraordinary."

The Tyrant seemed to utter a curse, releasing his hands, merging with the darkness.

When the light shone again, Bologue had returned to the dim earth; what had just happened seemed like an illusion, yet he still held a glass of orange juice in his hand.

A series of coughing sounds ensued, and Bologue turned his head, only to see Palmer's injuries healing at a visible rate, with layers of Ether Protection enveloping him.

Not only him, but also Bologue, enveloped by the Tyrant's power.

Chapter 319: The Blood-Washed Stones Shine Brightly

Under the power of the Tyrant, both Bologue and Palmer received magical protection, and as if time had reversed, their conditions returned to peak, even their weary spirits grew excited once more, like they had been injected with adrenaline, their hearts pounding fiercely.

"I feel like I've vomited up all my innards."

Palmer's eyes were dazed, his consciousness hovering between comatose and awake. He took only a few steps before clutching his chest and howling, "It hurts, I feel like I've been beaten up."

He was completely unaware of how dire his previous state was, nor did he realize the Tyrant had come by. If there was a mirror now, Palmer would discover he had become a blood-soaked figure.

Palmer glanced at Bologue, his eyes suddenly lighting up.

"Where did you get that?"

Saying this, Palmer grabbed the orange juice from Bologue's hand, and drank the remaining half in one go.

In such a deadly predicament, obtaining a chilled cup of orange juice made Palmer feel like his soul was being saved.

Bologue's expression was somewhat complex, a few minutes ago Palmer was on the brink of death, yet now he was lively again, and he didn't even ask where Bologue got the juice—whether it was actually orange juice or some liquid resembling it.

Chaotic thoughts flashed by, and Bologue was too lazy to question Palmer, as communicating excessively with a fool would only turn oneself into a fool.

"Aimou, are you okay?" Bologue asked.

"Uh... there's a strange power enveloping my body."

Aimou was particularly sensitive to Ether, unlike the carefree Palmer, she had long ago detected the Tyrant's protection.

The exhausted Ether was quickly replenished, and their weary spirits regained excitement—various anomalies occurred among them, and it was directly linked to the Devils.

This reminded Bologue of the covenant that bound the Crimson Cult and the Gray Trade Association; they had made some kind of agreement with the Devils, obtaining their protection through the binding of a covenant.

Bologue hadn't signed the covenant, neither had Aimou and Palmer. The power of protection on them at this moment was just a temporary agreement.

Bologue needed the power to escape with his life, while the Tyrant needed an executor to temporarily resolve some troublesome matters for him.

But was there really no cost? Bologue didn't believe it.

For Bologue, the so-called cost was the deepening connection with the Devils. Previously he needed to use Mammon Coin to actively summon the Tyrant's presence, but now the Tyrant could actively appear before him.

Of course, this might be related to the area he was in, since it was the Tyrant's territory. Nevertheless, excessive interaction with the Devils made Bologue feel a bit vigilant, though it was necessary.

Dancing with wolves.

"Though I don't know exactly what happened, it seems the Delusional was stopped."

Palmer also noticed the power within him, viewing it as the Tyrant's reward for their efforts in battle. He looked up at the opening above, the crimson blood hole still dripping blood as countless branches clawed and fumed.

Bologue also looked up, as it seemed to be true, the Delusional was lost within the creature's body, the intricate flesh slowing his pace, giving them a chance to breathe.

"Don't relax, we're not out of danger yet."

Unlike Palmer's optimism, Bologue remembered the Tyrant's words.

A difficult trouble will confront them next, the same trouble the Tyrant noted, for this reason, the Tyrant willingly protected them to conquer the formidable foe.

The power of the Devils was needed to defeat such a formidable foe.

Bologue's mood was already tense, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid coiling around his arm, forming a slender Blade in his hand.

His other hand grasped the Round Shield to cover his body, adopting a sword and shield stance as he cautiously moved deeper into the darkness.

In the escape from the Delusional's pursuit, Palmer had exhausted all his ammunition. Now, the only weapons left were a few Flying Knives he carried.

As an Undead, Bologue walked at the forefront, while Palmer followed behind, gripping the Flying Knives, ready to throw them into the whirlwind at any moment.

The air, thick with dust, was permeated with the scent of blood, which grew more intense as they delved deeper.

"There's wind," Palmer suddenly said, "There's a road leading to the outside here."

Palmer keenly detected the influx of air currents, which for them was undeniably good news; they could finally escape this deadly situation.

They continued forward, towering stone columns emerging in sight, carved with fighting demonic gods, arrayed in arches along the roadway.

Bologue tried to walk to the edge of the columns; below lay boundless darkness of the Abyss, seemingly they were walking on an immense Long Bridge.

"Is there such a place in the Great Rift?"

Palmer raised his head, between the columns gradually appeared enormous Angel statues, gripping Fire Swords, their countenance furious, seemingly oppressing the endless darkness below.

Strolling within this solemn and cold atmosphere, Bologue's nerves were fully taut, and at the Long Bridge's end, Bologue saw that thing.

Upon seeing it, Palmer couldn't help but whisper in amazement, "Do we have any other paths to take?"

"Seems like we don't." Bologue thought, that must be what the Tyrant wanted him to kill, "Prepare for battle, Palmer."

"Are you sure, Bologue?" Palmer thought Bologue had gone mad.

Bologue replied nonchalantly, "Do we have any other choice?"

"But..."

"Don't hesitate, Palmer. In fact, that damned thing has already discovered us." Bologue continued.

The other party seemed to hear Bologue's words. At the end of the Long Bridge, the scarlet flesh loomed as large as a hill, with tumors tightly wrapped around the bridge.

It had long smelled the scent of the living. Now it no longer bothered to disguise, the scarlet tumor began to writhe as its immense body lifted high.

Bologue and Palmer both raised their heads, realizing their misconceptions about the opponent.

This was not some flesh ball but a coiled scarlet serpent, its body raising its head high, yet the head was a blurred human figure.

Bologue recognized the person, the Crimson Bishop, Latis.

In the Beast Fighting Arena, he had chased where Jia Meng vanished, now unexpectedly appearing here.

Bologue's heart instantly leaped into his throat, thinking the Devil's protection was, indeed, not easily acquired, as he had to face a Negative Power User. Worse still, the Immortal Heart was in his possession; there was no escape even if he wanted to.

"Is he... injured?" Palmer's words relieved Bologue from his anxiety.

Bologue furrowed his brows, straining to discern Latis's figure, and after a few seconds' delay, a clear image appeared before him.

A chilling cold seized Bologue's blood. He suddenly understood why Latis wasn't fighting for the Immortal Heart but appeared here instead.

He... was about to die.

At this moment, Latis's lower body had already fused with the giant serpent's body, and the human-like torso was covered with hideous scars. First, he lost his entire left arm, then there was a huge wound splitting his abdomen, beneath which was black and hollow, the internal organs long gone.

Then there was a cut across his throat. The wound was shallow, not severing Latis's neck, but slicing through his airway, with blood gushing out.

One of Latis's eyes was blind, and amid countless wounds, the most lethal one originated from his heart.

A pitch-black blade pierced through Latis's heart.

What puzzled Bologue the most was that as the Crimson Bishop, Latis possessed an extraordinary regenerative ability, not to mention after merging with the decayed root sprout, he had nearly reached an undead state.

Yet now, the injuries just hung on him, with the edges of the wounds writhing, trying to intertwine and heal, but each time they intertwined, they slid apart, as if the immortal nature was shattered.

"Ethereum mutual exclusion..." Aimou's voice echoed in his mind.

"What?" Bologue had never seen such a strange sight.

"Someone has breached his Rectangular Soul Critical, leaving a large amount of ether residue in the wounds."

Aimou sensed the ethereal fluctuations across Latis's body. Although the distance was far, it wasn't an issue for her. She endured subtler fluctuations when producing metamorphic metals.

"Those residual ethers are mutually exclusive with his own ether, thus hindering the flesh from healing."

"So, he's really about to die, right?" Bologue asked.

"Yes, but as long as there's some time and those ethers are dispelled, he can heal his wounds..."

"So now, he's clinging to a half-dead state by the Crimson Queen's protection. If I cut off his head now, he'd really die, right?"

"That's about right," Aimou observed Latis and continued, "He's just been through a fierce battle, extremely weak, with ether constantly leaking from the gaps in his Rectangular Soul Critical..."

Bologue thought he had learned enough. He suddenly turned his head, eagerly speaking to Palmer.

"Wanna add a Negative Power User to your record?"

Palmer was stunned for two seconds, then cursed loudly.

"Are you nuts!"

Despite the verbal lashes, Palmer still assumed a fighting stance, seeing Latis's weakness too. Most importantly, Latis had already sensed the Immortal Heart on them, and no matter what, he wouldn't easily let them go.

Bologue tied the container to his back, layers of Iron Armor wrapping around him. Looking at that scarlet serpent's body, the long Sharp Sword extended into a mighty Great Sword.

"The blood-washed stone glistens!"

Mad power fills the body and bones!"

Within the void, a gramophone slowly spun, its hoarse and piercing song echoing across the dark Long Bridge.

Palmer couldn't fathom where the song originated, while Bologue excitedly tossed a grappling hook, embedding it in the stone pillar above, swinging fiercely with sword wind, tearing the raging song to shreds.

Chapter 320: Hunting Crimson

Facing the oncoming Bologue, Latis never expected that a lowly Condenser would have the courage to swing a sword at him. He meant to rebuke something, but as the words emerged, they turned into a series of beast-like wailing roars due to the wound in his throat.

The crimson serpent's body coiled, rampaging across the Long Bridge, and then the flesh of the serpent started to writhe, opening one crimson eye after another, closely watching Bologue's trajectory. Simultaneously, numerous tentacles extended from the flesh, reaching toward Bologue.

In reality, Latis only possessed the appearance of a snake. The great snake's body was not covered with tough scales but rather soft, mutable flesh.

In Latis's eyes, Bologue did not possess the ability to change direction in mid-air. As long as Latis attacked the landing point of the grapple, Bologue would undoubtedly die.

But halfway through the air, Bologue suddenly retracted the grapple, and then a silver-white, slender serpent swung out, transforming into an extended arm that grabbed the opposite stone pillar.

The figure quickly shifted, causing the attacking tentacles to miss their target, while countless dense iron feathers, reminiscent of a bird, extended from the armor.

This was Bologue mimicking the form of the Blade-Biting Wolf, transforming his entire armor into deadly blades. Then, he swung the Great Sword, and as Bologue swept past the great snake's body, he left behind a crimson, stretching wound.

Bologue was merely a Condenser, but with the dual amplification of Aimou and the Tyrant, although his Secret Energy couldn't extend into a sub-discipline like the Prayer Believers, his Ether intensity had already reached the level of a Prayer Believer under this blessing.

The power was only temporary, but it was enough to bring Bologue joy, as this was the strength he would master in the future.

The serpent's body squirmed quickly, sharp white bones breaking through Latis's palm. The only right hand grasped the white bone that pierced the palm and then forcefully twisted it off, turning it into a Bone Sword in his hand.

Latis, with red eyes, lunged at Bologue, the Bone Sword slicing through the air with a sharp white arc.

As a Negative Power User, unlike Nade and Yas, Latis himself was not powerful. His Secret Energy discipline was the rarely seen Contract School. It was due to this Contract School that he held the position of Crimson Bishop, and under the contract's constraint, he possessed the ability to communicate with the Crimson Queen and use this contract to draw more believers.

Normally, Latis would not directly step onto the battlefield, but this time, the Immortal Heart was snatched from him by the Gray Trade Association. No matter what, he had to personally retrieve the Holy Relic.

The Bone Sword precisely slammed into Bologue's Great Sword. As the two crossed, Bologue was forcefully slammed into the ground, sliding several meters on the Long Bridge, leaving a trail of broken stones.

Latis was very weak, but the flesh of the corrupting root still possessed formidable physical strength.

"Thank you... Mother..."

A deep voice emerged from Latis's mouth. After leaving the Beast Fighting Arena, while pursuing Jia Meng, he encountered a siege by formidable enemies. These fatal wounds on his body were left by those two.

If not for his tier as a Negative Power User and the powerful healing brought by the corrupting root, Latis would already have died at the hands of those two.

Having barely escaped, Latis felt no relief for surviving, but rather an even deeper despair.

Various factions contended for the Immortal Heart, while he was the one most powerless to reclaim it. In this chaotic battle, he lost completely.

Latis hoped his death would have more value, so he ultimately came here, to this bridge in the depths underground leading to that place of no return.

"Please... wait a moment."

A new surge of madness reignited in Latis's eyes. He didn't look at the fallen Bologue on the ground but instead looked into the endless darkness below the Long Bridge.

Originally, he intended to proliferate more flesh, then sacrifice himself by falling into the Abyss, to satisfy the hunger of that existence. But with Bologue's arrival, everything changed.

It was as if the Crimson Queen truly was watching him, and in this dire situation, Latis once again saw the Immortal Heart. More importantly, he was so close to that existence.

At this moment, there was only one thing Latis needed to do: kill Bologue, reclaim the Immortal Heart, and plunge into this deep darkness to become one with that existence.

Bologue climbed up from the rubble, coughing blood. He had somewhat underestimated Latis. Even with numerous protections and considering Latis's own decay, there was still a certain gap between them.

"Any thoughts, expert?"

Palmer threw a Flying Knife. Accompanied by gusting winds, the attacking tentacles were sliced open by the Flying Knife, raining down blood.

"That blade."

Bologue looked up at the pitch-black blade embedded in Latis' chest. It was strange; Bologue felt a sense of familiarity with the blade, as if he had seen it somewhere before.

"Find a way to strike again!" Bologue shouted.

The armor emitted a low hum as Bologue rose again, sprinting towards the rising giant serpent's body. His steps were heavy at first, but soon became light.

The Constant Motion Core was operating at full force, an immense amount of Ether was violently injected into Bologue's Alchemy Matrix, causing intense physical pain from the excess Ether.

A breeze swirled around Bologue, and then the wind grew stronger, transforming into a fierce air shield that enveloped him.

Bologue swung his Great Sword again, just as Latis entered a new phase of mutation.

A crack appeared along the front of the serpent's body, as if a blade had split it open, revealing a colossal crimson maw intertwined with flesh. From either side of the maw, countless white bone claws extended, dancing wildly like the hundred legs of a centipede.

Blood gushed from the maw, flooding the ground, while fine branches of flesh and blood grew and extended within, transforming into myriad scarlet threads that blocked out the sky.

"Forward!"

Palmer shouted at Bologue's figure. Several Flying Knives whirled around Bologue, slicing through countless branches.

Yet Palmer's Flying Knives were mere mortal metal, not powerful Alchemy Armaments, and after successive impacts, they quickly shattered into clusters of dense iron fragments.

Palmer raised his hand, his pupils radiating incandescent light, until Bologue moved beyond the range of his Secret Energy, at which point the fierce wind slowly dispersed.

Thanks to Palmer's assistance, Bologue advanced swiftly, his vision filled with countless threads of blood. Even though the Flying Knives cut through a large portion of the blood threads, their severed ends split, sprouting more threads, as resilient as wild weeds.

"We'll be held back!" Aimou warned Bologue.

The dense blood threads wrapped them tightly within. Even Bologue couldn't launch his grappling hook, but he was not concerned.

As the Ether surged, Bologue's figure began to accelerate and spin, dense Iron Feathers adorned his armor, and he swung the Great Sword forcefully.

Bologue's figure gradually blurred, transforming into a silvery Iron Feather storm. The Ethereal Amplification reached its peak, and in the maelstrom, all nearby flesh and blood shattered instantly.

Outside the dense blood threads, Palmer was unaware of what was happening within. As Bologue was completely enveloped by the threads, he began his own action. The grappling hook swung, aided by the gale from Secret Energy-Wind Source, his figure darting through the air like an apparition.

Palmer did not go to rescue Bologue; instead, taking advantage of Bologue distracting the attacks, he rushed towards Latis on the serpent's head.

Rescue his partner? Don't be ridiculous; he's an Undead, after all.

Latis also noticed Palmer closing in, and the numerous white bones alongside his maw sprang up swiftly, like long spears, and each aimed at the airborne Palmer.

Latis clearly hadn't realized the deceitfulness of Palmer's Secret Energy. He thought that by attacking the landing point of the grappling hook, he could capture Palmer. Palmer, relying on the gale, changed direction multiple times in mid-air, weaving between the standing stone columns, teasing Latis like a flying bird.

Palmer grew closer to Latis, close enough that the icy Bone Sword in his hand was clearly visible.

Sweat dripped down Palmer's forehead, and he muttered bizarre phrases like "Long live the Crimson Queen" and "Boss, save me" under his breath.

These utterances did not escape Latis' ears. His expression towards Palmer was momentarily complicated, unable to understand why Palmer was praising his mother, as he didn't seem to be a member of the Crimson Sect?

Latis made a huge mistake. He shouldn't have tried to comprehend the foolishness. Just as he raised the Bone Sword, ready to slice Palmer's body in one blow, Palmer suddenly paused in mid-stride, made a grotesque face at Latis like a madman, then turned to throw the grappling hook, accelerating away, as if he had come all this way just to disgust Latis.

Fueled by humiliation, Latis was about to give chase, but the subsequent mutation revealed what Palmer was truly up to.

The sharp buzzing became clear; countless blades sliced through the entangled heavy blood threads. Using the time Palmer had bought, Bologue had nearly severed all the blood threads.

At this moment, Bologue was covered in blood, bearing thousands of blades on his back, spinning into a storm, unleashing a crimson downpour on the serpent's body.