

## Endless 321

### Chapter 321: Biggest Villain

"Aimou, you can imagine it this way."

Bologue's voice echoed beside Aimou's ear, "You are not engaging in slaughter, you are engaging in a... noble cause."

"Noble... cause?"

"Yes, a cause I call the 'axiom iron law'. Your actions are all about cutting off evil, to save more lives from undeserved death."

"But that still sounds pretty villainous."

Aimou recalled Bologue's violent actions, the only difference between Bologue and those cultists was probably that he did not worship any Evil God.

"Hmm? Actually, understanding it as something villainous is not entirely incorrect."

Bologue's voice was filled with the professionalism and rigor expected of an expert.

"I consider myself a professional, loving my craft, and since I've taken it up as a career, I strive to be the best."

"Be the best villain?" Aimou was somewhat puzzled by Bologue's thinking.

"Exactly, as long as I eliminate all villains, I'll be the greatest and strongest villain in the industry."

Aimou could tell that Bologue wasn't joking.

"Then now... we just need to act."

In the crimson tempest and rain, a scarlet figure sprinted wildly on the enormous snake's body, holding a heavy Great Sword, piercing into the flesh, hacking through layers of flesh.

Under Bologue's brutal onslaught, massive amounts of blood gushed out, dyeing the worn Long Bridge a blood-red.

Palmer pulled the hook rope, flying swiftly between the stone pillars, turned to look at Bologue, as Latis's bloated snake body twisted and convulsed.

It knocked down several stone pillars, broken stones crashing into the deep darkness below, with no echo returned.

Waves of tearing pain came from the snake body, Latis's massive snake body was intimidating, but in front of Bologue, this huge hull became a weakness instead.

Bone Spears like centipede legs sprang up, assaulting Bologue amidst the flesh, yet now his Ether surged, under its extreme amplification, Bologue's speed was like a phantom, swiftly navigating between the white bones, constantly ascending.

"Teachers should teach, doctors should treat patients, sheriffs should protect civilians... professionals should do the work matching their expertise."

Even now Bologue continued to instill his strange thinking into Aimou, not knowing how much she absorbed, but in her silence, a vast amount of Ether supported Bologue.

"I'm not a teacher, not a doctor, and definitely not a sheriff."

Bologue's voice was hoarse, filled with anger.

"I'm just a Field Staff burdened with debts, my profession is to kill these bastards!"

The dense flesh blocked every part of Bologue's sight, countless appendages mixed with Bone Spears fell like burning arrows.

Bologue had nowhere to escape.

No, not everywhere.

The gold rings in his azure pupils grew increasingly dazzling, until they scattered like melting gold paint, filling up Bologue's eyes, transforming them into a brilliant azure-gold.

The blood-stained Iron Armor seemed to melt into flowing liquid, closely wrapping over Bologue's body surface, the bloated Iron Rider was no more; now he seemed more like wearing a bright red formal suit, if not for the madness of this scene, he seemed more like a gentleman ready to attend a ball.

The power of Deceitful Snake Scale Silver greatly suited Bologue's Summoning Hand, largely because it allowed the Summoning Hand to break through the limits of controlling solid matter, driving the liquid metal of the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid.

The solid metal was replaced; the soft and adaptable liquid metal soared and danced wildly on Bologue's body, Latis summoned countless scarlet appendages, and Bologue also summoned his Silver Hand.

Countless Silver Hands.

Like a legion commanded.

"But no matter what... Aimou, you surely wouldn't want this kind of monster getting out, would you?"

Finally, Bologue asked this.

Responding to Bologue was the golden tracks appearing on the body and the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, Bologue smiled, he didn't confront the countless scarlet appendages head-on.

The ends of the Silver Hands warped and lengthened until they transformed into sturdy Blades, instantly, countless Blades violently pierced into the flesh below.

Bologue was lifted by numerous Blades, using these sharp edges as feet, following which the Blades brutally tore through the flesh below.

With previous experience, Bologue was no longer as resistant to re-entering the flesh; Aimou still found it hard to accept, but she could only bite the bullet now.

Bologue plunged straight into the snake's body, unleashing a storm of Blades inside the flesh, while Latis's swinging appendages struck nothing, losing sight of Bologue.

Intense pain surged from within Latis, as if a worm was greedily gnawing at your flesh.

Within the flesh, a defense was also woven, scarlet sprouts covering the insides.

The decayed roots, a product originating from the Devil, cannot be regarded as conventional organisms. It's more like a monster with flesh characteristics; anything capable of proliferating in flesh will develop on it.

But this could not stop Bologue. The Deceitful Snake Scale Silver repeatedly switched between liquid and solid states, much like Jia Meng's Shadow of Illusion and Reality. When the sprouts tried to destroy the blades, they would turn into liquid, easily passing through the flesh. But in the next moment they would solidify into metal, like rapidly growing thorns, tearing everything around them.

Latis managed to injure Bologue several times by luck, but the injuries left were unable to stop Bologue. It wouldn't take long for him to heal from his wounds.

At this moment, Latis absurdly felt he couldn't tell who was really part of the Blood-Corrupt Church.

The fusion with the eerie decayed roots granted him the nature of the Undead, yet it seemed Bologue had such power from the beginning.

Is he... an Undead?

No one responded to Latis. While he was figuring out how to counter Bologue's fierce attacks, another fellow swinging in the air was also restless.

Latis hadn't noticed earlier, but this deep underground world had been swept up in a gentle breeze, intensifying under the drive of Ether, until now, when it became a small storm that caught his attention.

Palmer landed on a stone pillar, with eyes burning hot with Ether, commanding the whirlwind to envelop the giant serpent's body, mixed with blowing sand and stones, leaving scars on the flesh, deep or shallow.

Secret Energy·Wind Source is very useful, but it lacks direct means of destruction. Moreover, Palmer had exhausted all his ammunition, and even the Flying Knife had shattered completely.

Fortunately, Bologue was proactive. Seeing Bologue charge into the serpent's body, Palmer began to feel they might really have a chance to destroy a Negative Power User.

Latis's vision was obscured by the whirlwind, suffocating his breath too, as the serpent's scarlet tail wrapped around the Long Bridge, breaking it with great force, causing the entire bridge surface to collapse.

Palmer fled quickly, avoiding the serpent's tail's fierce attack.

An endless fury surged within Latis's heart, never had he felt so stifled. First, he suffered from Nade's fire burn, then faced the deadly strike of those two. Now he was weak and being tortured by these two Condensers like bugs.

The most important thing was, panic began to spread within him; fear crept into the gaps of his will—there was a moment when Latis really thought he might die at the hands of these two.

Below, the flesh swelled and ruptured, as Bologue, covered in blood, emerged, sprouts continuously oozing from his wounds, pursuing him.

"Indeed, this guy is nothing to be afraid of."

Bologue turned mid-air and swung out Iron Spears towards Latis at the serpent's head. Some were dodged by Latis, while others nailed into the flesh below, the force so great that the entire spears were completely driven into the flesh.

Against someone like Nade, even if they were severely weakened, Bologue believed he would still have no chance against them, considering the Secret Energy's cunning nature, not to mention the Negative Power User's Secret Energy.

But Latis was different. As a member of the Contract School, Latis's reliance was solely on the Ether intensity of a Negative Power User, and the resurrection power of decayed roots. It could be understood that his own ability was only through a contract to merge with decayed roots, transforming into a flesh monster with infinite resurrection and extremely strong Ether.

But now this monster was exhausted, waiting only for the Hunter to shoot the last arrow, piercing his throat.

Latis glared at the blood-soaked Bologue, exerting his full strength as the flesh began to wriggle and deform. Jagged white bones enveloped Latis's body encasing him like armor.

The serpent's body coiled together like a raised hill, the flesh cracked open, twisting into sharp bone spears, their tails adhered by flesh tendrils, swinging towards Bologue.

"Palmer!" Bologue shouted.

"Alright!"

The whirlwind intensified, its massive pressure squeezing Bologue's body as if an invisible bowstring launched him, his speed far exceeding Latis's expectations, utilizing bone spears to counter Bologue was now impossible.

"Suicidal!"

Latis hoarsely raised his blood-stained Bone Sword, directly facing the oncoming figure.

The silver Great Sword collided with the Bone Sword; simultaneously, dense Silver Hands swung out, rooting in the surrounding flesh like tendrils, firmly fixing Bologue in place.

A tremendous force came from his arm, and Bologue felt his bones almost shattered. The Silver Hands trembled wildly; fortunately, Bologue wasn't thrown off by Latis's great force this time.

The blades held together, Bologue found himself in the clash against the scarlet twisted gaze.

"Pitiful... insect."

An eerie voice came from Latis's damaged throat, whereas Bologue sneered grimly.

In such moments, no harsh words were needed—only actions.

The silver Great Sword began to crumble, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid scattered away, revealing the Short Sword beneath.

A massive amount of Ether was infused, causing even the Alchemy Matrix on the Short Sword to glitter with overloaded sparks. The Bright Light Blade reignited, in the blazing white flames, the Ethereal Sword cut a breach into the Bone Sword.

"Not what you expected, huh?"

Bologue taunted.

In the scarlet gaze, the flames burned fiercely like a slender Flame-shaped Sword, forcibly cleaving the Bone Sword, along with Latis's chest.

Blood spilled profusely.

## Chapter 322: Iron Thorns and Steel Brambles

The protection from the Tyrant, supported by the Shared Chord Body and Bologue's own Ethereal Amount, converged three streams of Ether into a singular, pure force, all infused into the Bright Light Blade.

This Alchemy Armament acquired from Kedening, which Bologue later had appraised by Belli, was confirmed to be an ordinary Alchemy Armament that hadn't undergone a metamorphosis. Its strength largely related to its nature.

"Ether itself is a pure energy, and its Alchemy Matrix concentrates and releases this power. You can understand it as exchanging a large amount of Ether for maximized lethality."

Belli explained, introducing the Origin School that had similarities to it.

"The Origin School often uses such tactics. Once they master Ether to a certain degree, they can also shape Ether into Ethereal Blades and inflict damage."

This is the effect of the Bright Light Blade, allowing Bologue to transcend the limitations of his school to some extent, shaping his Ether into deadly Ethereal Blades.

In the dazzling light, the faces of Bologue and Latis were illuminated in a ghastly pale, their blue-gold eyes filled with rage. Bologue knew that the opportunity to strike down Latis was rare, perhaps the last one, so he exerted all his strength.



The Ethereal Sword severed the Bone Sword, carving a massive gash across Latis's chest. But this was not the end of the battle; Latis clasped his fingers together, and menacing bone spikes protruded from between them, delivering a punch to Bologue's chest.

The Silver Hand tugged Bologue's body, making him slightly sidestep. The sharp fingers missed Bologue's heart but still pierced through his chest.

After all, Latis was a Negative Power User, even in his weakened state, he remained a noble Negative Power User.

"And then!"

Latis laughed heartily. He had only one arm left, yet in this final confrontation, he had still won.

Bologue was too naive to think that as a Condenser he could possibly shake a Negative Power User. It was utterly ridiculous.

The decaying root tendrils infiltrated Bologue's body through his fingers, corroding him from within. Unlike Latis, who had a massive body, no matter how he was hacked it was merely a minor wound. In an instant, scarlet roots spread throughout Bologue's chest cavity.

"I... won't die." Bologue sneered.

"Even the Undead can be imprisoned."

Latis had already guessed Bologue's identity as an Undead. Although somewhat shocked, it wasn't enough to change the course of the battle.

The decaying root tendrils would slowly assimilate Bologue, embedding him into the blood and flesh of a massive tree, residing permanently between death and rebirth.

"No, what I mean is, these injuries are not enough to stop me."

Bologue laughed, explaining.

Faced with such fatal wounds, ordinary people would fall into despair and lose their mobility, but Bologue was different. Until he completely died, he could fight in the most powerful manner.

A huge amount of Ether surged through Bologue and Aimou's Alchemy Matrix, advancing triumphantly, infusing into the Bright Light Blade.

The Alchemy Armament could not withstand such an Ethereal Amount, and it began to spark and collapse in frequency, while the form of the Ethereal Blade lost its restraint, like an erupting stream of fire, firmly gripped by Bologue.

"Swarm of snakes!"

Bologue raised the fire of Ether high, his other hand clenched into a fist as if intending to twist the Latis before him into foul blood.

"Obey my command!"

An invisible large hand grasped Latis, also capturing those scattered snakes.

The massive blood and flesh of the body began to tremble violently, endless agony emanating from beneath the shell, as if a swarm of snakes slithered among the flesh and blood, devouring it.

In an instant, countless serpents ruptured from the giant serpent's body, like seeds, instantly exploding into countless Iron Branches.

Cold thorns spread across every part of the snake's body in the blink of an eye, and the thorns continued to ascend, even piercing out of Latis's throat, stained with mottled blood.

"How... is this possible?"

Watching all this in disbelief, Latis soon understood everything.

Against this massive blood and flesh body, Bologue's reckless hacking couldn't solve anything. As he traveled inside the giant serpent, Bologue left countless Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid behind, connected by slender threads.

This was Bologue's true killing move. Numerous thorn seeds were hidden inside the giant serpent, interlinked, and even shifted continuously with the twitching of flesh and blood.

The previous throwing of Iron Spears towards the giant serpent buried seeds constantly until this ultimate killer moment burst forth completely.

Bologue swung the Ethereal fire in his hand, burning through the path of blood and Bone Armor, reducing all material it touched to dust, until the Bright Light Blade could no longer sustain, shattering into mundane iron.

But this was enough.

A massive blood cavity appeared in Latis's chest, exposing internal organs, bones, and even the beating heart entirely to Bologue. Most importantly, it also revealed the pitch-black blade that almost killed the heart.

Now up close, Bologue finally recalled where he had seen this pitch-black blade before.

He released the shattered pieces of the Bright Light Blade from his hand, allowing the pitch-black blade to cut his palm. Then Bologue infused all his strength, twisting the pitch-black blade, churned Latis's heart into foul blood.

Forcefully withdrawing the pitch-black blade, Bologue flicked an eye-catching scarlet arc in mid-air.

"Farewell."

Bologue looked at Latis, whose eyes had lost their luster, and the chains loosened their grip on the massive body of flesh and blood. Then, Bologue's body uncontrollably leaned backward.

The final strike had nearly drained Bologue's Ether, and his body was heavily injured; he had no strength left to speak of.

The wind began to rise as Palmer leaped from one side, catching the falling Bologue, and the two tumbled together, rolling several times before coming to a stop.

The crimson giant serpent also lost all its support and completely collapsed, crushing column after column of stone, and the bridge surface began to crumble incessantly.

Fortunately, this upheaval didn't last long, and everything returned to tranquility again. The crimson serpent, like a creature from myth, lay dead at the end of the Long Bridge, while two figures in the near distance leaned against the base of a stone column, observing the scene.

It took Bologue several moments to regain his senses; the decaying roots embedded in his body were quite deadly. He had no energy left to deal with them, but fortunately, their gnawing was balanced by his resurrection, and apart from intense chest pain, Bologue felt things were relatively normal.

Palmer sat next to Bologue, gazing somewhat blankly at the dead crimson serpent. After a long pause, he faintly asked Bologue.

"Can you still make some orange juice?"

"Huh?"

Bologue never imagined Palmer would say such nonsense at this moment, but this time Bologue didn't resist and was rather happy to follow the track of this fool, so he said, "I'll try."

Bologue snapped his fingers.

Nothing happened.

"Looks like I can't,"

Bologue remarked, annoyed by problems caused by the Tyrant, this lunatic. He was about to rub his forehead to alleviate some headache, but his head bumped into something cold.

Lowering his hand, Bologue found himself holding a glass of orange juice, the chilled kind. Turning his head, he saw Palmer had the same glass, crazily even with a straw and a little umbrella in it.

The two exchanged a glance, silently clinking their glasses and, facing the dead corpse, emptied them in one go.

After a brief silence, Palmer couldn't hold back his laughter, followed by Bologue.

Bologue was probably amused by Palmer or confused by this absurd scene; eventually, the two laughed out loud.

"Good heavens, Bologue!"

Palmer, while biting the straw, slapped forcefully on Bologue's back, causing a few drops of fresh blood to seep from Bologue's wounds with each hit.

"A Negative Power User! We really took down a Negative Power User! And a bastard from the Corrosive Sect, no less!"

The fear of life and death vanished; Palmer's behavior became absurd and exaggerated, raising three fingers to repeatedly emphasize to Bologue.

"Triple pay! Triple pay, indeed!"

Bologue, too, nodded laughingly. Though he didn't want to laugh, he couldn't control his expression. He guessed Aimou must be the one laughing.

"Aimou, you're quite a prodigy," Bologue sighed, "not yet onboard, and you helped us take down a Negative Power User. Your rookie showcase is way better than mine."

Aimou said nothing, just letting out a burst of confident laughter.

Bologue and Palmer supported each other, wobbling as they got back on their feet. Just as Bologue pondered the next move, Palmer patted him.

"Wait a second, Bologue, that thing..."

Palmer's tone was somewhat terrified. Turning his gaze, the once-dead crimson serpent began to writhe again.

"Didn't kill it thoroughly?"

This time, Palmer truly panicked. Now they were both merely at their limits, utterly without the energy to face a Negative Power User.

"No, it's not the Negative Power User. Those are the decaying roots."

Bologue accurately judged that Latis was dead, and now the decaying roots regained control, acting on biological instinct.

That pure, insatiable appetite for devouring.

One wave after another, Bologue's feelings were already numb, and the crimson serpent also caught the scent of living beings, slithering its way toward the two, smashing through the rocks along the path.

Just as Bologue and Palmer were preparing for a last stand, another powerful Ether reaction surged from behind, and the Canyon glow shone like a blazing sun, illuminating half of the gloom while bathing the crimson serpent in light, freezing it in place instantly.

A gunshot echoed.

A pure white flame darted through, penetrating deep into a bloody hole in the crimson serpent's body, slicing through from head to tail, almost completely severing the serpent's form.

This wasn't any ordinary flame; Bologue could feel the absolute and violent Ether coursing through it, flames forged entirely by Ether.

"Yo, you two did quite well."

A familiar voice rang out. Bologue turned his head as the brilliant light faded, revealing at the end of the Long Bridge a fierce tiger holding a handgun in one hand and a Bone-breaking Knife in the other, accompanied by a Blade-Biting Wolf, its body clad in pitch-black sharp blades.

## Chapter 323: Tiger Eye

On the dim underground long bridge, two people stared blankly at the approaching tiger, and after a long pause, Bologue finally asked, as if belatedly realizing.

"Geoffrey?"

Lebius's Blade-Biting Wolf was too recognizable. To be able to interact closely with this Blade-Biting Wolf without being attacked, Bologue thought the person must also be from the Order Bureau. Coupled with previous rumors, he easily guessed the person's identity.

The tiger took off his mask, revealing a familiar face—it was Geoffrey.

Unlike the two who were in a sorry state, Geoffrey's attire was impeccably neat, with hardly any stains of blood, his expression relaxed. In what was hell for Bologue, Geoffrey looked as if he was out on a picnic.

"Geoffrey!"

Before Bologue could continue questioning, Palmer shouted emotionally, spreading his arms wide, running toward Geoffrey, determined to give him a loving hug.

"Before today, I never thought I'd look forward so much to your arrival!" Palmer's voice was almost at the point of tears.

For the unlucky ones, today was a killer day, with one danger following another, and by the end, Palmer's mood had become numb—even nonsensical praises for the Crimson Queen kept pouring out.

Geoffrey slightly sidestepped, easily avoiding Palmer's embrace of love, while Palmer, unable to stop, fell to the ground like a dog eating dirt.

Bologue staggered over, already aware of Geoffrey's return to the field, but recalling that scene just now, he couldn't have imagined Geoffrey would be this strong.

To be honest, Bologue's impression of Geoffrey underwent a slight shift.

When he was released from prison, Geoffrey always maintained the image of a good guy, perhaps with an odd middleman quality, frequently introducing him to jobs that involved slaying demons... Okay, now that he reflects, it was indeed a bit odd.

In any case... the power of the Negative Power User.

Bologue began to feel a sense of anticipation for power. He yearned for greater strength, knowing that only then would he have some bargaining power with the devil, and he could possess the ability to protect himself in conflicts, instead of being chased by these monsters all over.



"Did both you and Lebius come for this operation?"

Bologue asked, now somewhat understanding the surprise Palmer had mentioned.

"Yes, Lebius is hunting others, his secret energy is well-suited to wide-area pursuit." Geoffrey glanced at the Blade-Biting Wolf beside him, explaining.

Lebius's true form wasn't here, but in some hidden corner, where he commanded the Blade-Biting Wolf, running through the vast maze to hunt those fleeing enemies.

Few could survive Lebius's hunt.

"King's Shield Guard are a new group of opponents; we know little about them, so we can only set traps like this... I've been pursuing that guy, Lebius dealt significant damage to him, but I didn't expect you guys to take him down."

Geoffrey said halfway, then glanced at the bloody corpse, "Negative Power Users are too dangerous; the first thing we do after starting operations is to eliminate these guys."

Bologue nodded. It was precisely with the Blade-Biting Wolf that he had left a black blade at Latis's heart, achieving the execution of Latis.

"Wait a moment, so this credit should count under us, right?" Palmer suddenly got up, eyes shining, "This Negative Power User, it counts as us killing him, right?"

"Hmm? Sort of."

Geoffrey hesitated for a moment but nodded in agreement.

Bologue and Palmer, these two unfortunates, had been tormented by this task enough, and it was time to give them some reward, such as being recognized as Condenser-level slayers of a Negative Power User... Although the Negative Power User was severely wounded, that's not important.

Palmer cheered, while Bologue didn't understand why he cared so much about this matter; he thought Palmer wasn't the type to cling to rewards.

But Palmer said something right; Bologue didn't care about these honors, but he was quite concerned about the triple salary, especially support equipment post Sublimation Furnace Core.

Every time after dangerous operations, one major motivator for Bologue was that afterwards, the Sublimation Furnace Core would send quite good alchemy armaments as rewards.

The Bright Light Blade was already shattered, and Bologue felt quite distressed; such lethal alchemy armaments were rare.

"What should we do next?" Bologue asked, "Apart from the still-growing corrupt roots, the power of the Crimson Sect should be completely dismantled."

The Crimson Sect was the biggest unfortunate group in this chaotic battle, with successive battles severely depleting their manpower. Even the Crimson Bishop Latis perished in the subsequent conflicts; they virtually suffered a total defeat.

"No need to worry about the corrupt roots; someone will deal with them later. The main task now is to suppress King's Shield Guard... this is the task of the Violence Suppression Action Group."

Geoffrey spoke, signaling the two to follow him.

"I'll first take you away from here; let the subsequent operations be handled by others. You guys should go for healing and rest."

The two unfortunates had completed their mission goals, and it was unnecessary to continue exploiting them. Geoffrey had also worked for several years in the Logistics Department, knowing well the approach of sustainable extraction.

"Oh, right, Geoffrey."

Bologue called to Geoffrey, suddenly remembering another extremely important matter he hadn't mentioned to him.

"What is it?" Geoffrey turned around, only to see Bologue taking out a spherical object encased in hardness from behind.

"Did I get it?" Bologue said.

"What?"

Looking at the strange object, Geoffrey couldn't immediately recognize what it was.

A swarm of snakes twisted into a Sheep Horn Hammer, Bologue forcefully pried open the outer proliferated hard shell, revealing a container full of cracks, and an eerie voice echoed.

"I've reclaimed the Immortal Heart."

Bologue's voice was soft but struck Geoffrey's chest like a Heavy Hammer.

Since the beginning of the operation, the connection between Bologue and Geoffrey had been severed. Neither knew the other's actions, and Geoffrey's important goal in pursuing Latis was to retrieve the Immortal Heart.

Having seen the dead Latis, he knew clearly that the Immortal Heart was not with Latis. If Latis had owned the Immortal Heart, they would now be facing absolute maddening Hell.

But in any case, Geoffrey never thought the Immortal Heart would be in Bologue's hands; this expert had controlled it from the start.

After a moment of shock, Geoffrey looked around; in the endless darkness below, it seemed as if countless hands reached out, trying to drag the people on the Long Bridge into the Abyss.

"We need to leave quickly," Geoffrey's voice became urgent, "This place is terrible."

Geoffrey didn't know how Bologue and Palmer had stumbled upon this place, but he knew very well why Latis came here.

The Crimson Bishop realized that victory was hopeless, so he wanted to sacrifice himself.

Offering all the flesh and blood to the Abyss and the existence beneath it.

There's no time to clear off the flesh; the most important thing now is to leave here with the Immortal Heart as quickly as possible.

Having barely gotten to safety, Palmer was puzzled by Geoffrey's tension, while Bologue, without asking much, listened to Geoffrey and became alert.

"I'll carry it."

Geoffrey reached to take the container; as a Negative Power User, it was most fitting for him to bear this responsibility.

But just as Geoffrey was about to grasp the container, the roaring Ether surged in the dimness.

In an instant, the ground shook, the Abyss stirred, and massive, crimson appendages rose from the darkness below, entwining around the bridge pillars. In a blink, they climbed up the Long Bridge, and the rotten crimson and color filled every corner of the vision.

Palmer's face turned pale; each appendage was as enormous as that crimson great serpent, with a faint light shining beneath the flesh, making the flesh appear like translucent red Amber.

"How is this possible?"

Geoffrey's eyes flashed with Canyin light; that monster was supposed to be asleep, how could it awaken now?

Yet the truth was undeniable, and in an instant, Geoffrey unleashed the power of a Negative Power User, the Ether surged, and the overwhelming power enveloped Geoffrey.

He was ready to perish with this beast; under no circumstances could the Immortal Heart fall into its grasp, and meanwhile, Geoffrey roared into the Whistle.

"Calamity has awakened! Inform the Abyss Watcher!"

With the message sent, a brief calm enveloped the Heart Core Net, followed by a storm of information exchanges.

Some cursed how Calamity could be awake, others questioned why the Abyss Watcher hadn't issued a warning, and some warned Geoffrey to hold on, the wolves are moving towards him, this was Lebius's statement.

"Bologue! Take it and leave, I'll buy you time."

Geoffrey stood with his back to Bologue, the light in his eyes nearly coalescing into daylight.

As a child, Geoffrey had been taken to the zoo by his family, where he saw a tiger for the first time. Though caged, confronting the tired, listless Tiger Eye, young Geoffrey felt only enormous fear, unable even to move.

From then on, the image of a tiger's eyes carved deeply into his heart.

Later he became a Condenser and rose through the ranks to become a Negative Power User, with his Secret Energy continually optimized and growing more potent.

"Your Secret Energy is intriguing, a type not recorded by the Order Bureau. They've given you the naming rights."

The words of Lebius from back then echoed in his ears, continued with,

"Medusa's Gaze? It feels like this myth suits your Secret Energy well."

Geoffrey thought it over, shook his head and denied it, for he had long named this Secret Energy.

Secret Energy·Tiger Eye.

The Canyon light swept past, and all things froze wherever Geoffrey gazed.

Chapter 324: True or False

Geoffrey knew very well that facing the Calamity alone meant no chance of survival, but he just needed to stop it for a few seconds to give Bologue a chance to escape.

Amidst the surge of Ether, Geoffrey's fear also reached its peak. It was the first time since the secret war seven years ago that he felt such terrifying fear.

Confronting this ancient and dreadful existence, even his sharp mind fell into a stalemate.

His gaze swept across, and all the scarlet limbs within view were firmly restrained, but such restraint didn't last long. There were too many of them—the figure trembled slightly, about to break free from the stillness.

Geoffrey's Secret Energy had never been good at dealing with large-scale battles, but rather, it excelled in one-on-one combat. That's why he always partnered with Lebius—Geoffrey restrained the target, and Lebius delivered the fatal strike.

"You saw it too, didn't you? Lebius."

Geoffrey muttered in a low voice. The Blade-Biting Wolf beside him was under Lebius's control.

In action, the two always moved together. Even though they were briefly separated this time, Lebius still sent a Blade-Biting Wolf to follow him.

Geoffrey began to feel grateful for the separation; otherwise, there would be another dead person here.

Were Lebius to die as well, the unfortunate Special Operations Group would most likely dissolve.

There was no response to Geoffrey's words. The blades all over the Blade-Biting Wolf's body slightly lifted, vibrating with an ear-piercing hum.

The stagnant state didn't last long as the limbs broke free one by one, crashing down towards Geoffrey. There was nothing crafty about it, no technique to speak of—just the instinctual attack of a beast, but such an attack easily snapped the Long Bridge. Amidst the spreading dust, Geoffrey swiftly moved, firing back.

Bursts of gunfire erupted, piercing bloody holes through the limbs. Scarlet threads surged from all around, but were cut down entirely by the Bone-breaking Knife.

This was Geoffrey's first encounter with the Calamity... Of course, unless someone was insane, even a Seeker of Glory would never approach the Calamity voluntarily.

Geoffrey couldn't help but smile as if comforting himself, muttering.

"There aren't many chances to clash with the Calamity."

The bridge beneath his feet completely collapsed amid the writhing flesh. Geoffrey swung a grappling hook, sweeping to one side, followed by countless scarlet hues.

Geoffrey knew little about the Calamity, at least not much about the one lurking beneath the Great Rift. From the moment Geoffrey knew of this Calamity's existence, it was under the watch of the Abyss Watcher, trapped in an almost eternal slumber.

As for how to fight it, Geoffrey had no idea; he could only rely on his combat experience to seek a chance for survival amidst its onslaught.

Palmer and Bologue hurriedly fled. Even without looking back, they could sense the terrifying Ethereal Fluctuation.

"Are we abandoning Geoffrey?"

Palmer shouted to Bologue. If the two of them left like this, Geoffrey might really die here, but soon Palmer realized that even if they went back, what could they do—die alongside Geoffrey?

"For now, yes." Bologue's voice was cold and merciless.

He didn't know what the situation was now, but judging from Geoffrey's reactions, this was definitely the key to everything.

Aimou seemed a bit disheartened. She didn't know Geoffrey well, but from their reactions, Geoffrey was their friend, and now their friend was about to die.

Bologue suddenly stopped in his tracks. They were already considered to have escaped to a safe zone. Though they didn't know where to run next, at least they weren't going to die for the moment.

"My reason tells me we should watch Geoffrey die and then I would rationally proceed, until one day I gain the necessary power, then return to slay this monster."

Bologue's voice was suppressed with anger. He turned to look at Palmer, and Palmer couldn't meet his sharp gaze.



"Palmer, you're a lucky guy, and pretty good at escaping. You can take it and leave, right?"

Bologue said as he raised the container.

"What are you... going to do?" Palmer's voice trembled slightly.

"I'm an Undead; when it comes to risking my life, I have more capital than anyone."

Bologue said lightly. He didn't know what the monster was, nor what would happen next. He only knew that Geoffrey couldn't die here.

Palmer swallowed hard, decisively taking the container and vowing, "Even if you die under the Great Rift, we'll dig you out."

Bologue was slightly dazed. He found the atmosphere a bit absurd; they were clearly heading for a terrifying unknown, yet when Palmer spoke, there was always a bit of a rogue feel to it.

Not bad though; in such a solemn atmosphere, a bit of levity is needed to ease the tension.

Bologue suddenly felt Palmer would make a great stand-up comedian. This guy always managed to make people laugh when he spoke. But if possible, Bologue would rather he say these things on a stage, not in such a deadly place.

"Aimou, your Shared Chord Body is on Palmer. Take him and leave."

Bologue continued, knowing this endeavor was fraught with danger. He wasn't sure what they would face, so having Aimou leave was the best choice.

After a few seconds of silence, Aimou's voice, tinged with some disdain, said.

"No, he looks too filthy."

Bologue's words came to a halt.

Seeing Bologue's expression, Palmer curiously asked, "What did she say?"

Perhaps due to his trust in the expert, knowing that Bologue was ready to turn the tide, Palmer felt no tension at all.

"You don't want me to drive you out, right?" Bologue said.

"You are Undead; as long as I don't sever the Shared Chord Body, even if you die, I won't be affected."

Aimou explained her reasoning.

"Admit it, Bologue, you need me. Otherwise, if you go, it would just be a suicide mission... No, you want to go on a suicide mission, but if you die within a minute, you can't save anyone; you need... to die a bit slower."

The golden halo solidified, as firm as Aimou's resolve.

"I can help you."

Bologue repeatedly took deep breaths, mimicking Palmer, speaking lightly.

"You're not even of age; for something so life-threatening, you need your guardian's consent, right?"

Despite saying this, Bologue had already turned around, running towards Geoffrey.

"My guardian was just chasing you, and... I'm not human, so those rules about being a minor don't apply to me, right?"

Aimou learned quickly; she was already adept at speaking nonsensical things and conversed fluently with Bologue.

Bologue couldn't help but shake his head, unsure whether he was setting a bad example for the child, even less certain what kind of adult Aimou would become.

But Bologue could clearly sense a peculiar emotion rising within him, thinking that when Adelle watched him grow, she felt the same as he did now.

The Long Bridge was massive, almost spanning the entire dark underground space, yet under the attack of the Calamity, it continuously collapsed, leaving only a few scattered broken bridge piers, standing lonely in the darkness.

Geoffrey retreated to a position that hadn't collapsed; this environment was unsuitable for his combat, yet another scarlet limb curled up, smashing towards him, but under the Bone-breaking Knife's slice, the tough flesh crumbled.

Geoffrey found it hard to describe the form of the Calamity, as it was so immense, and what he saw now was just a small part of its grand body.

Its true main body was hidden underneath the deep Great Rift, and what came to attack him was merely a tentacle reaching along the Long Bridge.

But even this single tentacle, as the battle progressed, continuously split and mutated, resembling a mass that could adapt to the environment, constantly self-correct and evolve.

One by one, scarlet eyes opened on the coiled tentacle, looking no different from the decayed root buds at first glance, but Geoffrey knew, unlike the Devil's product of decay, which acted solely based on instinct and was unaware, the Calamity had consciousness.

Not just consciousness, but a mind akin to, if not surpassing, that of a human, and the biggest difference was, the Calamity could control Ether.

Every strike of the tentacle carried an Ether impact, knocking Geoffrey around like a pinball, yet his gaze was no longer filled with fear, instead, he noticed something peculiar.

Something... felt off.

After engaging in combat, the fear towards the Calamity gradually waned, turning into suspicion, the terrifying monster wasn't as mighty as imagined, at least not to Geoffrey.

Geoffrey knew well the power of the Calamity; he shouldn't have been able to withstand more than a few rounds, yet now the battle slowly became evenly matched.

"Have you contacted the Abyss Watchers?"

Geoffrey's voice roared within the Heart Core Net.

The awakening of the Calamity had no sign, suggesting another possibility—that the Abyss Watchers responsible for monitoring might have been killed by it before they could warn anyone.

Geoffrey knew well what kind of people could be Abyss Watchers, more so when some of them were Defenders.

All sorts of suspicions filled Geoffrey with intense unease, and then another voice sounded in the Heart Core Net.

"This is the Desperate Outpost."

The voice was low and calm, speaking with absolute certainty.

"According to the reports from Group Four and the Abyss Watchers, the Calamity is still in slumber, and the Serenity Defense Line remains intact. Report complete."

Hearing this response, silence filled the Heart Core Net, and Geoffrey's heart grew cold.

He recognized the voice in his mind and absolutely trusted his words.

If the Calamity was still in slumber, then what was he facing right now.

### Chapter 325: Rhapsody

In the moment Geoffrey was distracted, amidst a thunderous roar, scarlet tentacles rose from the ground, wrapping around Geoffrey's body. The surface of the flesh sprouted dense spikes, twisting forcefully, squeezing out a torrent of blood.

As they tried to entirely devour Geoffrey, a sharp blade flashed, and Bologue slashed through the layers of flesh.

"Bologue? What are you doing here!" Geoffrey saw Bologue and couldn't understand why he returned.

"I am the Undead, I'm here to deal with it!"

Geoffrey hesitated as he watched Bologue, then saw Palmer swiftly escaping in the distance, carrying the Immortal Heart. Suddenly, he understood everything.

"No, it's a conspiracy!"

Geoffrey roared, raising his gun, and the entity hidden in the shadows revealed its true form at this moment.

The Pretender released the hook and leapt down from the darkness above. His aura was somewhat weakened, limited by his tier, and the calamity he had created indeed had a significant discrepancy compared to a true calamity.

Fortunately, this was no longer important; the Pretender had shaped the situation perfectly by exploiting Geoffrey's wariness of the calamity.

Palmer looked up, as the Pretender descended upon him like a nightmare, and the scarlet figure entangled on the Long Bridge began to dissipate into nothingness, losing the support of ether.

No one expected that in the chaotic struggle's end, the Pretender would appear in such a manner. More importantly, he could create such an evil calamity.

Geoffrey had enough understanding of Illusion Creation, especially pure, spontaneous Illusion Creation. The forces that could restrict this kind of power were only two: the ether amount to sustain the secret energy's operation and the Condenser's own imagination.

All human fantasies are mixed and pieced together with known reality, like how humans can't imagine colors beyond the visible spectrum; human capability limits the perception of vision.

Illusion Creation is the same, the Pretender couldn't imagine things he hadn't understood or witnessed.

But this calamity was so vivid, even its aura was similar, tinged with the madness of the Devil, forcing Geoffrey to reconsider how deep the Pretender's knowledge of the Great Rift was.

The Pretender once served as the chief of the Sublimation Furnace Core with access to the secrets beneath the Great Rift, but reading in documentation and witnessing firsthand are entirely different matters.

Glancing at the constantly dissipating calamity by his side, Geoffrey was sure the Pretender had been deep into the Great Rift.

So how much did the Pretender know about the mysteries below?

"Watch out! Palmer!"

As Geoffrey spoke of the conspiracy, Bologue had already sensed the error and shouted a warning to Palmer.

The fight with Latis made Bologue temporarily forget about the Pretender being such a formidable enemy. More importantly, Bologue didn't expect the Pretender to hide his tracks until the last moment, and in Geoffrey's presence, he dared to attack.

If a battle were to commence now, it would be tantamount to declaring war on the Order Bureau, driving the conflict in a direction Bologue least wanted to see.

"Teacher, he..." Aimou's voice echoed.

"No, he was just influenced by the Tyrant's power."

Bologue comforted Aimou, shifting the blame onto the Tyrant.

In this endless frenzy, with the Tyrant's incitement, everyone's deepest and most fervent greed was awakened.

Under the pale puppet mask, pupils rolled with pure white ether, and behind the Pretender, eight arms appeared, wielding sharp blades, crashing towards Palmer.

With a scream, Palmer turned swiftly, firing a hook towards Bologue and Geoffrey's direction.

At this moment, the unlucky Palmer realized they had been lured away. From afar, Geoffrey fixed his gaze on the Pretender as a fierce aura emanated from him, expanding into an invisible wave crashing forward.

Though he also wore a mask, Geoffrey disliked masked individuals, as masks covered the eyes, making it difficult for him to gaze into the opponent's eyes and thereby disrupt them.

Luckily, Geoffrey was a Negative Power User, having broken free from many of the secret energy limitations. Now, as long as he directly looked his opponent in the eye, he could exert some degree of influence, unable to fully immobilize them but able to slow their steps.

Though far from one another, the Pretender still sensed the ferocious gaze when it landed, feeling as though eyed by a savage beast, blood ran cold, heartbeat slowed, and every movement became sluggish.

Unfortunately, the Pretender's tier was the same as Geoffrey's; they were both Negative Power Users, and under the same tier, the influence of Geoffrey's secret energy would weaken.

But for Palmer, this brief delay was enough for his escape.

With his understanding of the Pretender and the dire situation, Palmer now realized that the calamity was Illusion Creation, and the Pretender was willing to shred him apart to seize the Immortal Heart.

The remaining ether compressed behind him, the wind amassed like a compressed bomb, instantly detonated.

The violent wind tore at Palmer's body, hurling him upwards like a shooting star.

Palmer's speed was so fast that even he couldn't control his direction, hurtling straight towards the abyss outside the Long Bridge.

The Delusional tried to keep up with Palmer, but streams of pure, ether condensed into entities crossed his path, blocking his steps with dazzling trails of light.

These were the alchemy armaments carried by Geoffrey, the paired firearm once shown to Bologue long ago, much like Palmer's Thunderbolt Revolver. Geoffrey's firearm allowed him to inject a large amount of ether into the bullet heads, turning them into ethereal bullets upon shooting.

The bullet heads sliced through the air, and then the ether exploded with a roar that forced the Delusional to evade. At this moment, Bologue also leaped from the Long Bridge.



Palmer's speed slowed down, followed immediately by free fall.

His landing point was unfortunate; without any support nearby, he would plummet directly into the abyss.

Palmer let out cries of agony. He wanted to crack a cold joke to lighten the grim atmosphere, but as the protagonist of this atmosphere, he couldn't open his mouth.

Bologue dashed out of the Long Bridge, firing a grappling hook towards the ruins, and as he approached Palmer, he threw the Deceitful Snake Scale Silver again, transforming snakes into an extended Silver Hand to catch the falling Palmer.

"I've got you!" Bologue shouted.

The Silver Hand quickly retracted, and Bologue held Palmer by the waist, the two of them swinging widely under the Long Bridge, supported by the grappling hook.

"Good news, the calamity is fake!" Palmer yelled in Bologue's ear, "Bad news, he's coming!"

Without Palmer's words, Bologue had already felt the powerful ether reaction of the Delusional. One stone step after another rose and collapsed beneath the Delusional's feet in mid-air.

Relying on Illusion Creation, even this complex and perilous terrain was leveled for the Delusional.

His disguise had been pierced, and he no longer concealed anything. But at this moment, sharp coldness attacked from behind him.

Perhaps because of Aimou, Bologue had a hint of undeserved leniency towards the Delusional, but when Lebius acted, it was absolute ruthlessness.

From the scattering of Illusion Creation's calamity and the Delusional's descent, the Blade-Biting Wolf silently lurked in the shadows.

Even among Negative Power Users, vast disparities existed, and Lebius was the most lethal among them.

As Lebius's partner, Geoffrey still didn't know how extensive Lebius's secret energy influence was. In any case, during each battle, Lebius would leisurely sit aside, then dispatch packs of wolves to chase enemies. After waiting a moment, the wolves would return with the enemies' heads.

It was the same now. Under Ethereal Concealment, the Blade-Biting Wolf silently appeared behind the Delusional, aiming a deadly blade at his heart. To ensure the kill, another blade cut towards the Delusional's neck.

The cruel scene did not unfold. The blade did not hit a solid entity but sliced into a phantom bubble, and then the figure of the Delusional completely disappeared.

"Illusion Creation again!"

Bologue exclaimed, as he and Palmer swung back from the other side of the Long Bridge, catching this spectacle.

"Was this guy really just an Alchemist before?" Palmer shouted, "He could lead a field ops team!"

Geoffrey's gaze turned stern. They had made a critical error, underestimating the Delusional.

Condensers often harbor the prejudice that Alchemists lack combat prowess, even if they become Negative Power Users; this power is regarded solely for research.

But now the Delusional shattered all of their biases. Seven years was enough for a rookie to become a seasoned soldier, and sufficient for an Alchemist to learn how to wield a sword.

"Shouldn't it be said they're of the same lineage?"

Bologue recalled Belli's graceful swaying of the crowbar and had inquired about it.

"Transforming metals is physical labor. Sometimes we have to work like blacksmiths, manually wielding the hammer and refining metals, so physical training is crucial for an Alchemist."

Belli added.

"Of course, in the event of accidents, a robust physique significantly boosts our survival chances."

Geoffrey tightly gripped the Bone-breaking Knife. Presently, he regarded the Delusional as a genuine warrior and would handle him by the Field Operations Department rules.

For Field Staff, capturing enemies is never the first option; killing is. Only those who give their all but fail unexpectedly to kill have a chance to be retrieved.

Geoffrey firmly put on the mask. Under the surging ether, the mask animated, its fur dancing softly, like a true devil tiger.

Chapter 326: The Fall of Thundercloud

The Blade-Biting Wolf shredded the phantom, Geoffrey heightened his ether, alert to his surroundings. Bologue brushed past Palmer and the Abyss, leaping from the other end of the Long Bridge.

This all happened simultaneously, as Bologue witnessed the raging tiger, he couldn't help but sigh, even the good-natured have moments of anger.

"You say, if that's an Illusion Creation, then where would the Delusional be?"

At this moment, Palmer unexpectedly spoke.

"Don't jinx it with your crow mouth..."

Bologue hadn't finished warning Palmer when another surge of ether released nearby.

"Damn it! Palmer!"

Bologue choked back his unfinished words, cursing loudly.

Ether solidified in mid-air into steps, the Delusional appeared before them once more, several barbed hooks were illusioned, attacking the two still swinging towards the Long Bridge.

From deceiving Geoffrey with a Calamity illusion, then misleading the Blade-Biting Wolf... the Delusional's combat strategy was clear, to keep the Immortal Heart away from Geoffrey.

Once Geoffrey obtained the Immortal Heart, aside from a direct battle, the Delusional had no chance of reclaiming it, and even in a direct battle with Geoffrey, his odds were pitifully low.

Perhaps seven years had changed the Delusional beyond recognition, yet Geoffrey had survived the secret wars as a seasoned field staff; he was truly battle-hardened. Had the life in Logistics Department not corrupted him, Geoffrey would have had pure muscle rather than a paunch.

Now was the Delusional's last chance, he charged aggressively at the two in mid-air, Geoffrey noticed everything, his gaze intense, as a suppressive force descended to try and seal the Delusional.

Mocking laughter echoed, the puppet-like white mask twisted and shattered in an instant, the Delusional's figure split into dozens, densely surrounding Bologue and Palmer.

Geoffrey's Tiger Eye could switch between group stasis and single stasis, the strength difference between them was vast. The Delusional confused Geoffrey's vision with illusions, forcing him into group stasis, trying to control the Delusional.

"This is why I prefer not to work with others."

Geoffrey's eyes glowed Canyin, he murmured.

Pairing with Lebius, he never worried about Lebius getting hurt, nor did he worry about his stasis failing. But now Lebius wasn't here, only a Blade-Biting Wolf assisted him.

The pitch-black blade moved swiftly, yet it couldn't immediately cut down all the phantoms.

Bologue and Palmer's racing figures encountered changes; Deceitful Snake Scale Silver formed into a Silver Hand, pushing away the encroaching chains, yet cracks appeared in the rock where the hooks embedded, then dislodged.

"Palmer! Do you still have strength left?" Bologue asked.

They swung halfway, but with hooks detached, they couldn't swing back onto the Long Bridge. Hook retrieval needed time, Silver Hand was limited by distance, unreachable.

"I'll do my best!"

Palmer gritted his teeth, summoned a gale, pushing them towards the Long Bridge, yet in the Delusional's view, the two airborne seemed like targets.

The remaining figures lunged at them, true or false, no one knew where the Delusional's real body was. But Bologue had no other options; he could only push on regardless.

Luckily, in this desperate moment, the Canyin light brightened, under Ethereal Amplification, Geoffrey's speed exceeded all their expectations, nearly instantly appearing before them.

Bone-breaking Knife raised high, Geoffrey slammed a blood-stained blade down at one figure.

After brief confusion, Geoffrey accurately judged the Delusional's true location based on different ether intensities.

Seven years transformed the Delusional from a scholar to a warrior, yet he had never personally experienced those most frenzied combats, nor that blood-earned experience of Geoffrey's.

In an instant, the surrounding figures scattered, leaving only the real body beneath Geoffrey's blade.

The Delusional didn't panic; he had foreseen this moment. After all, he was here to snatch food from the jaws of the Order Bureau; he knew all too well his old employer's strength.

Luckily, he had prepared thoroughly.

Rounds of hard Round Shields were illusioned in front of the Delusional, they couldn't block Geoffrey's heavy strike, but enough to delay slightly, allowing the Delusional to hurl something towards Bologue and Palmer.

Bologue watched helplessly as the Delusional swung his hand, a delicate glass container barreling towards him.

The surface of the container was etched with intricate patterns, resembling a work of art, yet inside brewed rolling thunderclouds, tiny cracks split open, Bologue could almost hear the roaring storms and lightning.

Thundercloud Qi, Bologue had seen this thing at the auction. It seemed the buyer had been killed by the Delusional, making it the Delusional's spoils, turning into a weapon to break the deadlock.

Bologue had no time to issue any warning. The moment the container shattered, the roaring thundercloud engulfed everyone.

The vision turned grayish, and amidst the dimness was lightning like serpents, twisting light striking everyone inside the thundercloud. Bologue was hit directly by a bolt of lightning, his whole body lost strength, and he fell into brief paralysis.

Palmer was the same; he tried to summon the gale, but the air currents around were already engulfed by the Thundercloud Qi. The gale he wove was covered by the thundercloud before it could blow.

In the apocalyptic scene, the golden light flickered behind the dark clouds, followed by crimson appendages breaking through, swallowing the golden light.

At this critical moment, the Delusional once again created Calamity through illusion, although merely a fake replica. Under the Delusional's full-on effort, in tandem with the violent thundercloud, it briefly suppressed Geoffrey.

Most importantly, the dark thundercloud obscured Geoffrey's vision. He couldn't find a target to freeze. The Ether flow around had also been disrupted by the thundercloud, making him completely unable to detect the Delusional's Ether reaction.

The thundercloud surged, and a black figure broke through the clouds, like a diving Black Hawk, swooping toward Palmer below.

The Black Hawk was accompanied by a raging thunderstorm, with bolts of lightning striking down, electrocuting Bologue and Palmer.

Bologue was better off; he was the Undead, and from his earlier learning experience in the Black Prison, this level of attack wasn't enough to knock him out or kill him. But Palmer was different. This unlucky fellow was already smoking from the electric shock, losing consciousness and free falling with Bologue out of the thundercloud, plummeting toward the Abyss below.

The Delusional and the two of them burst out of the thundercloud one after another, with the crimson figure inside it clashing with Geoffrey repeatedly.

"Stop!"

Bologue roared hoarsely, but this still couldn't prevent the Delusional from reaching Palmer's side, snatching the Immortal Heart.

The pale puppet mask turned toward Bologue, still maintaining silence, saying nothing. Illusion-made wings unfolded behind him as the Delusional quickly decelerated, briefly hovering in mid-air, then rushing towards another corner of the darkness.

The Delusional eventually secured the Immortal Heart. What he needed to do next was escape from the Order Bureau's siege. As for Bologue and Palmer's lives, they weren't in his considerations.

Bologue watched the light gradually fade. At the crucial moment, he made a decision, Deceitful Snake Scale Silver extending to form an arm, grabbing the unconscious Palmer.

The two clung together, Bologue spinning in mid-air, using all his strength to throw Palmer upwards. This wasn't the end; he then rotated again and hurled an Iron Spear with even swifter force.

The Iron Spear accurately struck Palmer, piercing through his arm, pinning him to a nearby rock wall. It looked somewhat tragic, but at least Bologue successfully stopped Palmer from falling.

When it was time to save himself, Bologue realized he had already fallen into a desperate situation. Whether it was the surrounding rock walls or the Long Bridge, they were too far away. The Summoning Hand couldn't reach that distance, and the grappling hook he held had only one chance.

If it couldn't be lodged into the rock wall, by the time the hook retracted and was released again, he would already have been completely swallowed by the darkness.

"Whatever, let's give it a try!"

Bologue never thought there would be a day where he, like Palmer, would become a player reliant on luck. But in such a desperate situation, he could only gamble on his luck.

He threw out the grappling hook, and as it reached the extreme distance, the hook barely caught into the rock wall. Bologue showed a look of joy, but before he could pull himself closer, the hook, having hit from the extreme distance, couldn't fully lodge into the wall and came loose again.

Luckily, Bologue was already closer to the rock wall this time. After the hook retracted, he directly used Deceitful Snake Scale Silver to mold the hook-head into a small anchor and hurled it toward the rock wall with all his might.



"Aimou!"

Bologue called out, and immediately Ether Amplification covered his body.

This time, the anchor fiercely drove into the wall, and as Bologue fell, the grappling hook went taut, with Bologue raising a shield in front of him and colliding hard with the rock wall under the pull of the hook.

It felt like being hit head-on by a car; after the impact, Bologue felt intense pain all over his body, followed by the anchor starting to loosen, falling straight down.

Fortunately, by now Bologue had already touched the rock wall. Under the drive of the Summoning Hand, protrusions appeared one after another, allowing him to slowly climb back to the Long Bridge.

After the danger subsided, Bologue could finally catch a breath of relief. Clinging to the rock wall, trying to regain his strength, Bologue was completely unaware that the shadows were writhing intensely. Then a pair of white gloves extended from the shadows with an inaudible malicious chuckle, grabbing his shoulders.

The Devil would never interfere with others' choices, at most, at the crossroads of fate, giving a nudge with some force.

Of course, for some stubborn fellows, they might give a kick.

The Tyrant gently tugged on Bologue's shoulders, and in a flash, Bologue lost all his strength, even the Ether fell silent, no longer responding to his call.

Bologue didn't know what was happening; he only felt a chilling coldness. And as he fell, the light above his head faded continuously until everything returned to darkness, descending into an eternal fall.

## Chapter 327: Wilderness Survival

This feeling is quite wondrous, like being submerged in icy seawater, every inch of muscle in the body relaxing under the buoyancy, strands of coldness wandering across the body, soothing the weary spirit.

This is an environment suitable for sleeping in late, even Bologue is somewhat indulged in this rare tranquility, letting his body drift along.

In this void world, Bologue tightly shuts his eyes, swaying back and forth between massive rubble and dust, like a lost wanderer.

A layer of frost hangs upon his body, as if he had been dead for many years.

Upon contact with roaming boulders, Bologue is gently bumped aside, his figure slowly shifting among the rubble. After unknown lengths of time, his body is seized by the gray-white earth, gravity weighs upon him, dragging him from the deep void toward the ground.

Bologue crashes hard onto the ground, but this time he does not awaken; gray-white matter, unclear whether snow, ash, or dust, gradually engulfs his body, until only a blurred outline remains.

Thus passes much time again, in the gray-white wilderness a figure slowly emerges, resembling a traveler of this gray-white desert, dressed in similarly gray-white robes. Strangely, his face seems protected by some force, blurred and distorted, eluding all observers from seeing his true visage.

The traveler approaches the nearly buried corpse, showing no reaction, as if sights like this are ones he has witnessed many times before, his heart remaining unmoved.

He extends his hand, seizes the cold frozen body, and then drags Bologue towards the Ring Mountain beside them, reaching the highest point before releasing, dropping Bologue's corpse into the darkness of the Ring Mountain.

The traveler silently watches all this, the corpse incessantly rolls, stirring gray-white dust, bit by bit descending to the depths, falling into the immense shadow of the Ring Mountain.

The floating rocks above collide, shattering into countless fragments, extending gigantic rifts, and then faint white light descends, gently illuminating the shadow of the Ring Mountain.

The shadow contracts, it becomes faintly perceptible that there is something within the shadow, dense, piled into heaps.

The traveler pays no extra heed to those things, rather turning to walk toward the gray-white wilderness. After he departs, more light filters through the rifts, a corner of shadow is dispelled, revealing the grim under it.

Corpses, countless corpses, piled into mountains of corpses, filling the depression of the Ring Mountain.

In this silent void world, innumerable corpses intertwine, layered upon each other, their skin losing all pigmentation, resembling plaster statues, only gray-white remaining.

In the prolonged tranquility, some corpses descend into utter gray-white, then shatter like sculptures, their dismembered limbs not bleeding sticky blood, nor any flesh to speak of.

Only gray-white dust remains, as if upon death, corpses transform into these gray-white sculptures, the dust dispersing, merging into this gray-white world.

It seems as though this world is not meant to be like this, but through the annihilation of countless corpses, increasingly heavy dust swallows everything.

No one notices the happenings here, and beyond layers of massive rocks, within the void, a singularity appears out of nowhere, it distorts the surrounding space, even light paths become twisted, forming arcs.

In the next moment, the singularity expands, a blurry figure appears within it, then begins to solidify, after a brief stupor, Bologue opens his eyes.

Bologue feels somewhat bewildered, then his expression shows slight alarm and curiosity, he remembers the last scene before losing consciousness.

He had fallen into the Great Rift.

To this day, Bologue remains unclear what lies at the bottom of the Great Rift, yet he can faintly sense that it is an ominous place.

Curiosity and reverence coexist within Bologue's heart, he had thought about finding a chance to explore there, but never imagined he would do so in this manner.

But... how did he fall into the Great Rift?

Bologue recalls carefully, all he feels is at that moment he lost all strength, even the Ether fell silent, then the fall ensued.

He cannot comprehend all this, but regardless of confusion, handling the current situation is paramount.

"So... did I die from the fall?"

Bologue mutters softly, drifting along in the void.

Fortunately, Bologue does not wait long, a massive tugging sensation ignites from his heart, his figure begins to distort, stretch, ultimately vanishing into the void, returning to reality.

After Bologue's departure, the void world continues to operate steadily, the traveler strolls upon the gray-white ground, awaiting the appearance of the next corpse, then dragging it into the shadows.

...

"Bologue!"

Resounding calls echo near his ears, it seems someone is calling him.

"Bologue!"

The voice sounded very familiar; she must be someone Bologue knows.

Bologue felt someone pushing him, then pounding, then... then...

A hazy consciousness suddenly solidified, and Bologue snapped awake, opened his eyes, and struggled to sit up. Before he could say anything, Bologue painfully retched.

He vomited a puddle of foul blood, barely controlling his churning stomach, and the belated sensation of pain assaulted Bologue's body.

This pain was a thousand times more intense than anything he had ever experienced before, causing Bologue to completely lose control of his body, collapsing to the ground and trembling continuously, as if having a seizure.

Beside Bologue, Aimou had already come out of the Shared Chord Body state, and in the dim light, she tried to control Bologue's body, but he struggled fiercely. She had never seen this side of Bologue.

"Don't touch me... let me catch my breath."

After a brief loss of control, Bologue gradually stopped trembling, but the intense feeling of pain in his heart still lingered stubbornly.

Bologue reached out and pushed Aimou away, as if he didn't want her to see him in such a pathetic state. He groped around, crawled to the other side, leaned against the rock wall, and repeatedly took deep breaths to suppress the raging force.

Bulimia Nervosa.

Bologue couldn't have imagined that this condition would erupt now, the exhaustion after battle, the void of Ether, the headache after resurrection, coupled with the endless craving of Bulimia Nervosa.

These negative states stacked upon one another, and Bologue, who had barely come to, almost fainted again.

After a few minutes of respite, Bologue finally managed to stabilize, but even so, his condition was far from good. A dull intense pain shot through his body, and he tried to clench his fists, but his body couldn't muster much strength.

Bologue thought this was probably the worst he'd felt since he'd been released from prison.

"Are you... still alive?"

Seeing him stabilized, Aimou leaned in. The surroundings were incredibly dark; the only source of light was the vague luminescence trickling down from above, along with the blue halo in Aimou's eyes.

As she approached, Bologue could also see Aimou's condition clearly; she wasn't doing much better.

Aimou was draped in Bologue's clothes, but after the fierce battle, the clothes were long soaked with fresh blood, coagulating into clumps, exuding a stench of decay.

Her limbs enveloped in Iron-Repelling Paint bore numerous scratches, her thigh showed damage that exposed the internal mechanical structure, and her once-fine cheeks were marred with many cracks, revealing faint light from the gaps.

Aimou seemed like a porcelain doll about to break.

Bologue opened his mouth to speak, but the intense pain in his mind left him unable to sort his thoughts. At this moment, Aimou leaned closer.

She first reached out, pinching Bologue's arm. Sadly, without a human flesh-and-blood body, she couldn't feel the warmth of Bologue's body; even the softness of flesh was hard to perceive.

Then pressing her hand on Bologue's neck, then his heart, Aimou, like a doctor, assessed Bologue's life status in a way she comprehended.

Bologue couldn't grasp what she was doing, but he did not resist. Then, Aimou gazed intently at Bologue and suddenly embraced him.

"I thought you wouldn't wake up."

Aimou's monotonous voice unexpectedly fluctuated with emotion, deeply frightened. Before Bologue could say anything, she continued.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

It was unclear what she was apologizing for.

Bologue didn't mind this and comforted, "I am the Undead..."

Having said that, Bologue was startled. He seemed to understand the reason behind Aimou's fear, and slowly pushed Aimou away, he asked quietly.

"Aimou, how long was I dead?"

Afraid that Aimou couldn't comprehend this, Bologue added again.

"From the time I died to waking up again, how much time elapsed?"

Aimou controlled her emotions briefly and answered.

"Three days."

## Chapter 328: The Abandoned Land

Bologue spent a few minutes figuring out what happened from Aimou's account.

"I'm not sure what happened. You suddenly lost consciousness, then fell," Aimou recalled, "No matter how much I called out, you didn't respond."

"Then it was just falling, endless falling. According to your instruction, I didn't disengage the secret energy, detached from your body, and then we plunged into this darkness... You landed in a mess, torn apart beyond recognition."

Every time Aimou recalled that scene, she found it extremely terrifying, and being lodged in a dead body was not a good feeling.

"I was dead at the time, wasn't I?"

"Yes... I waited for a long time, but you didn't wake up. I dispelled the secret energy, detached from your body. I tried a lot of methods, but couldn't awaken you."

Aimou's voice gradually began to tremble; for her, it truly was a nightmare-like time.

"I thought your Undying Body was lying to me, that you had completely died."

During this time, Aimou often sat by Bologue's corpse, continually talking to him, hoping for some response.

Thinking back now, it felt like she was talking to a corpse, which sounded insane.

"No, just under certain special circumstances, my resurrection takes some time," Bologue comforted Aimou, "I just didn't expect it would take so long this time."

This was something Bologue couldn't understand, why his resurrection took so long this time. With Aimou's Ether reinforcement, he had ample Ether supplements and should have resurrected quickly.



His gaze turned to Aimou sitting beside him, wearing Bologue's clothes and looking as disheveled as a drifter; Bologue's appearance wasn't much better than Aimou because Aimou had taken his coat, he looked like a looted vagabond.

It seemed that their outfits were rather matching.

Bologue rubbed his head hard to clear his mind a bit, then pulled out the only folding knife left from his waist and walked towards Aimou.

"Stand up."

Aimou obediently stood up, then Bologue said, "Hold your hands out."

The folding knife swirled back and forth, Bologue cut out some cloth to amend his coat, making it more fitting so Aimou wouldn't be blown by the wind when walking.

Aimou seemed a bit surprised; she didn't expect Bologue to do such a thing, and Bologue didn't bother to explain anything.

Bologue remembered the scene in the movie where Sido said he needed the bathroom, but the detective told Sido he could deal with it on the lawn.

Although Sido was just a hunting dog, it possessed human consciousness and a sense of human shame; exchanging this understanding, Bologue could probably comprehend Aimou and ought to respect her thoughts.

After handling these matters, Bologue's figure still seemed somewhat wobbly, muttering under his breath.

"Wondering if Palmer's dead... probably not; this guy is usually quite lucky at critical moments."

Bologue then recalled the Immortal Heart that was taken by the Delusional one, hoping Geoffrey and the others would stop the Delusional one, even if he managed to escape with the Immortal Heart, he should now be on the Order Bureau's hunt list, right?

The most important thing is the Delusional one probably wouldn't expect Aimou to be in his hands, not only in his hands but also unlucky to plunge into the Great Rift together with him.

Thinking of this, Bologue looked up, staring at the dim light above.

After a long silence, Bologue suddenly exclaimed.

"Did we really fall into the Great Rift?"

Faced with this reality, Bologue had some difficulty accepting it, that he actually fell into the depths of the Great Rift, it sounded too absurd.

This brought to mind the times when he and Palmer would chat about the Great Rift while on patrol within it, exchanging those seemingly worn-out jokes.

Little did he know he would actually live through the experience one day, and that day came so coincidentally.

"How deep do you think it is here?" Bologue asked.

"I don't know."

"Huh? I thought you could gauge it," Bologue regretted.

"I'm an Alchemy Puppet, not a multifunctional toolbox," Aimou complained.

Bologue looked at Aimou with a slight frown, then sighed, "After climbing out, I'll have to equip you with a multifunctional military saber."

"Huh?"

Bologue waved his hand with a smile, looking back up at the ceiling, he approached the rock wall and placed his hands on it, trying to climb up.

With the Summoning Hand, Bologue could summon protruding platforms on the rock wall, climbing back to the surface step by step.

Just as he was about to release secret energy, Aimou stopped him.

"What are you doing?" Bologue asked in confusion.

"During your period of death, I have been surveying the surroundings, and I discovered a very critical problem."

Aimou said, the blue halo in his eyes dimming, leaving behind only a faint flicker of blue light.

"There is no ether here."

...

Gusting cold winds swept across the desolate gray-white earth. An astonishing rift, like a giant wound, opened a path on the surface reaching the Abyss.

Fanny, wearing ether-flow goggles, stood at the edge of the Great Rift, carefully observing the ether flow below.

This mysterious energy, ether, filled every corner of the world like air. It was omnipresent and often converged like airflow in vast amounts, weaving silken curves like silk.

In Fanny's field of vision, the shimmering ether flow filled every corner of her gaze. But as she shifted her sight, the farther down the Great Rift she looked, the dimmer the light of the ether flow became, until at the very depths of the Great Rift, there wasn't the slightest glimmer of light, just a blank void.

This wasn't because the ether-flow goggles were damaged, but because the position the goggles were observing truly had no ether.

Such situations frequently occurred in the world. For instance, the Origin School could disperse ether in an area, plunging the entire region into a state of ether vacuum.

But under Fanny's observation, the entire interior and deeper layers of the Great Rift were completely in a state of ether vacuum, without a hint of force flowing.

"That's the situation. The lower part of the Great Rift has been in an ether vacuum state for a long period. For both humans and Condensers, it is considered a forbidden zone for life, not to mention Undead like Bologue."

The voice came from behind Fanny, and it was Hart speaking, explaining the current situation to the others.

"According to the information you provided, Bologue's Undying Body requires a certain amount of ether to activate. We don't know what state he was in when he fell, but right now, he is likely in a state of death, in hibernation within the ether vacuum."

Hart continued, "We need to carefully formulate a search and rescue plan. Finding a living person and finding a corpse are completely different challenges, not to mention the ghostly environment at the bottom of the Great Rift."

"Indeed, the environment of the Great Rift is overly complex, let alone the bottom, which is in our blind spot. It will only be more treacherous than anticipated," Kingsley also added.

Yas stood silently in the center of the conversation, gazing deeply into the darkness below.

Since the operation concluded three days ago, after a brief rest, the Violence Suppression Action Group had resumed their activities, surveying the surroundings of the Great Rift.

This responsibility lay on himself, Yas believed. He had underestimated the forces involved in this mission, causing Bologue to fall into such a predicament.

Snow began to fall from the sky. Amidst the gray snow, another person approached. Seeing him, Yas signaled to the members, and the three of them tactfully left, leaving the area to Yas.

Soon after, Lebius, leaning on a cane, walked over to his side with Geoffrey.

"Are you drawing up a rescue plan?" Geoffrey asked.

"Yes, but progress is slow..." Yas said, his voice tinged with helplessness. "The main issue is that the Abandoned Land is the territory of the fourth group. According to regulations, we have no authority to interfere. To rescue Bologue, we must rely on them."

"Abandoned Land."

Geoffrey looked toward the darkness below, feeling a wave of fatigue.

Lebius remained as silent as ever, standing calmly, and no one knew what he was thinking.

"Is Palmer okay?" Yas asked about something else.

"He's alright. Bologue nailed him to the rock wall, saving his life. Now he's at the Border Sanatorium. Although he escaped death, his condition isn't good, remaining in a coma."

Geoffrey continued to sigh, "Those two unlucky guys encountered every enemy they could during the mission. The worst part is that whether it was the Corrupted Root and Seed or the Negative Power User, they somehow managed to trade a few blows."

Yas also smiled wryly. Perhaps this was the fate of Debtors, the people favored by the Devil, who always exceeded conventional expectations.

"Lebius, do you have any thoughts? Now your most valued member is sharing a room with Calamity."

Yas asked Lebius again. He was accustomed to his friend's aloofness, but at such a moment, with Lebius still being this way, it felt odd to him.

The Serenity Defense Line enveloped the Abandoned Land, preventing ether from persisting there; Bologue's prized Undying Body would also lose its power, yet Lebius remained calmly composed.

It was as if Bologue wasn't venturing into a lion's den but merely going out to buy a bottle of wine.

"I'm not worried about Bologue. He's a professional; such predicaments won't trouble him," Lebius spoke. "What I'm more concerned about is his own umbilical cord."

Upon hearing the term umbilical cord, Geoffrey and Yas also reacted, their expressions peculiar, as if another, greater complication had surfaced.

"I'm wondering if Bologue will discover those things. If he does, how are we going to explain it to him?"

Lebius asked the two, and silence hung in the air.

#### Chapter 329: Reminiscing and Chatting

Bologue rolled up his sleeves and glanced at his watch. The watch looked tattered, yet the hands on the dial were running steadily.

Thanks to his precise training with Secret Energy in the past, Bologue not only became more adept at handling Secret Energy, but also turned into an Entry Level watchmaker.

Using the Summoning Hand, it didn't take Bologue long to repair the watch. In this eerie place, surrounded by endless darkness, the dim light above was merely decorative.

Bologue needed this watch to gauge the passage of time. After some rough calculations, it should be the fifth day since Bologue fell into the Great Rift.

Aimou's mental state seemed poor; although she couldn't make expressions and her tone was monotonous, Bologue could just sense it.

Bologue thought it must be the oppressive environment and being in the company of his corpse for three days that left a lasting impression on Aimou.

This was something Bologue didn't know how to handle. Although he was an expert, he wasn't a psychological expert.

Unlike Aimou, the oppressive environment didn't affect Bologue at all. To avoid a dead silence, he would hum songs from time to time.

Humming songs in such a dark and deep ghostly place.

"Did you adapt so quickly?" Aimou said, "We are now at the bottom of the Great Rift."

"That's how experts are."

Facing Aimou's question, Bologue answered confidently.

The dark oppression indeed didn't affect Bologue. Back in the Black Prison, he had grown accustomed to all of this, but it was truly a bad memory. Unless necessary, Bologue rarely mentioned it to others, even excluding Aimou.

Marching forward, forward, constantly moving forward.

Aside from chatting with Aimou to maintain her mental state, during the two days since waking up, Bologue kept up the hard survival effort.

He had read many wilderness survival stories, but those unfortunate souls in the wilderness more or less saw some living things, managed to make tools, hunt animals to fill their stomachs, or at least gnaw on tree bark.

Yet in Bologue's situation, after two days of survival, not to mention living things, apart from rocks, he hadn't seen anything else.

Hunger gnawed at Bologue, but fortunately, being an Undead, he did not fear dying of hunger, and the power of Condensation made his physique much stronger than that of ordinary people.

However, the troubling part was being in an Ether vacuum.

When informed by Aimou that this place was an Ether vacuum, Bologue felt disbelief, thinking it was merely some unknown factor causing a small region to be in Ether vacuum.

But after two days, still not having walked out of the Ether vacuum zone, Bologue couldn't help but suspect that the entire bottom of the Great Rift might be in such a condition.

Hence, Ether became a scarce resource, and Bologue had to conserve his Ether for emergencies, which ruined the plan to climb out of the rock walls.

Based on Bologue's Ether reserve, the complex situation of the Great Rift, and the damn depth, in his current state, he couldn't climb up.

Realizing these issues, Bologue also noticed the slow revival rate of himself might be due to the Ether vacuum.



Unable to absorb Ether from the environment, Bologue relied on his remaining Ether reserve to slowly heal wounds, revive consciousness.

In other words, if he died multiple times in the Great Rift, Bologue might never wake up again.

"This reminds me of my days as a soldier."

Bologue cautiously moved forward in the dimness, he and Aimou were deep in a narrow rift, unsure if they could walk out.

"What's the matter?" Aimou asked.

"At that time, our camp was ambushed by enemies. I barely managed to escape into the dense forest, but the enemy didn't easily let us go, scouring the forest repeatedly."

Bologue recounted his past story, "Back then it was like this, evading the enemy while figuring out survival in the dense forest."

"The good news is, there are no enemies here, the bad news is, this isn't a forest, with no animals to eat, not even bark to gnaw." Bologue joked, trying to dispel the deep coldness.

"I don't need to eat," Aimou said, "I can lighten the burden."

"Yes, you don't need to, and I don't really need to... not much for now."

That was Bologue's saving grace, falling down with him was Aimou, who didn't need food or water, only some Ether to stay healthy.

If it had been Palmer falling with him, that guy would have complained endlessly, dragging both their spirits to the bottom.

But then, who knows, after all Palmer had his Blessing, if Palmer shouted "Boss, help," maybe the Crimson Queen would extend a helping hand, pulling himself out along the way.

Sometimes Bologue rather believed in Palmer's luck; once it kicked in, it was unbelievably strong.

"How long can your Ether reserve last?" Bologue asked with concern.

In the Ether vacuum environment, Aimou wasn't doing well either. Her operation depended on the power scattered by the Philosopher's Stone, driving the Constant Motion Core and further absorbing surrounding Ether in this cycle.

Now, Ether was unavailable around her, and Aimou's cycle was broken. Once her Ether was consumed, Bologue was unsure what would happen to Aimou.

"Luckily, although there's no ether outside, I have a device that reserves ether within myself," Aimou said.

"Like a backup energy source?" Bologue's eyes lit up when he heard this.

Another reason Bologue felt the situation wasn't so dire was because he still had a stock of Soul Shards on him. These pure ethers would turn the tide at crucial moments.

"Pretty much, it's designed for emergencies. With this ether, I can hold out for a long time," Aimou said as she glanced at her limbs, "If necessary, I can disassemble myself to reduce ether consumption."

"Disassemble? Like what?"

"Like taking apart the limbs," Aimou slowly raised her hands. Her limbs surged with ether, "Removing unimportant devices and structures on the torso, even retaining only the Constant Motion Core and the head."

Aimou spoke of such horrifying things very rationally, and Bologue's expression was somewhat complex. To disassemble herself cleanly seemed to be a normal thing for Aimou.

"No, no, do I tie your head to my waist and find a way to escape?" Bologue shook his head, "Let's forget about that."

"This is the optimal solution; it can greatly reduce my consumption."

Aimou didn't understand. She had considered these possibilities during the design phase, and was merely applying her designs now.

Bologue didn't say much more. He clearly realized that there remained a perception gap between himself and Aimou.

Aimou had perceptions similar to humans, but when these perceptions applied to herself, they became a vision unique to an Alchemy Puppet.

Like disassembling herself completely, retaining only essential structures.

Bologue felt this was a bit... off, but after realizing it felt off, he recalled himself.

Normal people wouldn't risk themselves, but Bologue, boasting his Undying Body, could die repeatedly. From this perspective, when Bologue's concepts applied to himself, they became quite odd too.

"Are we freaks?"

Bologue muttered to himself. Both he and Aimou overlapped with normal human ideas, but the parts that didn't overlap were extremely bizarre.

The narrow rift gradually widened. As Bologue advanced, he reached out to explore his surroundings. In the dim light, his visibility was pitifully small.

The rock was hard and cold, covered with a thin layer of ice. With each breath, Bologue exhaled a plume of white mist.

The temperature here was very low, but the power of the Undying Body allowed Bologue to withstand frostbite. However, this constant injury and healing felt like a long, never-ending torture to Bologue.

Aimou didn't feel too bad. She had actively shut down her perceptive abilities. As a cold steel shell, the fierce cold only made her joints a bit stiff.

"Bologue!"

Aimou suddenly stopped Bologue and then asked, "How is your stamina?"

"Quite good," Bologue said, clenching his fist. "Even with the situation this bad, I've got enough strength to beat a few people to death with my bare hands."

Bologue considered himself an expert, and toughness, focus, and endurance were all excellent traits for an expert. Regardless of how dire the situation became, before truly dying, Bologue was always able to extract strength from his body.

"Turn around, bend over."

Aimou commanded. To save ether, she had already shut down all unnecessary functions.

Now she looked like a real puppet, expressionless. Her lips didn't move when speaking; the voice came directly from her throat. The light in her pupils dimmed, carrying a slightly deep sense of emptiness.

"Alright, alright, alright."

Bologue roughly understood what she intended to do.

Aimou clumsily pounced onto Bologue's back, her hands resting on his chest before tightly clasping on.

"To save ether, I will temporarily lose my ability to move. The rest is up to you."

After Aimou spoke, it was as if someone had drained her soul. Her body went limp, heavily resting on Bologue's back, with only a faint gleam remaining in her pupils.

Bologue adjusted Aimou; thankfully, her metallic body had undergone much optimization, and she had replaced much of her material with lightweight metals. She was lighter than anticipated.

"This feels all too familiar." Bologue muttered in a low voice.

"What's wrong?"

Aimou's voice sounded beside his ear. Now she was in absolute energy-saving mode, retaining only communication ability.

"My days in the army, carrying a heavy radio on my back... or possibly a wounded comrade."

Bologue stepped forward into the darkness.

"It's quite amusing to recall the past at times like this."

Chapter 330: Land of Ashes

Stabbing the folding knife fiercely into the crevice of the rock, Bologue pressed down hard on the handle, forcibly prying off a piece of rock. Repeating this a few times, Bologue finally widened the rift enough to squeeze through.

It was the sixth day since Bologue fell into the Great Rift. He was cold, hungry, and exhausted. To prevent himself from collapsing, his body was in a constant state of slow self-recovery, which had consumed a considerable amount of his Ethereal Amount.

But... it's not too bad yet.

Bologue wasn't just trying to survive; it was also a rare opportunity to observe the bottom of the Great Rift. During these days, he noticed that there was no sign of life here—only cold rocks and winter ice everywhere.

There were no insects living in the shadows, not even moss; the whole world was dead silent, as if a hungry monster had devoured all life.

Bologue continued stepping forward. After crawling out of the narrow fissure, the path before him became wider, turning into endless darkness.

It was still the same scene as before, nothing but cold rocks filling every inch of view.

Bologue sighed deeply and continued onward.

The Ether vacuum enveloped the entire bottom here, devoid of any life; even the light was dim and obscure, as if abandoned by the entire world.

This time, Bologue had no plan. The harsh environment and his physical state couldn't support an escape from here, but he refused to give up, stubbornly moving forward.

Bologue always believed in this principle: every occurrence had its inherent meaning and reason, and this Ether vacuum environment was no exception.

One must know, Ether filled every corner of the world. Naturally, it's extremely rare for an Ether vacuum to occur, considering the wandering paths above, the Order Bureau, and even Opus.

Bologue thought that this strange environment must have been forged by some force—continuing to explore might lead him to find a way out.

"By the way, Aimou, if your Ether runs out, would you die?" Bologue asked.

"Die? I don't know," Aimou's voice was cold, without fluctuation. "I might fall into dormancy from the lack of Ether?"

"Just like me?" Bologue said, "I would too; once I die, without the support of Ether, I'd fall into dormancy, turning into a corpse."

"Is that so?"

"Mm-hmm."

"However, I've already experienced it; you haven't gone through dormancy yet, have you?" Bologue asked.

"No, ever since I awoke, I haven't entered dormancy... or death," Aimou replied.

"Are you afraid of death?"

At this, Aimou fell silent, seeming to be deep in thought.

Death had always been a very serious issue for Aimou, and Bologue understood this. He could sense it from their previous conversations, and his reaction upon reviving.

It was the first time Bologue saw Aimou so emotional, but upon reflection, he also found it quite understandable. Aimou was just a child, and to her, the unknown after death was so terrifying and profound.

"Want to chat?" Bologue suggested again.

"Chat about what?"

"Anything," Bologue said, stopping to look around at the endless darkness. "I don't know what you think, but from a human's perspective, in a damn place like this, we need to talk so it doesn't feel so lonely."



"Lonely?"

"Yes, lonely. One person in such a place would go mad, but with two people, we can talk about the past and the future. If there are three people, we could even set up a bonfire and tell lousy jokes."

Bologue spoke with a hint of a smile, his voice echoing in the surrounding darkness, rumbling like distant thunder, reaching into the clouds.

"I'm a freak, not normal, but humans are like this."

One might struggle to survive alone, but as long as there's someone to communicate with, an emotional anchor, even a coward will become strong."

Bologue trudged forward with Aimou on his back; the ground was full of protruding rocks, making him feel like he was crawling among reefs.

"If you wish to understand humanity more deeply, you should know these principles."

"Mm,"

Aimou responded softly.

"So... if the Philosopher's Stone inside the Constant Motion Core was removed, would you die?" Bologue asked.

"I don't know, but when the teacher designed it, some loss wasn't calculated. Theoretically, the operating life of the Constant Motion Core is infinite, as long as you replace the Philosopher's Stone every few decades," Aimou said.

"A few decades? I always feel Teda won't live that long."

Bologue roughly understood Teda's thoughts. This design seemed more like a comfort for Aimou, telling her she wouldn't die so easily. But for Teda, a mortal's lifespan is limited—either resurrect Alice or succumb to old age; in any case, it'd be difficult for him to live until Aimou replaces the Philosopher's Stone.

"But... replacing the Philosopher's Stone isn't that easy," Aimou added.

"Why?"

"I've discovered some problems on my own... it's a secret, Bologue."

Aimou's voice finally fluctuated; she cared a lot about this matter, even willing to waste Ether to make her expression more vivid.

"Will you keep it a secret?" Aimou asked.

"You know? Aimou, from a human social perspective, we can be considered as friends who've gone through life and death together, don't you think?" Bologue countered.

The blue halo glowed faintly and then slowly rotated. Aimou clearly couldn't understand what "friends who've gone through life and death" meant, but from Bologue's tone, she could sense Bologue's emotion.

Silence, more silence, endless silence.

"Alright, alright, I know you don't want to talk about this anymore, but say something else."

Bologue didn't press Aimou excessively, instead trying to keep the atmosphere as relaxed as possible.

At times like this, Bologue missed Palmer, as his partner only seemed useful in moments like these, where even if no one paid attention to him, he could make the atmosphere more relaxed by entertaining himself.

"When you feel like talking, just let me know."

Bologue leaned on a folding knife, this sharp weapon being used as a climbing stick by Bologue, with its blade full of notches and dents.

Struggling to climb up, Bologue started to wonder why this place was so clean.

He still remembered the Great Rift, where mines and pipes dumped garbage and wastewater into the rift day after day, toxic fumes rising like the end of the world.

Yet the bottom of this rift was unexpectedly clean, devoid of all life, accompanied only by cold rocks.

Bologue felt a vague unease, unsure of its source, but his expert instincts warned him.

After walking for a long time, Bologue suddenly stopped and then asked.

"Aimou, do you feel that the nearby temperature is rising?"

"I'm not sure, I've shut down all perception functions," Aimou replied.

Bologue looked around in confusion. He could clearly feel the temperature rising, the cold was no more, replaced by a slight warmth. Cautiously moving forward, shortly after, he heard the sound of trickling water.

The solid ice melted, and clear water flowed between the rocks. Bologue immediately knelt down, scooped some up with his hands, and had a simple taste. After confirming there were no issues, he drank deeply.

Not dying was one thing, but being tormented by thirst was another.

After replenishing his water, Bologue hoisted Aimou onto his back again and moved forward. He began to get used to such scenes, humming songs to entertain himself.

The surrounding warmth made Bologue feel much more at ease. At this point, Bologue deeply realized how convenient Aimou, as an Alchemy Puppet, truly was.

She could now be completely seen as an accessory, aside from being somewhat heavy, she had practically no flaws, which was much more convenient than carrying a proper injured person.

Sometimes Bologue wished he could be like an Alchemy Puppet, able to block a certain perception just by saying so, which would make his life much easier.

After walking for several hours, the surrounding paths gradually opened up. Besides the cold rocks, Bologue finally saw something else.

Gray-white soil mixed with the black rocks. Bologue stepped onto the gray-white soil. Once he entered this gray-white area, the surrounding became completely warm, driving away the winter cold entirely.

Bologue found a corner on the edge, set Aimou down, and sat against the rock wall to take a short rest.

Glancing at the broken watch, it should be night by now. Bologue panted, regaining his strength while also enduring the physical pain and the hunger gnawing at him.

Bologue could no longer tell if it was physical hunger or the compulsions from Bulimia Nervosa, as the intense craving gnawed at his insides like worms.

Fortunately, Bologue had a strong willpower, and these compulsions didn't affect him. He just needed a short rest.

"This place is really strange."

Bologue muttered, grabbing a handful of soil and clutching it in his hand.

Suddenly, Bologue froze. He sat up straight, carefully observing the soil in his hand, rubbing it thoroughly, his gaze gradually becoming sharp.

"What is it?"

Aimou noticed Bologue's anomaly and asked.

Bologue fell to the ground, digging fiercely with his hands, layer after layer of soil, but beneath it remained that same gray-white appearance.

Picking up his folding knife, Bologue stabbed down into the dug-out hole. Only when the hilt was about to vanish inside did he pull it out, finding gray-white powder still clinging to the notches, and as he touched the blade, the metallic coldness was gone, replaced by warmth.

Slowly lifting his gaze, he swept his eyes around, as the boundless gray-white stretched to the end of his vision, disappearing into the dark and deep blackness...

"This isn't soil."

Bologue murmured.

"This is ash."

An endless sea of ash filled the bottom of this Abyss.