

Endless 471

Chapter 471: Eternal Sleep

The friendly and joyful atmosphere was gone, replaced by an immensely serious ambiance. Bologue felt like a criminal, surrounded by these people with no escape.

"What's wrong?"

Bologue was perplexed by the change in attitude of Serey and the others. It was merely a conversation with Sai Zong; why were they reacting so strongly?

Serey snapped his fingers. Bode immediately got up and closed all the doors, carefully checking the main door of the Undying Club to ensure it was tightly shut.

Wei'Er looked around warily. Although this was their territory, it seemed as if an unknown enemy lurked deep within the Undying Club.

Serey discarded his relaxed demeanor, becoming extremely tense.

"You mean, at the very start of the timeline disorder, Sai Zong took the initiative to remind you and engage you in conversation."

Serey inquired seriously, "And after that, Sai Zong disappeared and hasn't returned until now, is that correct?"

"Yes, so... is there something wrong with Sai Zong?"

Bologue asked in confusion. From his perspective, the Undead within the Undying Club got along quite harmoniously. They would often kick Sai Zong out of the way when he became a nuisance.

But now they were filled with reverence and... caution towards Sai Zong?

"There are indeed big problems. After spending countless years together, we've somewhat learned about each other's pasts, yet as for Sai Zong... we know nothing about him." Bode spoke up at this moment.

"We've known Sai Zong for a long time, but you might not believe that we've hardly communicated with him," Wei'Er said, "He's always playing some bizarre roles, and only switches roles every few decades; he'd say a few words then, mostly unimportant small talk."

"We think Sai Zong numbs himself by turning into another role. We've asked him, but he remains silent about it."

Serey toyed with the wine glass in his hand, analyzing Sai Zong's mindset.

Everyone in the Undying Club had a terrible past, and they each used different ways to numb themselves to get through the endless years.

Alcohol and joy were Serey's sanctuary; transforming himself into another being was Sai Zong's way of escaping issues.

Bologue asked, puzzled, "So why are you all so wary of Sai Zong?"

Serey squinted his eyes. He hesitated, unsure whether to continue speaking. Bode and Wei'Er shared the same attitude, and the atmosphere grew serious and oppressive. In those undead's eyes, the previously safe club was becoming extremely dangerous.

"Bologue, have you ever thought about who founded the Undying Club?"

Faced with this mysterious question, Bologue shook his head. He hadn't even been part of the Undying Club for a year, and he hadn't met many members. How could he know such a thing?

"Are you suggesting... you suspect Sai Zong might actually be the owner of the Undying Club?"

Bologue quickly realized another possibility, his voice brimming with repressed astonishment.

Everyone silently confirmed Bologue's answer, strange emotions lingering among them. Serey poured a few more glasses of wine, hoping the alcohol might relieve some of the tension.

"Unlike what you might think, I didn't truly join the Undying Club after the Dawn War ended a century ago. I'd known about it long before that."

Serey swirled the wine glass, watching as the ice cubes collided, reflecting light that pulled his thoughts back to ages past.

"That must have been... many years ago, I can't quite remember. I recall Sai Zong had invited me then. I would occasionally visit as a guest but never stayed or became a member."

Bologue listened quietly to Serey's tale; this former Night Race Lord rarely recounted his long past.

"After the Dawn War, I had nowhere to go. That's when Sai Zong appeared again, making the invitation once more, this time I accepted and thus found myself here."

A slight chill ran through Serey's body as he realized, belatedly, certain things.

"Then something wonderful happened, Bologue.

No one told me what to do, but as I lived here day by day, I couldn't tell how it happened. Unconsciously, I adopted a certain identity here and became the bartender."

Serey chuckled, his gaze sweeping over the familiar bar counter.

"It was like some sort of assimilation. Without realizing it, I became part of the Undying Club as a bartender, the person responsible for managing this place, while Sai Zong, after I arrived, plunged into his role-playing as if having shrugged off his responsibilities."

Bologue felt a shiver of fear at Serey's tale, "It all happened subtly, didn't it?"

"Pretty much, by the time I realized it, I'd been working for many years, and had invited many new members," Serey said, "I was shocked and felt like I'd fallen into a Demon Cave. I immediately confronted Sai Zong, and he unusually broke character and responded to me."

"A sanctuary isn't for free; everyone must contribute their value to maintain its operation."

Serey recalled Sai Zong's words at the time, surprised that he could remember such long-ago sentiments so clearly.

"He said I could leave anytime I wanted, the Undying Club never confines anyone. The reason we can't leave is our past binds us, making us afraid to return to the mortal world."

Serey paused, recalling his ghastly past, he couldn't help but sigh, "He was right. We aren't trapped here by the Undying Club, but by our past, unable to leave."

"It's simple to leave; just truly step through that door and never look back, to embrace the destiny you're meant to. But over all these years, none of us have had the courage to do so."

He pointed to the door of the Undying Club, indicating that each undead was free, yet imprisoned.

Everything comes with a price.

"That's when I began to find Sai Zong suspicious, but you've seen how he acts usually; it's truly difficult to take him seriously."

Serey spread his hands helplessly; no matter how fearsome or mysterious the being, if they behaved like a dog daily—peeing everywhere, gnawing on table corners—who could take them seriously? Instead, they'd get kicked and punched.

Bologue understood Serey's point, "Among you, Sai Zong is undoubtedly the most experienced, and in some ways, your arrival succeeded Sai Zong's responsibilities. So you suspect him... of being the owner of the Undying Club?"

After saying this, Bologue was surprised by his own thought, akin to a completely unfounded wild conjecture.

Yet... yet Bologue couldn't help but believe it; it felt like the only truth, and he thought the others felt the same.

"The older, the nobler, the more capricious."

Serey didn't answer Bologue's question, only murmuring softly.

"This is an anomaly; Sai Zong voluntarily stopped his role-playing, communicated with you, and left the Undying Club."

Bode's voice rumbled gruffly, his cold skeletal face turned towards Bologue, "Even now, we don't know Sai Zong's identity or what standings he holds in the Undying Club, but it's certain he's far from simple as he appears."

Their conversation gradually fell into silence. They didn't know what more to say and instead sipped their drinks gloomily.

Bologue thought of the ever-spiraling staircase within the Undying Club, and the seemingly endless hallway. This seemingly carefree club hid unknown secrets.

No one knew Sai Zong's true identity or where he had gone. At least for the days that followed, Bologue never again saw that comically dog-like figure.

Deep within the Undying Club, at the end of an almost untouched hallway, a room door remained tightly shut. Inside, faint snores could be heard, persisting for already a hundred years. Someone was sleeping here, never to wake up.

Chapter 472: Impermanence

After the chaos subsided, the Great Rift slowly returned to tranquility. Although not much time had passed, it seemed as if everyone had forgotten the brutal blood and fire, unafraid of the hateful evils, still rooted within the mist-wreathed Great Rift.

Perhaps just as the Tyrant said, as long as there are desperados in this world, the Great Rift will never die, like the final destination of all ocean currents, sheltering those demons and devils that cannot live in the sunlight.

The Tyrant stepped out of the dark room, standing at the highest point of a twisted building for the first time in a long while, overlooking the complexities of the Great Rift.

The collapsing paths of hesitation were being rebuilt bit by bit, aerial corridors were again erected between the cliffs, and continuous constructions were born along the precipices.

The Tyrant took a deep breath, feeling the breath contained in the wind, human desires weaving a tantalizing flavor, lingering endlessly in his mind.

After enjoying this, the Tyrant turned around, looking at the fellow dressed in a ludicrous outfit, "Are you ready to leave?"

"I've seen your show and there's no reason to stay here anymore," Sai Zong emerged slowly from the shadows, "Moreover, I never really liked this place."

Sai Zong came to the Tyrant's side, overlooking the Great Rift with him, then vague murmurs sounded by Sai Zong's ear, as if countless people were whispering something.

He knew what it was, one sacred or evil, noble yet selfish wish after another.

Sai Zong disliked those voices, discerning various repulsive ugliness within them, followed by the birth of destructive rage in his heart, until he shattered everything into pieces.

"If possible, I really don't want to leave the Undying Club... this world is too noisy."

Sai Zong sighed deeply, suppressing his angry nature.

The Undying Club was not only a sanctuary for Serey and others but also Sai Zong's refuge, where he separated himself from the mortal world, enjoying eternal peace.

The Tyrant nodded gently, then said, "You should hide your whereabouts, don't let anyone know your tracks."

"The other brothers and sisters are not as reasonable as I am, especially those two fellows, they've always been trying to start another war."

The Tyrant was deeply hesitant about Sai Zong's actions, clearly aware of the disaster that could unfold once that slumbering entity was awakened.

"What about you? Tyrant, what do you think?" Sai Zong puzzled, "You are clearly one of the devils, yet you are not as ferocious as them... sometimes I really can't see where you stand."

"Humans are complex, devils are alike. I cannot defy my nature to crave souls, but at least I can take souls more gently," the Tyrant smiled, "But they are different."

The Tyrant's voice was cold and ruthless.

"If I were a kind and merciful shepherd who cared about the lambs' thoughts, then they are just insane butchers who care nothing for the lambs' ideas, only plundering souls with the crudest means.

I cannot allow them to plunder so rudely, at this rate, humanity will sooner or later head toward a dead end."

"Once humanity reaches a dead end, won't there be no one left to supply you souls? After all, no matter how rational and kind you claim to be, you ultimately remain on the tier of shepherd and butcher, and this is just the hypocritical pity from those of higher position."

Sai Zong shook his head, disdainful of the Tyrant's hypocrisy.

The Tyrant laughed, patting Sai Zong's shoulder, paying no mind to his words, his voice deep and twisted, "Sai Zong, you are the last person qualified to accuse me."

"Think about your nature, and my brother who slumbers... You don't need to tirelessly seek deputies, and constantly trade for new souls like us.

All you need is to wait, and whenever war ignites, you will reap endless souls—this world never lacks war."

The Tyrant's wrist exerted slight force, nails piercing through the puppet suit, sinking into flesh.

"No, you are not only unqualified to accuse me, you should thank me, thank us, for it is our impulses and our restraint that this world sustainably generates endless wars to satisfy your desires."

Sai Zong couldn't refute the Tyrant's words, nor did he wish to argue further, a look of pity flashed in his eyes, remaining silent.

"You and my brother both bear the mission of rage, yet you are unwilling to be dominated by rage, only yearning for eternal peace."

The Tyrant's laughter was hoarse, sharp, and piercing, "This is our sin and punishment, the one who enrages desires peace, the hungry desires fullness, the greedy desires satisfaction..."

Sai Zong shook off the Tyrant's arm, breaking free from his hold, the two distanced each other. Sai Zong took a deep breath, forcibly suppressing his restless heart, gazing toward the dense Sea of Mist shrouding the Great Rift.

Sai Zong murmured, "I don't wish to participate in your disputes, I only yearn for ultimate peace."

The Tyrant ruthlessly said, "Then you should return to the Undying Club and hide there for another few hundred or thousand years... But evidently, something is compelling you to leave."

"I've detected an anomaly, the evils are gathering... What are you all planning?"

Sai Zong ignored the Tyrant's words, instead questioning him.

The Tyrant revealed a sinister smile, opening his arms as if to embrace Sai Zong, striding toward him.

"Among our brothers and sisters, the one I am most annoyed by is that manipulative person, too smart and too cunning, always able to awaken my inner pain.

My favorite is the master behind you, who perfectly exhibits the struggle of contradiction, evidently ruled by eternal fury yet yearning for absolute peace, willing to imprison himself for it."

"You and he have both been hiding in that refuge for too long, none of you have any idea what has transpired in all these years." The Tyrant warmly embraced Sai Zong.

Sai Zong said, "I've been observing the world, rather than a complete self-exile."

"Then are you clear about the truth behind the Fall of the Holy City?"

The ominous voice entered his ears, Sai Zong abruptly looked at the Tyrant, his eyes gradually imbued with blood, turning into a glaring crimson.

Sai Zong's reaction pleased the Tyrant immensely, he laughed heartily.

"Must admit, among all my long experiences, King Solomon was the most outstanding human I have ever encountered, he nearly achieved it... he nearly won."

The Tyrant's tone immediately turned grave, devoid of any emotion.

"King Solomon won the wager, obtained it, and hid it away, right here in this Oubos of Oath City."

Sai Zong rasped, "So that's why we're all here, competing against each other?"

Mysteriously, they all were influenced by some primal force, compelling them to come to this place, simply because it was calling.

"Indeed, that's why I said, you've hidden too long, so long that you're unaware of this."

Sai Zong was not swayed by the Tyrant's words, turned around ready to leave.

The Tyrant loudly asked, "Where are you going!"

"To her side, I can feel her approaching Opus."

Sai Zong did not mind exposing his whereabouts to the Tyrant, just as the Tyrant said, he was an ominous devil, yet remained one of the rare kind devils.

"She yearns for humans' seven emotions and six desires, that complex interwoven emotions, destruction is not her wish... perhaps we can form an alliance."

Sai Zong said without looking back.

"What's the point? Sai Zong, to him, what are you? Debtor, Deputy, or the most favored mortal by the devils?"

The Tyrant squinted his eyes, loudly questioning Sai Zong.

"Everyone blessed by the devils loathes the devils themselves, why are you so loyal?"

Sai Zong did not respond to the Tyrant, merely bowed his head moving forward, disappearing into the mist.

Chapter 473: New Team Member

"I've been doing well lately, work has been smooth. You probably won't believe it, but I just got involved in a time anomaly event a few days ago and turned the tide!"

"Impressive, right? Promotion and pay raise are just around the corner."

Palmer picked up the microphone and excitedly recounted his recent fantastical adventure to the other party.

"Most importantly, my vacation request was approved, I'm now figuring out a day to go back and see you."

"Hey, is there anything you want? I'll get it for you. My bonus is quite substantial this time, I'll cover all expenses."

"What? Got everything at home already, don't need anything, huh! Damn! Vasilina, I'm out there risking my life, and you're just lounging on the sofa watching TV, aren't you!"

"Alright, alright, let's talk when I get back."

Palmer hung up the phone, his face still radiating satisfaction, but his beautiful fantasy was interrupted by the voice from next door.

"Was that your fiancée?"

Palmer's expression froze for a moment before he yanked open the curtain, "Boss, eavesdropping on others' calls isn't good!"

"I didn't intend to listen, but your voice was so loud, it was hard not to hear."

Lebius lay on the hospital bed, a bed table set up in front of him filled with various documents. Most bizarrely, there were two exquisite mechanical hands beside the bed, quickly processing documents under Lebius' control.

Palmer looked at Lebius helplessly, then sighed, "Yes, she is my fiancée."

Geoffrey's injuries weren't serious, he was discharged after staying at Border Sanatorium for a few days, and Bologue was the same. His undying body was truly convenient.

After the two left, only Palmer and Lebius remained in the ward, and they temporarily became roommates.

Sharing a room with your boss is stressful enough, let alone living together for a while.

During these days, Palmer's mental stress was pushed to the limit, but after hitting that limit, he became relieved and instinctively ignored Lebius, amusing himself.

Lebius said seriously, "Hmm... Even now, I find it hard to imagine that you have a fiancée."

"Boss, I know you're trying to joke, but could you at least change your facial expression when doing so?" Palmer had gotten used to Lebius' various reactions, "Your cold expression is truly terrifying!"

Thanks to his time with Bologue, Palmer applied the experience he gained from him to Lebius.

One could say Lebius and Bologue were somewhat similar, both extremely cold, efficient, and professional. But unlike Bologue, who occasionally went off the rails and revealed his fierce or humorous side, Lebius was different; he seemed to have only one persona, living by it.

"No, I'm serious," Lebius wasn't joking, continuing to browse the documents, "Is it a marriage alliance between families? You are, after all, the heir of the Clarks family, many families might desire your lineage."

Lebius paused, "If it's not, then that's quite surprising. It's hard to imagine someone like you attracting romantic interest."

Palmer got anxious, "Oh God, boss, just how unworthy am I in your eyes!"

Lebius recalled Palmer's file, even though he thought highly of Palmer, the experiences directly pulled out really were unremarkable.

The atmosphere in the ward fell into an eerie silence, only the smell of disinfectant wafting between them.

Palmer got even more anxious, "Say something! What's with the silence!"

"How did you two meet?"

Lebius clumsily shifted the topic.

Palmer frowned seriously, "I'm just unlucky, not stupid. That was too clumsy a way to change the topic!"

Lebius looked at him expressionlessly.

"..."

"We've known each other since childhood, a bit of a free romance, and somehow got engaged all the way till now."

Palmer obediently sat by the bedside, hands on his knees, recounting his simple emotional journey to Lebius.

One thing worth acknowledging is that both Lebius and Bologue possess a peculiar magic; when they silently gaze at you, you'll feel psychological pressure like never before, as if facing a friendly psychopathic killer.

Under such pressure, Palmer chose to abandon thinking.

"That's it?"

"What else?"

Lebius's eyes, rarely, showed some other emotions, like... disappointment.

"What did you imagine? A playboy? Constantly indulging in different women's arms?" Palmer proclaimed loudly, "I'm the heir of the Clarks family, am I that kind of person?"

Lebius replied calmly, "I didn't say anything."

Palmer kept shouting, "Your eyes were saying too much already!"

After venting, Palmer mumbled, "How should I put it? As the heir of the Clarks family, having a fiancée means I must take responsibility, absolutely can't mess around, right?"

Lebius coldly said, "If you didn't mention it, I really couldn't associate you with being the heir of the Clarks family."

"Boss, you..."

Palmer was about to lose his temper but was interrupted by Lebius raising his hand, "I suggest you take your vacation as soon as possible, no one knows what tomorrow holds, right?"

"Oh... I'm planning to decide when to go back after I'm discharged and move into a new home," Palmer recalled something, "Also, I have the Prayer Believers promotion ceremony coming up, I'll deal with that first."

On reflection, Palmer realized he truly had a lot going on, various tasks filled his schedule, making it overwhelming.

Palmer's gaze drifted to the documents on the bed table, among sheets after sheets of paper, he saw a familiar photograph.

"How is she?" Palmer stood up, walked to Lebius's bedside, "Bologue rarely cares about someone like this, he must be quite concerned."

"She's doing alright, these are the inspection reports from the Sublimation Furnace Core," Lebius didn't hide anything, directly handed Aimou's file to Palmer, "You can take a look."

"She's a very interesting case."

Hearing Lebius's words, Palmer flipped through the records, a strange reality gradually emerged line by line from the data and annotations.

"As an Alchemy Puppet, she possesses human consciousness and even received the Devil's blessing. You could say she is now a living human being."

Lebius sighed at the conclusion from the report.

Palmer shook his head, "But this requires sacrifice of the soul."

"No, her soul is still intact, not one of the Debtor."

Lebius gave a shocking answer, upon hearing this Palmer widened his eyes in disbelief, thinking he heard wrong.

"The sacrifice was made by Teda, Aimou is the beneficiary of the wish... Odd, isn't it? But that's the reality, her soul remains whole but she received the Devil's blessing."

Palmer took a few minutes to digest this magical conclusion, then muttered to himself, "Knowing this news, Bologue should be quite happy."

"If everything went smoothly, Belli should have already informed Bologue, he cares about this more than we do," Lebius said.

"And afterward? Where does Aimou go? Teda is dead, and the Alchemy Workshop is destroyed, nothing's left."

Palmer spoke with some sadness, Aimou gained new life but was genuinely homeless.

"Was she planning to reside in the Sublimation Furnace Core? Belli should take good care of her, right?" Palmer thought of Belli again, at least Aimou still has her senior sister.

"The Sublimation Furnace Core proposed this to Aimou, but she refused."

Lebius continued flipping through files, "She said she likes being with Belli, but she feels she has already freed herself from Teda's constraints and should pursue something she likes."

Aimou doesn't particularly enjoy Alchemy, she studied it diligently just to please Teda."

"So what's Aimou planning to do?"

Lebius didn't answer Palmer's question but rather focused on gazing at the file in his hands, a personal dossier detailing the target's information.

Name: Aimou Yazhede.

Action Group: Rupert's Tail.

Status: Employed.

Lebius picked up his seal, pressing a red mark onto the "Employed" status location.

Chapter 474: Unique Strange Words

Cultivation Room, Pillar Courtyard.

Bologue sat casually on a bench in the corner, watching the busy employees with a sense of satisfaction from the contrast.

If it were Palmer, he would probably be overjoyed, but Bologue is someone who can't stay idle. Having been idle for a while, Bologue had entered a state of having nothing to do, but fortunately, that situation was about to end soon.

Glancing at the file bag next to him, Bologue unconsciously smiled. Usually, he was quite calm and unaffected by external things, but now he felt an uncontrollable cheerfulness.

Bologue tucked the file bag into his inner coat, and after a moment of waiting, a figure quickly approached him, and as he looked up, a familiar silhouette entered his view.

"Good...good morning!"

They were obviously comrades who had shared life and death, yet meeting the other seemed a bit shy.

Bologue thought maybe it was because it was her first time appearing in front of so many people. In her previous life, she had little interaction with the outside world, with her only deep understanding being while hiding under her own shell.

Now she was no longer hiding but stood openly in the Central Courtyard, not caring about others' gazes...

For her, it was a good step forward.

Bologue looked her up and down and said, "It fits well."

First, he complimented the other's outfit.

Such words flashed through Bologue's mind, which was what Belli had repeatedly reminded him of before he set out. Bologue didn't quite understand why he needed to say these things, but seeing Belli's serious face, he uncharacteristically cooperated.

"Ah...ah? As long as it fits, as long as it fits."

The other seemed a bit flustered upon hearing Bologue's compliment. Actually, her outfit was quite similar to the employees of the Sublimation Furnace Core, but for her, the feeling of clothes on her body was still somewhat unfamiliar, requiring a period of adaptation.

"How do you feel now, Aimou?"

Bologue stood up and asked Aimou in front of him. At this moment, she was no longer that cold Steel Body but a living flesh and blood.

According to the investigation from the Sublimation Furnace Core, this was Aimou's "Blessing," yet this "Blessing" required no cost since Teda had already paid it for her.

Blessing·Doppelganger.

Aimou herself was still a cold Steel Body, but when the Doppelganger activated, the Steel Body would transform into living flesh, making her a true human being.

This blessing didn't possess any significant benefits and was merely a blessing born to fulfill a wish.

"I still feel a bit unaccustomed,"

Aimou's voice was strange, stuttering, with a wavering pitch. Recently, Aimou had been learning how to speak correctly and how to adapt to the nuances of a flesh-and-blood body.

The more Aimou understood, the more she realized what a troublesome creature humans were. When needing to rest, Aimou would revert to her Steel Body, even though she lost many senses, it significantly eased her thoughts.

Aimou looked at Bologue with a strange expression, seemingly wanting to smile but holding back. Underneath the flesh-and-blood guise, Aimou found it really hard to control her expressions, and any former indifference had vanished.

"Humans are really a bother,"

Aimou complained again, saying that human skin can keenly sense those tiny touches, and the friction of clothes felt like bugs crawling on the skin.

Say something interesting, don't be so lifeless.

Belli's words echoed in Bologue's ears. Bologue thought for a moment, snapped his fingers, drawing Aimou's attention back.

"Aimou, you know? When you hear me say this, your breathing switches to manual mode."

In Bologue's understanding, instead of being lifeless, he might as well tell a cold joke.

Aimou froze for a moment, suddenly clutching her chest, her breathing becoming heavier and muttering repeatedly.

"Manual mode...manual mode..."

"Hey, hey, hey! Are you okay?"

Seeing Aimou like this, Bologue panicked.

Aimou stared at the ground; she felt that the most troublesome thing about being human was having to breathe constantly. It was fine usually, but Bologue's interruption made Aimou breathe harder. The more she tried, the more fatigued she felt, leading to a near-oxygen deprivation in a vicious cycle.

After adjusting for a while, Aimou finally calmed down. Bologue's expression was a bit awkward. After thinking it over, he took Aimou into the elevator.

Aimou had been to the Pillar Courtyard many times. Every time she arrived at the Sublimation Furnace Core, she had to pass through here, but this time the elevator's destination was not the Sublimation Furnace Core.

In Bologue's field of view, a slightly open control panel had a few more buttons. According to Lebius, this was one of the rewards post-action.

"You are now also a member of the Unshakable, although the chances of acting under this identity are rare, the corresponding permissions will still be granted to you."

At that time, Lebius said that, after being listed among the Unshakable, Bologue's importance within the Order Bureau increased slightly, and many previously sealed areas were now accessible to Bologue.

Among them, Bologue found several interesting areas; he never would have thought that such places existed within the oppressive environment of the Order Bureau.

Aimou whispered, "Where are we going?"

She came to find Bologue today entirely because of Belli; now Aimou had passed the Sublimation Furnace Core's examination, coordinating with the Field Operations Department to complete the post-action investigation report.

Chapter 475: Unique Strange Words_2

Yesterday, Belli mysteriously mentioned today's meeting, saying Bologue had something to give her, but now he has no intention of handing it over.

"Up there."

Bologue pointed upward, without clarifying his words.

Aimou didn't ask much further; besides Belli, she trusted Bologue the most within the vast Order Bureau, even if he said the elevator led straight to the Great Rift, she had no objections.

Soon the elevator reached its destination, stopped steadily, and the elevator door opened, allowing the warm sunlight to flood in, too bright for Aimou to keep her eyes open.

Aimou knew the various peculiar properties of the Cultivation Room, like this towering building that had no windows communicating with the outside world, let alone sunlight pouring in.

The moment the light touched her skin, warm feelings enchanted Aimou, making her realize the human shell wasn't completely useless.

"It was only after I was assigned to the Unshakable that I became aware of this department's existence, but more impressive than this is the observation deck above here."

The mysterious Observation Tower unfolded before her, and Bologue timely explained to Aimou.

Aimou gazed in awe at this massive department surrounded by countless glasses, unobstructed sunlight pouring down.

Bologue didn't lead Aimou deeper into the Observation Tower but walked up the spiral staircase along one side, pushing open the door at the end to reveal the vast sky.

Aimou was speechless at the stunning view, "This is..."

Bologue glanced around; underfoot was a firm ground of gray and white bricks, while on the other side was the intricate glass window covering the Observation Tower.

To be accurate, this should count as the rooftop of the Cultivation Room, but rarely anyone comes here, and few even know about it.

"Have a seat."

Surprisingly, there were several long benches on the rooftop, and Bologue sat on one close to the edge.

"How about it? It's nice here, right?" Bologue smiled, "Finding a place to bask in the sun in Opus is really too difficult."

Aimou nodded, gazing around.

This is a lonely yet beautiful world, the Cultivation Room like the only spire-reef standing amidst a sea of clouds, the morning light rising from the horizon, dyeing the surroundings in Canyin hues, and higher up, Aimou could clearly see the stars that hadn't faded away.

"It's truly beautiful..."

Aimou murmured, her human shell granting her sharper vision, enabling her to observe more complex colors; these vibrant lights gathered together, captivating her endlessly.

"Speaking of... I never properly thanked you."

"Thank me for what?"

Bologue didn't quite understand Aimou's words, as he took out a folder from his inner pocket, opened the seal, and poured out a stack of documents.

Aimou said, "For everything you've done for me."

"It's nothing, I feel it's what should be done," Bologue shared his thoughts, "Everyone is independent, proud, rejecting others."

"People might establish intimate relationships, but even in such relationships, few would show their vulnerable sides."

Bologue recalled Aimou's self-disclosure during Time Reversal, where she exposed her frailty, even though she believed Bologue wouldn't remember it all, and things would restart, the fact of her action was undeniable.

"But you did it, Aimou, you showed me your vulnerability, and I saw it. I cannot turn a blind eye."

Bologue looked at Aimou bathed in the morning light; she had gained a new life, her appearance like the adjustments made by Belli, no longer resembling Alice, nor was she Belli, Bologue thought, this must be what Aimou wanted — she was no longer someone's shadow but became a truly independent individual.

With this in mind, Bologue spoke seriously and solemnly.

"This is a magnificent world, the spirit and will of individuals mean nothing; everything will eventually tumble into the ruins of time, yet even in such a cruel reality, there are places of solace.

We are destined to fade away, but the fact of our existence is undeniably real, you too, Aimou.

You are not a substitute for anyone; you are unique."

Aimou and Bologue's gazes locked; she felt the sincerity in Bologue's words, it was a blessing from Bologue; he hoped his words would offer Aimou some support, enabling the vulnerable to navigate comfortably in this grim world.

Bologue whispered softly, "I was once saved by someone like this; she placed hope in me, and now I've done it, saved you, without any disappointment."

Aimou remained silent for a while, staring straight at Bologue, feeling compelled to do so, knowing she must.

"I'm sorry.

Sorry, Bologue."

Aimou didn't look away, facing what she needed to confront.

"Regardless of the disorderly timeline or my reckless actions... I'm sorry for everything that happened."

For a long time, only gusts of wind could be heard.

Bologue raised an eyebrow, realizing Aimou had grown quicker than he imagined, responding.

"I forgive you."

Aimou summoned her courage, ready to accept the punishment that followed; this was what should happen. Yet, Bologue was busy with his own matters, prompting Aimou to ask, "And then?"

Chapter 476: Unique Strange Words_3

"Then what?" Bologue asked, "Do you mean punishment or something?"

Aimou silently nodded.

"So how should I punish you? Imprisonment? That's too time-consuming. A fine? How much wealth do you have?"

Bologue shook his head and seriously said to Aimou, "We made a mistake, apologized, and then we need to do better. Do you understand?"

Aimou nodded half-understandingly, "Do better."

"That's right, do better."

As he spoke, Bologue patted Aimou on the back, "Don't overthink it, everything's in the past."

The morning light was warm, everything was so lovely, so lovely that Aimou felt it was surreal, as if she were in a pleasant dream.

Aimou slowly reached out, seemingly to touch Bologue, thinking this was a nice atmosphere, and Bologue responded... by handing the documents to Aimou.

"Huh?"

Aimou looked at the documents that suddenly appeared in her hands, a bit puzzled, feeling that the plot development was a bit off.

Bologue said earnestly, "You need to take a look at these documents; they involve a lot of things like employee benefits, salaries, holidays, etc. You also need to sign them."

"You... wait a moment, is this why you called me here?" Aimou started to speak incoherently.

Bologue showed a puzzled expression, "Job orientation, didn't Belli tell you?"

Aimou slightly opened her mouth, seemingly wanting to say something, but she couldn't get any words out. Raising her finger at Bologue, she wanted to berate Bologue's damned way of thinking, but she couldn't find any reason.

Indeed, job orientation.

Aimou muttered, "Bologue, I'm really curious about the structure of your brain, why is it so peculiar."

Bologue continued with his serious tone, "I'm the Undead, if it were you, I wouldn't mind being used as an experiment, opening my skull and such."

"Damn it, is this unique undead flirting?"

Aimou laughed instead of getting angry, realizing she shouldn't try to understand Bologue.

She understood that Bologue was just responding to her needs. Aimou also knew that whenever Belli tries to make Bologue do something, it requires a huge cost, but if it's for her, Bologue doesn't need anything; he's willing to cooperate with her.

To Bologue, this was a testament to their relationship, but Aimou just thought Bologue's way of thinking was somewhat insane.

"Alright, alright, if I need anything, I'll find you."

Fine then. Just as Bologue has enough patience for Aimou, Aimou also has enough tolerance for Bologue. Aimou confirmed something: in some ways, this expert and an idiot aren't much different.

"Hm? What's the matter?"

Aimou noticed Bologue still staring at her; Bologue seemed a bit hesitant, and then he spoke.

"I haven't worked for long, but in this brief time, I feel the other team members are quite decent. Geoffrey is very considerate; you can go to him if you need anything. The boss, though cold, does care about the team members. Yuriel is also very friendly; you can ask her directly if you don't understand something, and... Palmer is a jinx, best to stay away from him."

Bologue laughed as he spoke and continued, "I think you can consider this place as a new home."

Aimou didn't respond immediately. She placed her feet on the bench, hugged her knees, and tilted her head to look at Bologue.

"Thank you."

This was a bizarre statement that only Bologue could say. Aimou didn't feel angry because of Bologue's mood-dampening remarks; on the contrary, she found it Bologue's unique form of romance... just too weird.

"Anyway, welcome to the Special Operations Group."

Chapter 477: We

In the empty corridor, pure white light poured down from above, dispelling shadows and leaving no dead corners. Even the dust was hard to spot on the polished floor.

Nesanel walked through the corridor, his pace neither fast nor slow, his tall figure swaying slightly, exuding an intimidating presence.

Soon, Nesanel's steps came to a halt, and he stood at the end of the corridor, in front of a door marked with the Staff Sword emblem. A plaque hung on the door with the words "Decision Room".

Nesanel did not immediately push open the door but lingered at the entrance, as if hesitating over some decision.

Leaning against the wall beside him, Nesanel squinted his eyes. After a long sigh, he placed the container he was carrying at his feet. Various emblems were engraved on the container's surface, with a faint glow shimmering within.

The container held the recovered Immortal Heart, a forbidden item extremely dangerous to anyone, but at Nesanel's feet, it was no more than a piece of flesh not easily destroyed.

Nesanel rummaged through his pockets and lit a cigarette for himself. As smoke enveloped him, a sorrowful emotion crossed his resolute face.

As the Deputy Director of the Order Bureau, Nesanel had never particularly liked coming to the Decision Room. If possible, he would avoid any contact with it.

This was not about the Decision Room itself but rather the person inside, someone Nesanel preferred not to see. Every encounter with them readily unsettled even Nesanel's strong heart.

Nesanel loosened his collar and took out the necklace hanging on his chest. Opening the locket, inside was a photo of a woman.

"I always wonder, is all of this truly worth it?"

Nesanel gazed deeply at the woman's face, muttering to himself.

"This is the sorrow of mortals, isn't it? Our lives are too short. Even if we pay the price, the unknowable future remains distant, and we can't be sure if our sacrifices truly have an impact. We can only march blindly towards death."

Falling into silence, Nesanel said nothing further. In the prolonged tranquility, he was merely staring for a long time at the woman's face. Only after the cigarette burnt out did he slowly close the locket and pick up the container.

Opening the door to the Decision Room, Nesanel stepped inside. At first, there was an unknowable darkness. After an endless darkness, a gentle light appeared, and following a brief delay, Nesanel's sight recovered, and his vision brightened once more.

Golden light poured down from the dome, where sculpted angels occupied the sky. Their faces varied, with expressions ranging from joy to sorrow, and anger. Inverted on the dome, they stretched their hands towards the ground, as if trying to save something.

Decision Room, Inverted Hall.

Nesanel stood alone in the golden palace, raised his hand, and snapped his fingers. The permission exclusive to the Deputy Director was unleashed, causing the complex machinery in the Inverted Hall to pause for a moment before returning like a tide.

From the dim end, vague singing could be heard, as if it was welcoming an old friend.

Nesanel's body became light, entering a state of weightlessness, floating in mid-air. Then, the direction of gravity flipped, and Nesanel fell towards what had been the "dome".

With a nimble spin, Nesanel landed steadily on the ground, and the surface on which he had stood transformed into a new dome.

Nesanel lit another cigarette, casually flicking ash onto this golden hall. Without immediate action, his gaze swept across the surroundings.

The angels who had once stretched their hands to the sky had returned to the ground... or more precisely, they had never been high in the sky, nor were they ever so-called angels.

Within the Order Bureau, many had been summoned to the Decision Room for various reasons and had witnessed this sacred hall, but they never understood why it was called the Inverted Hall.

Nesanel's gentle gaze swept over those figures stretching their hands to the sky. They were as numerous as grains of sand, forming a pile as high as a mountain, and above them, the well once seen as an abyss had turned into the sky, its walls extending upwards until they vanished from sight.

Raising his foot, stepping on the void, the golden path was sketched out beneath Nesanel's feet. Pure Ether forged it into a staircase, continuous, spiraling into a stairway reaching the sky's end.

Nesanel walked for a long time, his figure entering the well-sky. He felt as if he had ascended several hundred meters, yet the ascent persisted, until he reached the end.

Above the dome was an expanse of lightless darkness. Nesanel stepped into the darkness; the well entrance he had come through contrasted against the dark world, an unmistakable glowing circle.

Nesanel stood on the edge of the well, lingering for a long time. After a prolonged wait, faint noises emerged from the darkness, as though countless toxic creatures crawled on the ground, approaching Nesanel.

Within the murky darkness, Nesanel vaguely saw the grotesque, monstrous figure. It was as large as a hill, grotesque and bloated.

"The Special Operations Group has contained an Immortal Heart. I thought you might have a use for this, so I brought it over for you."

As Nesanel spoke, he opened the container and pulled out the deformed heart.

Chapter 478: We_2

As the head of the Field Operations Department, Nesanel's actions were entirely against protocol, but after all, he was a Seeker of Glory, a lofty tier that could ignore most of the rules and regulations.

The insidious and dreadful Immortal Heart was utterly powerless in Nesanel's hand. It merely squirmed slightly, without even a thought of eroding Nesanel. The biological instinct made it feel an extreme fear and if Nesanel wished, destroying it completely would be no problem.

A hunched arm extended from the darkness, receiving the Immortal Heart from Nesanel's hand. Around the darkness seemed to writhe some mist-like thing. Even at such a close distance, Nesanel still couldn't discern the figure of the newcomer, who was shrouded in darkness, wrapping his entire body.

From the darkness came the sound of sharp teeth gnawing at flesh, and Nesanel could distinctly discern the lament of one blood vessel after another being torn apart, the sharp sound of blood being squeezed out of the flesh.

Nesanel turned his head, calmly smoking a cigarette, as the heavy stench of condensing blood overwhelmed even the smell of smoke.

A hoarse voice echoed in the dark, "How many times have you failed to quit smoking?"

"Many times... I don't really care about it anymore, after all, she is not around anymore, no one can control me now," Nesanel chuckled, "Besides, I've never heard of a Seeker of Glory dying from nicotine."

A raspy laughter rang out, the other person was amused by Nesanel's boring joke.

"Alright, alright, let's talk serious; the current situation is utterly terrible," Nesanel's tone turned serious, "The Corruption Sect's activities in the Narrow Countries are getting more frequent. The tenth group has been doing its best to suppress them, but they seem endless, impossible to eradicate."

The Kagader Empire and the Rhine Alliance occupied opposing poles of the continent, confronting each other. In between these two massive entities, numerous countries existed, squeezed in the gaps, and so they were called the Narrow Countries. The Narrow Countries serve as the boundary dividing the two and a buffer zone between them.

"The third group sent us a warning, the Joyful Garden has appeared again, no one knows where it will head to this time."

At the mention of Joyful Garden, the alluring figure and the most sinister, mad will appeared in Nesanel's mind.

"This is only the external threat; internally, the Tyrant's actions are becoming increasingly outrageous. I always have a feeling that he may not be content with just dithering at crossroads anymore."

Nesanel spilled out one piece of bad intel after another, thinking the other party must have known about them, but Nesanel still reiterated them tirelessly.

"In contrast, he has been much more honest, just staying in the hotel watching movies every day. The only troublesome thing is that he wants to share Bologue's vision. I have already refused him."

After dealing with these crazy and sinister existences for so long, Nesanel increasingly liked this movie enthusiast, even though he was also a terrible Devil.

A sudden response emerged from the darkness, "Sai Zong has left the Undying Club."

"What?"

Nesanel was stunned for a moment, his expression turning nervous.

"He left a while ago." The voice in the darkness continued to respond.

Nesanel seriously asked, "What should we do?"

"There's no need to do anything, just let him leave. Sai Zong is a very special person, including the Devil behind him... Devils are not united; we can use this."

With the voice in the darkness, faint murmurs circled around Nesanel, as if something in the darkness was walking around him in circles.

The darkness brought forth a question, "The truly frightening thing isn't those exposed in our view, but those hidden in the shadows. How long has it been since we observed the presence of those two?"

"Since the Fall of the Holy City..." Nesanel echoed with a deep voice.

"Don't think too much, I'll handle everything."

A hunched arm reached out from the darkness, gently patting Nesanel's shoulder, advising, "You should quit smoking, even like this, I can smell the smoke on you."

"I don't want to quit smoking," Nesanel flatly rejected the suggestion, "Sooner or later, I will take your position and become part of this darkness."

Nesanel gazed into the darkness, this darkness that hovered above the Dome.

"By then, I won't even have the chance to smoke... Before my responsibility arrives, I want to revel in joy, satisfy all my desires so that I can bear this long darkness."

"I've looked at your bills, you've charged all your personal expenses to public funds."

"Are you going to punish me?"

"No, I just find it curious that even though you spend almost half the department's budget every year on enjoyment, yet you still seem unsatisfied.

Why is that, Nesanel?

You wield the power of a Seeker of Glory, hold the deputy director's authority in the Order Bureau, and enjoy the endless wealth supported by the Rhine Alliance, you're counted among the top humans in the world.

Why are your eyes still filled with desire?"

Nesanel smiled helplessly, took a long sigh, and replied sorrowfully, "It's just self-deception."

He lit another cigarette, the faint glow illuminated Nesanel's face, his voice tinged with melancholy.

"Can I see you?"

"You know I'm not her."

"Just to fool myself, do you really need me to beg you?" Nesanel spoke expressionlessly, indifferent to his status and position, "Please, my great director, can't you just let me see her?"

"..."

The darkness began to writhe and disperse, revealing a pallid face emerging from the shadows, and Nesanel stared at her as if entranced; she hadn't changed, just like he remembered her.

"Don't worry about me, Director, I know I've had some conduct issues, but please rest assured, I will not betray the Order Bureau or defect to any Devil."

Nesanel spoke to the face in the darkness while taking heavy drags of his cigarette.

"I've never worried about that."

The woman spoke, but her voice was oddly that of a man.

"This is my only home," Nesanel muttered to himself, "Even if I died outside and my head got chopped off, I would still pick up my head and find a way to crawl back."

Nesanel reached out, touching the woman's face, a slight corner of his mouth lifted, "To be honest, I very much look forward to the day of fulfilling my duties, so I can be with her."

Withdrawing his hand, the woman's face was again obscured by darkness. Nesanel exhaled a warm breath of smoke, not wanting to converse any longer, he moved to leave. The darkness behind him gradually settled into tranquility, becoming a calm jet black.

Reaching the edge of the well entrance, Nesanel suddenly stopped, looked back at the darkness behind him, and let out his perplexity and confusion.

"When I fulfill my duties and merge with this darkness, who am I?"

Nesanel questioned, golden hues flashing in his eyes like an enraged lion.

"Am I Nesanel Vaolet, or her, or... do I become you?"

Become Alberto Alfredo."

The darkness gave no reply, indifferent. Nesanel simply chuckled disdainfully, stepping forward into the void, with Ether forming an illusory brick supporting his step.

The radiant spiral staircase extended downward, Nesanel looking down, he could see countless figures in the mundane world beneath the Dome reaching out to him.

They prayed for the descent of some power, but after the radiance, nothing awaited but endless darkness.

"You... are no one, you are us..."

The deep voice echoed slowly, hovering beside Nesanel's ear, like an irreversible vow.

"We are us."

Chapter 479: Epilogue

The oppressive Sea of Mist surged, like a vast ocean covering the underground world. In the glass dome, a hunched figure sat cross-legged, overlooking the monotonous scenery, eternally standing like a sculpture.

"I'm sorry, I failed."

The Third Seat knelt on one knee behind the Shadow King, his head bowed, his words full of apology.

After paying such a heavy price, they still lost the battle for the Immortal Heart, utterly defeated.

"This is not your fault, it's just that our power is insufficient."

The Shadow King's voice was calm; even though the Third Seat's failure would lead him step by step toward death, he was unconcerned, as if death was not unfamiliar to the Shadow King, but rather an old friend.

The Third Seat was somewhat agitated, "But what will you do?"

In the Third Seat's heart, the Shadow King was an absolute faith, he would never allow his faith to fall powerlessly like this.

"There will always be a way," the Shadow King carelessly said, "but unless necessary, I don't want to do it."

Yet despite saying this, the Shadow King had already reached the point where he had to make a decision, which filled him with a sense of grief and shame.

"You have to... no, you can't do this."

The Third Seat seemed to guess what the Shadow King intended to do, and just as he was about to persuade him otherwise, he was sternly interrupted by the Shadow King.

"It's alright!" The Shadow King shook his head, "Just let him win a bit more..."

The Shadow King took a deep breath, slowly clenched his fist, muttering, "I will win it back, I definitely will."

After saying these words, the Shadow King even amused himself, his out-of-character words resembling those of a hysterical gambler pleading for another round.

Gambler...

Thinking carefully, he seemed no different from a gambler, both just insignificant individuals in this grand gamble.

The Third Seat said no more, with a slightly sorrowful gaze, watching the Shadow King's back, that hunched figure bearing a weight far heavier than he imagined.

Carrying the vast Empire.

The Shadow King asked, "Besides that, are you certain? The Order Bureau successfully usurped the Power of Dominator?"

"Yes, we have completed the investigation. The individual is Bologue Lazarus, a Debtor with an Undying Body. His past is mysterious, and he only recently joined the Order Bureau, becoming a member of the Special Operations Group."

The Third Seat recounted the information gleaned from the investigation, "Although he is currently only a First Stage Condenser, when he activates Secret Energy, the effect of his Secret Energy is almost identical... it's practically a perfect replica of the Power of Dominator!"

In the eyes of the Third Seat, fervent emotions surged uncontrollably, causing his voice to tremble.

"That power commanding all things, the power of the 'Royal Domain.'

The Shadow King remained unmoved by the Third Seat's fervent words, only lowering his head, a faint glimmer emanating from his dark eyes, pondering something.

"Withdraw," the Shadow King said, "I will handle the matters that follow."

The Third Seat's eyes betrayed reluctance, but he knew he could not change the Shadow King's mind. More importantly, they had no other means.

Finally, the Third Seat sighed sorrowfully and left quietly, leaving the spacious and dim chamber once again with only the Shadow King.

The Shadow King reminisced about that forbidden power, pondering the name Bologue Lazarus in his mind.

An unseen force surrounded the Shadow King, like shoals of intangible fish, swimming continuously, causing ripples.

The Shadow King slowly lifted his head, gazing into the muddled darkness nearby. It was so black, as if it could devour all light, and the brief gaze instilled twisted sensations in the Shadow King's mind, as if unseen claws tore through reality, tugging at his spirit.

"I knew you were here, always watching me from the corner, never stopping."

Facing the sinister presence in the darkness, the Shadow King calmly remarked.

Derisive laughter came from the darkness, a nebulous figure emerged from the shadows, surrounded by equally dark shoals of fish, impervious to light, making him appear like a sudden black silhouette, tearing apart light and space.

The newcomer leisurely approached the Shadow King, the shadows squirming, lifting both him and the Shadow King, black tables and chairs extending from the darkness, and the two sat at either end of the table as delicate black and white chess pieces emerged from the tabletop.

The newcomer picked up a black piece, "Care for a game?"

The Shadow King gazed at the shadow for a long time, as with many previous meetings, no matter how he observed, all he perceived was a void of darkness.

He gave up trying to observe and silently picked up a white piece, advancing it forward.

The Shadow King questioned, "Bologue Lazarus... he is your new target, isn't he?"

"I think you might have confused the order," the newcomer moved a piece, sending the defending pawn forward, "compared to him, you're the new target."

"..."

The Shadow King's hand holding the piece stiffened for a moment, perceiving the underlying meaning in the newcomer's words, "So that's how it is? From the very beginning, he was your Chosen One, and I was merely a subsequent replacement."

The newcomer said, "I thought you had already realized you were a substitute."

"I had considered it, but I hadn't realized his existence predated mine by so much."

With just a few words, the Shadow King roughly guessed the various mysteries, simultaneously understanding one thing, this was deliberately revealed by the newcomer.

The newcomer always did this, releasing necessary information at crucial moments to guide him toward the future he desired. The most unsettling aspect was that the Shadow King never had the power to refuse.

Chapter 480: Epilogue_2

The Shadow King continued to inquire, "The Undead... he looks like he's been alive for many years, only recently released by you?"

The conspiracy hidden in the shadows of history was within reach, and the Shadow King felt he was close to touching it, his pupils filled with scarlet blood threads.

"What exactly do you want to do?"

The visitor let out bursts of laughter without answering, continuing the game of chess and talking about other topics.

"Rather than worrying about these matters, you'd better care about yourself. The dead don't get the chance to witness all this."

The visitor inspected the Shadow King's decaying and corrupt body, feeling his gradually fading vitality. By normal logic, the Shadow King in front of him should have died long ago, yet he defied logic, maintaining an appearance of life, but merely clinging to a threadbare existence.

"You're a pretty good pawn; you possess those noble human qualities—focus, resilience, caution, never compromising..."

The visitor halted the chess game; amidst the writhing darkness, the Shadow King could clearly sense that descending gaze.

"Want to make another deal with me?"

The visitor extended an invitation to the Shadow King, who remained silent, gazing at the chessboard, his eyes penetrating time, tracing back to many years before.

Back then, he was just a child who could barely lift a sword, meeting the visitor on some indeterminate night and making a deal with him.

The visitor reversed the Shadow King's fate but also directed his destiny towards a deeper darkness.

"My soul, my shell, my everything..."

The Shadow King shook his head, his voice calm, bearing neither sorrow nor joy.

"I no longer have anything to offer you."

The visitor extended his hand, forcibly holding the Shadow King, demanding him to lift his head and gaze into the darkness.

"No, it's not like that; even if you've lost all your value, so what? You're still alive now; you can continue to generate value."

The visitor understood the Shadow King's thoughts, observing his growth, witnessing his rise from despair... He understood the Shadow King too well.

"You don't want it to end like this either, do you? I can see the desire in your eyes."

The visitor laughed, his voice hoarse and piercing, "You're also looking forward to this moment, aren't you? Eager for my grace to fall upon you again, granting you power, returning you to the battlefield..."

"Ah... you're a restless black goat. I knew it from the start."

The Shadow King coldly observed the darkness, allowing the pitch-black arm to remove his mask, the icy palm pressing against his rough, decaying face, followed by fingers forcibly prying open his eyelids, exposing his eyeballs fully to the air.

The Shadow King was not swayed by the visitor's words; throughout the conversation, he had been contemplating, accurately speaking, from the first time he met the visitor in his childhood, he had been pondering why the visitor did this.

Until today, many years later, until Bologue Lazarus appeared before him, until various coincidences pieced together, he roughly understood the visitor's intentions.

"I'm just a vessel, a vessel transcending time to transfer that power to its substitute."

The Shadow King grabbed the pitch-black arm with a fierce grip, as if he wanted to break it.

"I should have no value to you, yet you now come back to find me.

Yes, it's not me asking for your grace; it's that you need me, right? You need me to do something to fulfill your dark conspiracy."

The visitor casually replied, "But you also mentioned, we're clear now, aren't we?"

Many years before, the Shadow King had fulfilled the deal with the visitor, repaid the debt, becoming what he is now.

The Shadow King laughed, his words filled with anger and reproach, "Clear? How could it be clear? I have never escaped your control, and you have always been watching me. The reason you haven't appeared before me is only because you were waiting for a suitable moment, right?

For instance... now."

The visitor fell silent, then with trembling laughter said, "Indeed, you are the finest."

"Many people think they are special, that they can break spells and pay off debts. Some even believe they can outwit the Devil and profit... You're different from them."

The visitor pushed over the pieces; they collapsed in waves, bodies piling into mountains, spanning the battlefield.

"You are always so clear-headed, never easily believing anyone's words."

The Shadow King growled, "Well then, what are you waiting for?"

The pitch-black figure began to wriggle and collapse, turning into countless black fish swimming around the Shadow King, ultimately consolidating behind him, reshaping into that pitch-black figure once more.

He extended his hands, gently placing them on the Shadow King's shoulders, lowering his head to whisper in the Shadow King's ear.

"Once more, my gaze will fall upon you, and you shall receive my grace again."

The shadow dispersed, countless fish burrowing into the Shadow King's body. After years, the sinister protection descended once again, granting him anew.

The Shadow King slowly stood up, sensing the surge of power within, also aware of the visitor's departure.

He was not happy about gaining power; on the contrary, a sorrow that was hard to resolve surrounded the Shadow King's heart.

Ultimately, the Shadow King had not escaped this destined fate; he once thought he had, but it was only a temporary evasion. He was destined to be entangled with it until the day his life ended.

Yet, the Shadow King did not regret. As long as he could fulfill his purpose and slay that abominable entity on the throne, even at the cost of his entire soul, he would not hesitate.

Silently leaving the chamber, the Shadow King did not attract anyone's attention, departing from the Fog Abyss Fortress, walking along the steep corridor into the shadows of the Great Rift.

The Shadow King could smell the rotten and decaying scent, then he found the struggling Demons within the shadows.

Pairs of scarlet eyes opened in the darkness, scrutinizing this unexpected visitor; some shouted loudly, some greedily eyed the soul beneath the Shadow King's shell, others, ravenously hungry, slowly drew their blood-stained Short Knives.

All this reflected into the Shadow King's eyes, a hateful smile gradually surfacing on his decaying face, he licked his sharp teeth, then plunged into the darkness.

After a brief metallic hum, harsh and piercing screams echoed in the shadows, as if some brutal punishment had descended upon the Demons, the wailing persisted for a short time, then ceased completely.

Amidst the ground strewn with corpses and filthy blood, the Shadow King gasped, feeling life's vigor; simultaneously, flecks of azure light arose from shattered limbs, Soul Shards merging into the Shadow King, bringing soul fulfillment.

The Shadow King contentedly closed his eyes, savoring the soul sacrifice he had awaited far too long.