

Endless 521

Chapter 521: Journey of the Absolute Night

Board games, simply put, table games; Bologue did know about these things, but didn't expect to encounter them at this time.

Bologue suddenly had a very bad feeling, possibly because he had played chess with the astronaut. Now whenever Bologue saw such board games, he felt very uncomfortable, always recalling those awful scenarios.

Moving away from the plethora of board games, Bologue stared at Serey. As an ancient Night Race Lord, Serey was a witness to history, a living fossil of time. Perhaps he could obtain some intelligence from him, not only about the astronauts but also about Overlord Xilin and even the Fall of the Holy City.

That was the end of the Rage of the Scorched Earth; Bologue believed that Serey wouldn't miss that grand finale. He certainly knew something, and after the Fall of the Holy City and the initial establishment of Oubos, the Undying Club seemed to have been here, too. Serey must have witnessed the course of the secret war, and might even have seen Xilin Kagader alive...

"Bologue!"

Palmer's shout snapped Bologue out of his thoughts. Palmer waved his hand, attracting Bologue's attention, "What are you daydreaming about?"

Bologue said, "Just... just thinking about something."

"Stop thinking about work. People need to relax, and moreover, you need to dispel the melancholy in your heart, don't you?"

Palmer elbowed Bologue, his eyebrows dancing with delight.

Looking at Palmer's mischievous appearance, Bologue couldn't help but want to punch him, but then thought that this was a poor unlucky fellow. Maybe he was the one with psychological problems, so Bologue tried to comfort himself.

"This was your own choice, Bologue, you have to bear it yourself. Anyway, he will live at most a few decades, bear it and it'll pass..."

Bologue hypnotized himself in a low voice, and after calming his mindset, he cast aside his worries.

On this point, what Palmer said was right. It's after work hours, and these people are celebrating in their own way. You can't just leave them cold on the side.

Bologue asked, "What board game is this?"

Palmer's eyes sparkled, as if he had been waiting for Bologue to ask for a long time, eagerly explaining and recommending.

"We've been waiting for this for a long time!"

Palmer forcefully patted the table, and this time Church and Serey actually nodded along. They were equally interested in this board game.

"The Journey of the Absolute Night!"

Serey excitedly raised his glass, afraid the wine might splash on the board game; he even intentionally pulled the glass away.

This behavior was rarely seen from Serey, who was usually messy in this aspect. Whenever he got drunk, he looked like he had just bathed in alcohol, all soaked.

This guy didn't care where the wine spilled usually, but this time was different. This showed Serey's attention to this board game.

Four people took their seats; Bologue briefly looked at the rulebook and got a rough idea of how this so-called "Journey of the Absolute Night" was played.

The map paper depicted a desolate land covered in snow, scattered with a few villages and cities, all connected by a winding railway, forming a loop.

At the starting and ending platform of the railway, there sat a delicate train model, alongside several uniquely shaped tokens.

Bologue found these things somewhat familiar, picked up the rulebook, and continued to look through it, reading the background story of the board game.

"From thousands of years ago, when humans lit the first flame and illuminated the darkness, detestable things existed.

They traversed the shadows, coveting human blood and flesh, spreading madness and despair with sharp teeth and claws. Humans could only hide under crumbling fortresses, trembling in the dark, anxiously waiting for dawn to arrive.

The cycle of despair continued for many years until the first person raised a long sword and resisted these wicked monsters, chopping off their hateful heads."

Bologue silently read the words on the page, sketching the ancient legends in his mind.

"Since then, the night was no longer terrifying. More and more people forged slender blades in fire and iron, joining the battle against the night.

These monsters could be harmed and killed; under the sacrifice of blood and fire, strange corpses piled up like mountains.

Those who fought called themselves 'Hunters,' who pursued monsters and dispelled the darkness, pushing the boundaries of humanity towards the dark world.

Hunters never tire, ceaselessly fighting, until all monsters are exterminated, eradicating the 'Demons.'"

Bologue closed the rulebook, looked at Palmer with confusion, "Isn't this the setting in 'Night Hunter'?"

'Night Hunter' was placed in Bologue's bedroom; he would read a few pages from time to time and had now read more than half of it. Although it was one book among many series, it allowed Bologue to have a general understanding of the worldview depicted.

"This is a board game adapted from 'Night Hunter.'"

Palmer's eyes sparkled as he snatched the rulebook and showed Bologue a segment written in the corner, which states "This board game is adapted from Crowned Blue Jay's work 'Night Hunter.'"

No wonder Palmer was so excited; it was a board game adapted from his favorite novel. His gaze fell on Serey and Church; they weren't as fanatical as Palmer but shared the same excitement in their eyes.

Bologue slightly furrowed his brows. "So... you guys are also loyal readers of Crowned Blue Jay?"

Church calmly nodded, while Serey excitedly exclaimed.

"Hey! If it weren't for the constraints of the oath, I would really like to make Crowned Blue Jay a member of the Night Race, granting him eternal life!"

Alongside, Serey's evil nature revealed itself.

"That way, he could pound the typewriter endlessly."

Bologue's expression subtly twitched; he shouldn't have expected anything from Serey. "Should I say that Crowned Blue Jay is lucky? Avoided eternal torment."

Serey said, "How can this be called eternal torment? That's eternal life."

"Then you surely haven't read the book carefully. Crowned Blue Jay often reveals such thoughts in his books; he doesn't like eternal life as it only makes life numb and gray. He prefers releasing brighter fireworks within a finite life."

A meteor is beautiful precisely because it's fleeting.

Bologue said, "If you find Crowned Blue Jay, he would definitely refuse you."

"That's just a novel, Bologue; you can't judge an author by his works. Maybe secretly, he's terrified of death and wrote those words to comfort himself in the story."

Serey narrowed his eyes, carrying a aura of mystery and antiquity.

"Two Undead discussing eternal life and death? That's too ridiculous. Hurry up and pick your pieces!"

Palmer interrupted their discussion; he didn't care about philosophical disagreements. Palmer just wanted to play joyfully.

'The Journey of the Absolute Night' was released today. Palmer spent a hefty sum to snatch this copy, and he couldn't wait.

The rules of 'The Journey of the Absolute Night' were fairly simple and matched the novel's plot. In 'Night Hunter,' Hunters would patrol between cities on an armed train named 'Dawn.' Upon encountering demons at some location, they would halt the train to begin a hunt.

The settings in the board game were similar. The Dawn was at the starting and ending platform, players took turns rolling the dice, and the combined values translated into the number of grid spaces the Dawn advanced. Different spaces triggered different random events.

When encountering random events, depending on the player's decisions and dice rolls, the game would take different paths. The ultimate goal of the game was to traverse mountains and cities, complete this tour hunt, and return to the starting point.

There was only one type of professional piece, which was the Hunter that players needed to role-play. But based on different hunters, they possessed different weapons, providing differentiation.

Bologue chose a hunter with various cold weapons, Palmer chose a hunter carrying firearms, and after careful thinking, Church chose a hunter with a crossbow. Everyone's choices somewhat aligned with their personalities and combat styles.

Serey didn't select a professional piece but instead mysteriously picked up a mask. The mask's base color was pure white, decorated with black lines depicting lush branches, giving him a more mysterious air.

'The Journey of the Absolute Night' required a host to guide the players. Serey played the role of host; he was considered the Navigator, determining which direction the Dawn advanced, diverging its path, or halting for combat according to the novel's settings.

The pre-game preparations were complete, and everyone took turns rolling the 12-sided dice. The numbers accumulated, and the Dawn slowly moved, accompanied by the sound of a whistle, roaring forward on the snow-covered tracks.

Chapter 522: Afeiya

Bologue found the board game uninteresting; he rolled the dice with a blank expression, acted according to Serey's instructions, and then triggered random events, encountering strangers or getting involved in battles.

After a few rounds, the Dawn had sailed a considerable distance, crushing numerous demons.

The battles in the board game largely relied on luck, something beyond Bologue's control, which gave him an odd sense of incongruity since he liked to hold everything in his grasp.

"Bologue is injured, adjudicated as a bleeding wound, and your actions in the next three rounds of random events will be affected."

Serey announced the result of the recent battle, tossing a Bleeding Card to Bologue.

Church, whose character used a crossbow, could battle from a safe distance, thus remained unscathed through several combat rounds.

As for Palmer... well, no surprise they're unlucky.

"Palmer is injured. Roll the dice to determine the injury level; it's a severe injury. In the next three rounds of random events, you'll need to roll specific value ranges continuously, or the character will be deemed dead."

Serey threw a Severe Injury Card to Palmer, who looked bewildered, staring at the card in front of him and then the board. The Dawn had barely traveled a quarter of the distance, and he was severely injured?

Serey quietly said, "Palmer, your luck doesn't match this game very well."

Palmer gritted his teeth, said, "I can win it back."

Church tried to suppress his laughter, but the corners of his mouth still curled up. The game was supposed to go on, but just as a new round of dice rolling began, a slightly unfamiliar female voice arose.

"Bologue? Palmer!"

The girl's appearance interrupted the game. Bologue looked up and saw a familiar figure maneuvering a tray of glasses through the pub.

"Yo! Afeiya!"

Unlike Bologue, Palmer recognized the girl immediately, and upon hearing the name "Afeiya," Bologue's dormant memories resurfaced completely.

He remembered now that Afeiya worked at this bar, and hadn't encountered her upon arrival, so he hadn't thought much of it.

Afeiya still remembered Bologue since he once helped her out of a jam, which left a deep impression on her. As for Palmer, they had met several times before since Palmer and Church used to meet at the flower shop weekly before splitting up.

"What a coincidence!"

Palmer greeted Afeiya, who, after delivering the glasses, walked over with a smile.

"And these two are...?"

Afeiya noticed the two unfamiliar faces of Serey and Church.

"Miss Afeiya, right? Hello, you can call me Serey."

Serey gracefully stood up, removed his mask, revealing those captivating ruby eyes, filled with an ancient mystery that struck Afeiya's nerves, rendering her momentarily dazed.

"Nice to meet you, Serey."

Forget Serey's comedic antics; when he was serious, he indeed was quite charming, with an ancient and mysterious aura, knowledgeable about the past and wealthy. No wonder Serey visited different women every day; he had the means to enjoy himself.

Serey's elegance didn't last long as he burst into exaggerated laughter, then returned to his seat, shouting loudly at the group.

"Roll the dice now! I can't wait to see how you die!"

Afeiya gradually recovered her clarity; few could resist Serey's charm, and Afeiya was no exception. Thankfully, Serey seemed to just want to tease her a bit. Though being a Night Race Lord for so long, he seemed to become more childish as time went on.

Blinking hard, Afeiya didn't understand what just happened with her. Her gaze then fell on Church, curious and unfamiliar in her eyes.

"And this one...?"

Church said nothing, didn't even look at Afeiya, but just stared at the board, seemingly avoiding her.

Bologue didn't understand why. Church clearly knew Afeiya, but Afeiya didn't recognize Church at the moment, and Church didn't reveal his identity either.

Faceless Man.

Bologue vaguely sensed an inkling of why, noticing the painful struggle in Church's lowered eyes with a glance.

"He is..."

Palmer was about to say something, but Church slightly raised his head, eyes filled with murderous intent, forcing Palmer to swallow his words back.

"Nothing much, our friend here is just a bit shy,"

Palmer, skilled at talking nonsense, could maintain a calm face no matter the lie, something that Bologue quite admired.

Bologue often couldn't tell whether Palmer developed such a skill due to his lousy experiences or found himself in such messy situations because of the skill.

"Oh, oh, oh, sorry," Afeiya apologized, then looked around, "Where's Church? Didn't he come with you?"

Palmer, unfazed, replied, "Church, uh... he's out on a business trip recently."

"Alright, if you need anything, just call me while I'm still on the clock," Afeiya lowered her voice, covering her mouth with her hand as she whispered, "If you order food, I can slip in some extra for you."

"Okay!"

Palmer gave a thumbs-up, watching Afeiya hop and skip away, busy among the tables.

"Wow, this boss really hired a good employee. Seeing someone so young and energetic lifts even my spirits."

Palmer mumbled to himself. As he returned his attention to the board game, a pair of eyes filled with hidden anger stared directly at him.

Church's voice was emotionless, "Did you do it on purpose, Palmer?"

Palmer didn't understand, "What on purpose?"

"Meeting here, at Afeiya's workplace, are you deliberately taunting me?"

Listening to their conversation, the smile on Serey's face froze and faded. He shifted his chair, moving a little closer to Bologue.

Palmer said, "After all, she didn't recognize you."

Just as Bologue had guessed, Church was using a different appearance with Afeiya. Under the influence of Secret Energy·Faceless Man, Afeiya didn't notice anything.

Church remained silent, but everyone could sense his anger. Church was being manipulated by Palmer, and Bologue and Serey were as well.

Bologue could even guess the reason he and Serey were here: one, to play board games with this guy, and two, if Church couldn't control himself and decided to punch Palmer, they could hold him back or take Palmer to the hospital.

Church let out a deep sigh. As an intelligence officer, he was very adept at controlling his emotions; it's just that his interest in playing board games had completely vanished.

"Church, I just think your progress is too slow," Palmer nonchalantly opened a bottle of wine, "Look at Afeiya, how cute she is, if you don't make an effort, others might take her away."

"I..."

Church wanted to say something to retort Palmer, but as soon as he started, he couldn't continue. Whether due to a reluctance to argue or a lack of strength to argue, he left it unsaid.

"Have you been the Faceless Man for so long that you don't dare to show your true face anymore?"

Palmer had always been concerned about this part regarding Church's true appearance, even though Church always said that the plain appearance he had when meeting Palmer, like now, was his true form. Palmer didn't believe it.

He had also been an intelligence officer. Palmer knew too well that very few words from Church's mouth could be trusted.

"What do you think I should do then?"

Church controlled his anger and looked very tired as he leaned back in his chair, his gaze wandering through the gaps between ice cubes in his glass.

"Tell her I am actually a person with countless faces, and the one she knows is just one of them, or directly say to her some things..." Church trailed off, his voice low, "After all, the relationship between us is merely that of a frequent flower-buyer, a customer relationships."

"That's true. Any suggestions, anyone?"

Surprisingly, Palmer seriously nodded and asked for opinions from Bologue and Serey.

Bologue decisively shook his head, handling emotional matters was not within an expert's responsibilities, and Serey vigorously waved his hand, righteously saying, "I'm not interested in young girls, I only play with seasoned veterans."

"Wow, we're screwed then!"

Palmer's face fell, "I don't have much experience either. I'm just childhood sweethearts turned fiancée, you know."

"It's troublesome, Church, none of us can help you here!"

Palmer exclaimed exaggeratedly, leaving it unclear whether he was sincerely trying to help Church resolve his problem or deliberately mocking him.

Church had a hard time tolerating it. He didn't like this atmosphere and didn't like openly discussing these issues. Church was a person who could be easily satisfied. He just wanted to buy a bouquet of flowers every weekend; as for when this would end, he never thought about these matters.

Now Palmer laid these problems bare, making a mess of tonight's board game session.

Church could understand Palmer's good intentions, but he didn't want to accept them. Church was preparing to leave, but just then, a familiar silhouette came hopping over.

"Your eyes look very similar to those of a friend of mine."

Afeiya suddenly appeared behind Church, leaning over so closely that Church, who had known Afeiya for a long time, had never been this close before. He could clearly see the outline of Afeiya's body, the slenderness and youthfulness of the girl were within reach.

"That friend of mine is called Church, you should know him, right?"

Faced with the girl's inquiry, Church stiffly nodded, unable to utter a single word.

Afeiya gently patted Church on the back and placed a drink and fries in front of him.

"I'm getting off work now, this is on me, stranger."

Afeiya said her piece and left like a graceful deer disappearing into the dense forest.

Church belatedly turned back, only to see a slowly closing door.

Chapter 523: Palmer's Love Story

"That's basically the situation. Church seemed calm, but I think he was angry and then left without a word."

In the Undying Club, Palmer drunkenly talked to a few people about what had just happened.

After Church left, the three of them lost their interest, let alone the fact that they couldn't continue the board game by themselves, so they simply left the Landling District and returned to the Undying Club, where at least they could find a few more people.

"Damn it, Palmer, you ruined tonight's board game!" Serey cursed from the side.

Serey didn't care about Church's emotional issues. To be accurate, Serey didn't care about anything; this guy's remaining life was meant for having fun, and everything had to yield for the sake of enjoyment.

Palmer had destroyed the "Journey of Nightfall," and their game had only just begun.

Bologue didn't say much. He felt this was a matter between Palmer and Church. The two were once partners, and even though Palmer had shared many past experiences with him, some things were known only to Palmer and Church themselves.

Like the issue between the Faceless One and Afeiya.

"This is something you should let Church handle himself, not add fuel to the fire from the side."

After hearing the whole story, Wei'Er paced back and forth on the chessboard, knocking over pieces one after another.

"I know, but if we let Church handle it himself, it'll just fade away unresolved."

Palmer reached out, picked Wei'Er up from the chessboard, and set her aside. Wei'Er sat obediently in place, wrapping her tail around her body.

"Since I've known Church, he's been pursuing Afeiya... Oh, this shouldn't be called pursuing. His actions are merely going to buy flowers, and this has been going on for a year or two."

The more Palmer spoke, the more he shook his head, unable to tolerate Church's slow actions.

"If Church keeps buying them like this, he'll just remain a well-off customer!" Palmer slapped his thigh in frustration over Church's lack of resolve.

"So, you want to help Church?" Bologue fiddled with the chess pieces.

"Sort of... If Church continues like this, he'll just bury the secret deep in his heart, and that's just awful."

Palmer calmed down and gazed at the railroad tracks on the chessboard, which crossed through towering mountains and a snow-blanketed world...

"Everyone's an undisputed expert in their own area, but when it comes to unfamiliar angles, they're utter fools."

Bologue said, "Sounds like you really know something."

Palmer said, "I don't really know much; I've just been through it."

"Tell us?"

Serey became interested. Since the board game couldn't go on, listening to a story was also quite good. Serey loved various stories. When he was still a Night Race Lord, he once formed a maid team in the castle, and the maids' daily job was to lull Serey to sleep and tell him bedtime stories.

When they heard this past story, both Bologue and Palmer had complicated expressions, while Serey seemed thoroughly engrossed in the pleasant memory.

"That was back when I was getting ready to join the Order Bureau."

Palmer recalled the past, though it wasn't too far in the past, since he'd only been with the Order Bureau for a couple of years.

"As one of the heirs of the Clarks, the Order Bureau was not only a coalition to us but also an extension of the Clarks' power. Every generation, someone from the Clarks joined the Order Bureau and held important positions; I was no exception.

At the time, I didn't have any complicated thoughts about it. I just thought of it as going to a new place for work. I was already old enough and supposed to leave home for work, so I packed my luggage and was ready to leave. On the night before my departure, Vasilina came to see me."

Palmer paused for a moment and suddenly stopped talking.

Serey shouted, "Go on!"

"No... I suddenly realized that telling this story might ruin my heroic image..."

"What heroic image?! Just say it!"

Wei'Er raised her cat paw, her cold sharp claws gleaming.

"Alright, alright!" Palmer surrendered with his hands up, beginning to regret bringing it up.

"Back then, my relationship with Vasilina was childhood friends, I admit I had feelings for her, but just like Church, I kept quiet, too scared to confess."

Wei'Er murmured, "Even the heir of the Clarks turns into an idiot in such matters."

"Hey! I heard that!" Palmer was distressed.

Palmer was about to retort but deflated like a balloon and muttered.

"Upon hearing I was going to work away from home, Vasilina came to see me. I thought it would be some difficult goodbye scenario, but in reality... um..."

She asked if I was going to work for the Order Bureau, I nodded affirmatively, and then she said the Order Bureau was dangerous and asked if I would face many scary enemies. I admitted, and I comforted her by saying I was mentally prepared for such things and told her not to worry too much.

Yes, even at my coming of age, my damn old man force-fed me all these life-risking lessons, so how could I not be mentally prepared!"

Mentioning his peculiar dad and the life-risking coming of age, Palmer grew agitated.

Bologue remembered Palmer's coming of age ceremony, and every time he thought about it, even the serious Bologue couldn't help but laugh.

"Son, welcome to the New World!"

Accompanied by the father's kind words, a crazy and bizarre world unfolded like thunder before a child, leaving Palmer crying his eyes out in fear.

Oh dear, was Palmer's comedic talent not from his experiences but rather from his dad, passed down in the Clarks family?

"I explained a lot to Vasilina, telling her not to worry and whatnot, but she didn't listen at all and, with a serious face, said to me..."

Palmer mimicked Vasilina's serious tone at the time.

"Palmer, you're a jinx..."

"Hold on a minute! Jinx?" Serey raised his hand and interrupted Palmer, "Did you become a debtor at that time?"

"Huh? No, I've just always had bad luck since I was young," mentioning this, Palmer looked quite embarrassed, "And after becoming a debtor, the bad luck became increasingly apparent."

Bologue tried hard to stop himself from laughing.

Hahaha!

"Back to the main topic."

Palmer recounted what Vasilina said to him at the time. He rarely remembers something so clearly, let alone someone's words word for word.

Palmer remembered that night's conversation; it was etched in his heart like a sword.

"Palmer, you're such an unlucky fellow, going to such a dangerous place. You might die one day and then every secret buried in your heart will fade away... Isn't that just pitiful?"

A smile unconsciously appeared on Palmer's face, "Honestly, I didn't quite understand what she meant when she said that."

Serey asked, "And then?"

"Then Vasilina kissed me forcefully."

"What?"

"What?"

"Meow?"

Palmer's expression was mixed with shame and indignation, "What could I do! I couldn't resist her at all! I have never won against that jerk since I was young!"

"She pinned me against the wall and kissed me, then she smiled at me and left. I was completely stunned and couldn't sleep all night."

"The next day my dad saw me looking all downcast and he jokingly said," Palmer recounted something even more absurd, "True to my son, going out to fight evil, got so excited lost sleep!"

Serey didn't know what expression to put on anymore.

Thinking about the grand Night Race, and the rising Eternal Night Empire, being destroyed by the Clarks family, and now this old and powerful Extraordinary Clan, with such a bizarre manner...

Were these people really the ones we fought to the death with during the Dawn War?

Serey gently rubbed his forehead, even now the Night Race Lord doubted life for a moment.

"After I got to the Order Bureau, it took me a few weeks to slowly understand Vasilina's words," Palmer said softly, "She knew I liked her and knew I wouldn't dare to say it out loud. If I died out there, those feelings would never see the light of day."

"Instead of waiting for you to react, Vasilina chose to tear down that barrier herself?" Bologue said.

"Pretty much, it was only then that I realized belatedly that I actually had a girlfriend, and I was happy for a long time."

"Shouldn't it be fiancée?"

Bologue noticed Palmer's incorrect wording; mentioning "fiancée" made Palmer's face change slightly, unclear whether it was joy or distress, but it was definitely complex.

"What do you mean? I thought I had a girlfriend and was excitedly showing off to others. After working for more than a year, my dad came to the Order Bureau to visit me, ask how my work was going and so on, and then..."

Palmer recalled the situation back then.

"Hey! Son, still alive huh!"

"Hey! Dad, still strong huh!"

When they met at the Order Bureau, Palmer talked about his work experience. He encountered many problems, luckily Palmer received very comprehensive training within the Clarks family and handled them perfectly.

Palmer's dad then talked about the things that happened in Wind Source Highlands after Palmer left.

"By the way, Vasilina..."

As soon as Dad mentioned Vasilina, Palmer boasted, "I chased Vasilina, she's my girlfriend now."

Palmer was full of excitement, in the past Dad always teased him about Vasilina, now Palmer finally won one. But Dad was not surprised, instead, he nodded, correcting him.

"How can you call her a girlfriend?"

"Then what?"

"She's already your fiancée, don't call her a girlfriend anymore."

"Oh, I got it," Palmer noticed something off, "Hold on... What did you say?"

"Fiancée?"

"Fiancée... Fiancée!"

Palmer's scream echoed throughout the Order Bureau.

...

"Turns out after I left Wind Source Highlands, Vasilina went to my dad and exaggerated what happened that night to him."

Back in the present, Palmer spoke expressionlessly.

"Vasilina feared I would die out there and this emotion would be buried, but she also feared I would mess around after leaving Wind Source Highlands."

Palmer said as he pinched his chin, "After all, I'm somewhat charming, Vasilina's worries are understandable."

Despite saying this, Palmer's face was pale, as if telling a joke that wasn't funny at all.

"So Vasilina went for it, found my dad, and proposed to me.

Yes, you heard that right, I'm the one who was proposed to, and my dad actually agreed. They even finished the engagement banquet.

Of course, no one informed me, no one..."

Palmer slumped against the chair, his whole body sliding toward the table's bottom.

"Their explanation was, I was performing tasks at the Order Bureau at the time, they didn't want to distract me, and since I like Vasilina, I would definitely agree..."

Just like that, I got a fiancée."

Palmer slid to the bottom of the table, like a pale shell without a soul. Bologue half-lay on the table, and after a long time couldn't suppress the laughter, eventually, everyone stopped pretending, various laughter erupted continuously.

Chapter 524: Regret Follows Like a Shadow

It must be said, Palmer is truly inexplicable—even his love story is more outrageous than any ordinary person's.

Palmer downed several bottles of alcohol in a row, trying to climb out of the abyss of these awful memories, muttering non-stop, "From the outcome, it seems good, but I always feel something isn't right..."

Bologue comforted, "Well, with your brain, it's better not to think about these things."

"No, no, no, I'm still a bit angry; this is a major life event for me, after all, and they just dealt with it so carelessly?"

Palmer always felt something was wrong with his life, like the coming-of-age ceremony back then, those evil, crazy stories got instilled in him so easily, and then came this engagement...

It seems every incredibly important event in his life ultimately ended in a casual manner.

"Since then, I've been in a cold war with Vasilina for a while. I think I still like her, but not as much as before. My old man doesn't communicate with me, I can understand, but she actually doesn't say anything about this to me... It really makes me angry."

Bologue asked, "What happened later?"

It was clear that Palmer and Vasilina reconciled over something, and Bologue vaguely guessed why.

"Later? Then came the event that changed my fate. The Church and I were attacked by the Order of the Fiery Blight, and in a pinch, I became a Debtor."

Palmer often mentioned his experiences back then, mostly to brag, but this time was different; he rarely talked about his psychological activities during that time.

"You all are Undead, perhaps you can't comprehend these.

I was scared to death back then, enemies everywhere, the cold glint of swords flashing, bullets flying non-stop—I suddenly realized that the death I often joked about was close by.

I was going to die, die in this damned place, quietly becoming a corpse."

Palmer paused for a moment, his cheeks slightly flushed, looking tipsy; besides Serey, Palmer was somewhat a drunkard.

"It's just... in stories, they say when people are about to die, they reflect on their life's story, but my mind was empty."

Palmer's voice became unexpectedly serious.

"If there's anything to say, it's Vasilina.

I distinctly remembered her appearance, her voice, her scent, everything about her... She seemed to stand vividly in front of me, smiling at me just as always.

I felt sorry—I shouldn't have been in a cold war with her; if I had known, I would have definitely talked to her before I left. What we talked about didn't matter; I just wanted to make sure she was there.

Then I started feeling relieved. Thinking carefully, I was going to die, yet there was nothing to regret.

I started to understand Vasilina's actions; if she hadn't kissed me forcefully, the emotions would have faded away with death; if it wasn't for that damned engagement party, Vasilina wouldn't have become my fiancée...

It's as if she anticipated everything, filling all my regrets."

Palmer looked incredulous and surprised.

"I realized I could die satisfied, and there's nothing better than this."

Bologue nodded gently, earnestly listening to Palmer's incredible love story, while Wei'Er leaned to one side, occasionally licking her fur. Serey also collected her laughter; as she listened to Palmer's story, it seemed Serey recalled something too, her ruby-like eyes flickering with countless thoughts.

"I think I can follow the Death God's will now, but I also feel angry, very angry; I still couldn't get past the engagement."

As Palmer spoke, he cursed, "It's like I was being married off! What am I supposed to wear at that wedding, a wedding dress?"

Bologue agreed, "If you want, I think it's not bad."

Imagine Palmer wearing a wedding dress on stage... this quite matches Palmer's style.

"I don't know what I was thinking back then... just feeling it shouldn't be like this; she kissed me forcibly, I lost that round, so the proposal should be up to me. I need to win back!

As the heir of the Clarks, how could I be married off by another woman? I must survive; I need to see Vasilina, propose to her personally, instead of letting her sneakily go find my old man!

These things should be raised by me, right!"

"Very reasonable yet very strange motivation." Bologue began clapping.

Palmer said aggressively, "You all know the story after that. I seized the ceremony, negotiated with the Devil, and became the Debtor.

I survived to propose to Vasilina personally."

Bologue asked again, "And then? Did you propose to Vasilina?"

Palmer fell silent; the result was obvious.

"Well... how to say?" Palmer surprisingly appeared shy, "I just haven't had time to go back."

Bologue felt he listened to the story in vain, angrily slapped the table, "You and Church are not much different!"

"Not really, it's just..."

Palmer hesitated, didn't continue, and instead turned the topic back to Church.

"I think... no matter what, there should be a result, not left indefinite. Church can't keep living under masks; he isn't some ghost living among numerous masks but a living person."

Palmer's words made Bologue reminisce about the past, and he remembered knowing someone who lived behind a mask like that.

"I agree."

Serey suddenly spoke, "When regrets appear, that feeling of remorse, I think is the worst punishment."

The bright red gaze fell on Palmer, their eyes met, and suddenly Palmer felt like he was getting to know Serey all over again.

The deranged aura around Serey was completely gone, pale skin devoid of blood, and in the ruby-like eyes swirled a thousand sorrows. In a trance, Serey seemed to revert back to the ancient and mysterious Night Race Lord, waiting on the throne in the deep, dark castle for the dawn that would never come.

"Fortunately, mortals have a day to die, and regrets will fade away under the Devil's scythe. But the Undead are different; regrets accompany us until the end of time."

Serey fell silent after speaking, his gaze lowered to the wine glass, pondering matters unknown to anyone.

Bologue did not disturb Serey. This Night Race Lord had passed countless years. Even now as he plays with the mortals, indifferent to everything, Bologue believed that Serey's heart had been passionate once.

In his mind's eye, he couldn't help but recall Serey's thick-as-a-brick photo album, which documented all his wives... Over such a long life, there were bound to be regrets.

Then came thoughts about himself, about Bologue Lazarus's own regrets.

Bologue reminisced about those beautiful moments, deciding he would use his remaining life to make amends.

"Ah..."

Palmer raised his head, pondering, "I'll find some time to apologize to Church. But after that, I'll definitely drag him to see Afeiya."

Bologue said, "You really care about Church, don't you?"

"He's my partner, my good brother who has been through life and death with me!"

Palmer gave a thumbs up and then seemed to remember something which caused him to become deep in thought, sighing heavily towards Bologue.

Bologue wore a look of bewilderment, as Palmer had been doing this often lately, frequently sighing at him as if he was quite disappointing.

"The ascension ceremony is over. I'll go take leave from Lebius tomorrow, and then we can head to the Wind Source Highlands."

A smile spread across Palmer's face. He was about to ask Serey if he wanted to join, but seeing Serey's somber demeanor, he swallowed the words.

Serey looked somewhat terrible; everyone could see it, and at times like this, it's best not to tease this Undead.

"Oh, right, there's one more thing, Bologue."

Palmer suddenly remembered something, vigorously slapped Bologue's shoulder to get him to listen.

"Aimou didn't come today, but she asked me to deliver a message to you."

Palmer almost forgot about it.

"She wants to meet you tomorrow at the Sublimation Furnace Core."

...

Watching Bologue and Palmer leave, Serey looked somewhat weary. This time had to do with neither alcohol nor merriment, but a tiredness that came from the heart.

"Youth is good, isn't it? Always brimming with boundless energy whenever, wherever."

Wei'Er jumped in front of Serey, her cat-like eyes reflecting Serey's disheveled appearance.

"Indeed, it's beautiful but also foolish," Serey murmured.

"This sounds like something a lousy old father would say."

"Actually every elder would say something like this, wouldn't they?" Serey pretended to be deep in thought, "You're still young. When you grow older, you'll find these problems aren't problems anymore."

"They often use such words to justify regrets from youth, but we all know, when we grow up, we haven't reconciled with our past selves, but have just become numb instead."

Serey touched his chest, "The scars left behind remain there, not healed, just less painful."

"I'm going, going to sleep."

Serey finished speaking, swiftly left, giving Wei'Er no chance to say anything.

Walking up the stairs, Serey hurriedly went, as if fleeing from something, anxiously retreating to his room.

But that abhorrent thing didn't leave; not even a door could stop its advance, because it was hidden in Serey's memory, and as the years grew, it grew from a seed to a towering tree, becoming ever more terrifying, rampaging within his body, someday trying to burst through Serey's body.

Serey lay on the bed, curling himself into a ball with the quilt. Ancient portraits, brand-new photos, colorful group pictures... They were hung on the wall, with numerous faces and many gazes scrutinizing Serey.

Full of love, sympathy, anger, pity...

Serey turned his head away, not daring to look, muttering to himself.

"I'm not ready yet... I'm not ready yet..."

Chapter 525: Surprise

Order Bureau, Sublimation Furnace Core.

Aside from the Field Operations Department, the Sublimation Furnace Core was probably the department Bologue visited the most. He was already immensely familiar with it, and many of the Sublimation Furnace Core employees recognized Bologue, casually greeting him along the way.

In this light, Bologue might be considered something of a celebrity within the Order Bureau. There's no escaping this; while the Sublimation Furnace Core employees might not know about Bologue's excellent fieldwork, they are certainly aware of his Undead identity.

Ever since making that wicked deal with Belli, she often summoned Bologue to the Sublimation Furnace Core with tempting propositions he found hard to refuse, persuading him to cooperate with her work.

Fortunately, this awful lifestyle came to an end when Aimou arrived. Belli's attention shifted away from Bologue, as if a child with a new toy discarded the old one.

Initially, Bologue felt a bit... lost? Then he abruptly realized how awful this line of thinking was, and how peculiar Belli must be to have such an impact on him.

Thankfully, all of that was over, and now it was Aimou's turn to suffer.

Bologue navigated through the industrial nest, finding his way to the employee dormitories within the Sublimation Furnace Core. Thanks to the Cultivation Room's uncanny "activity," with appropriate permissions, room positions could be altered freely, even twisting spatial structures.

Utilizing her position as head of the Sublimation Furnace Core, regardless of Aimou's resistance, Belli managed to become Aimou's neighbor. If not for the door Aimou insisted on, they might have been considered roommates.

Bologue knocked on the door, and shortly after, swift footsteps approached, and the door opened to reveal Aimou.

Currently, the Special Operations Group had little work to address, and with Bologue's promotion ceremony concluded, Aimou found herself entirely free.

"Good morning."

Bologue lifted a hand in greeting.

"Good morning!"

Aimou responded energetically, seemingly waiting for Bologue. She had changed into new clothes, still the Order Bureau's uniform, but Bologue could discern the difference in their wear.

As an expert, such observation is essential.

After the greetings, Bologue fell silent, his expression remained as usual, gaze unfocused and wandering, as if looking at Aimou or somewhere else, his facial muscles completely relaxed like a cold corpse.

Aimou still wasn't adept at handling this sudden silence, her micro-expressions changed constantly, her pupils looking elsewhere, avoiding eye contact with Bologue.

Aimou was essentially still an Alchemy Puppet. After being granted the Blessing·Doppelganger by the Tyrant, Aimou could transform her Steel Body into flesh, each form having its pros and cons.

For example, the Steel Body allowed Aimou to ignore fatigue, operating like an ironman, whereas the flesh form endowed her with human perception, bringing her closer to resonating with Ether.

Presently, Aimou was in her flesh state, the cold shell gone, replaced by the pliable flesh she enjoyed maintaining in everyday life like a human.

Yet, they stood at the doorway, Bologue appearing patient, while Aimou's mind was turbulent with countless thoughts.

"Damn it, what am I supposed to say next!"

Aimou screamed internally.

When she first met Bologue, Aimou could joke around, comfortably play pranks on him, watching him look flustered.

Back then, Aimou only saw Bologue as an ordinary character, allowing her to tease him without any psychological burden, not caring about his opinion of her.

But now everything was different. Bologue led her out of her mental maze, and Aimou found herself deeply attracted to him, valuing his presence, realizing she could no longer face Bologue with that carefree attitude.

Aimou was shackled.

The more one values another, the more they care about that person's thoughts, worrying if their words and actions would upset them. A smile from them would bring joy for a long time, while a slight frown could bring sadness.

For Aimou, it was like a serious interview, fearing she might make a wrong decision and get "eliminated" by Bologue.

"Palmer said you were looking for me, is it about work?"

Bologue broke the silence, his words as straightforward as ever.

Aimou was a bit dazed, Bologue's indifferent demeanor combined with his tone resembled a cold work machine. If he hadn't guided her before, Aimou might still doubt whether Bologue had any emotions.

"Uh... It's both personal and work-related."

Aimou felt something amiss with the conversation, but at least it broke the silence instead of stifling them.

"Anyway, come with me first!"

Aimou raised a string of keys, took Bologue's hand, and led him towards the warehouse.

Bologue followed behind Aimou, observing her figure shorter than his, like she was awkwardly pulling cargo.

In truth, Bologue could sense a certain rigidity and deliberateness when Aimou spoke with him.

Was she embarrassed, or afraid of something?

Because of him? That must be it; it was just them there.

Was she feeling awkward around him, or was it something else? Bologue thought it shouldn't be so. They were comrades who had been through thick and thin, such concerns should be ignored by now.

Just like with Palmer, initially when they partnered, there was some awkwardness, maintaining a safe distance. Now, after becoming roommates...

Recalling Palmer's terrible habits, Bologue was left with a headache. After a drunken return home last night, he even blurted out asking Bologue to be his best man.

"Bologue, actually, when I first met you, I thought we wouldn't get along."

When Bologue carried Palmer back to his own bed, Palmer, drunk, said.

"From the first time I saw you, I thought, wow! Look at this guy, with such a grim and resentful look, he must be someone hard to get along with. Maybe he even has some twisted, strange fetishes."

"And then?"

"And then, I guessed right, you're indeed a lunatic!" Palmer rolled over on the bed, "But surprisingly, you're quite easy to get along with."

"Maybe it's because the first impression you give others is too strong," in the dim light, Palmer used his fingers to give his eyelid a tug, "You seem too cold, Bologue."

"Like a sick killer just out of prison, full of contempt... you should smile more often."

After saying all that, Palmer fell into a drunken sleep, while Bologue quietly closed the room door. In his heart, he thought, Palmer actually guessed quite right, his partner wasn't entirely useless; in some ways, Palmer was quite keen.

Smile more.

Bologue wondered if Aimou wasn't used to his current expression, but he had been this way before, and she hadn't shown any sign of discomfort. But making some changes himself, it seems, wouldn't hurt.

Yes, it wouldn't hurt.

A friendly work environment would undoubtedly improve work efficiency and employee relationships, Bologue decided to give it a try.

Aimou felt some resistance from her arm and turned her head to find Bologue suddenly stopped.

The two made eye contact, and under Aimou's gaze, Bologue slowly broke into a smile. However, this deliberate smile blooming from his cold face gave the impression of a cold-blooded killer spotting a lamb, ready to make his move.

Aimou shivered, "You... what are you doing?"

"Smiling, right? Always looking cold isn't great."

Aimou was silent, on one hand amazed that Bologue actually had this self-awareness, on the other realizing her concerns were unfounded, and while Bologue was self-aware, his execution was still terrible.

Reaching out her hand, Aimou rubbed Bologue's corners of the mouth, the sternness dissipated, adding a bit of softness.

Aimou advised, "The smile is terrible, don't do it again next time."

"Oh."

Bologue nodded, secretly gritting his teeth, and whispered in his heart, "Damn Palmer."

After the interaction, Aimou felt a lot more relaxed, sometimes feeling she might overthink things, which was unlike her former self... maybe this is what human emotions are.

The cold steel body was being corroded by human sensibility, Aimou did not resist this.

"You're quite similar to Palmer," Aimou suddenly said, "Both of you have some bizarre thoughts in your heads, but Palmer will say them out, while you keep silent and then take action... which leads to you doing some odd things out of the blue."

Bologue asked, "Does it seem stupid?"

"Others might think it's stupid," Aimou said unsurely, "but I think it's rather cute."

"Huh?"

Bologue never imagined the word 'cute' would be associated with him.

Seeing Bologue's surprised reaction, Aimou laughed happily. She felt she was gradually regaining the feeling of interacting with Bologue like before. Maybe the recent busyness and random thoughts had made her feel unfamiliar.

"Alright, here we are."

Aimou opened the warehouse door, various goods piled up like mountains.

Bologue still couldn't understand this matter, "So what do you need me for?"

"Well... consider it a token of appreciation?"

Bologue still didn't get it, "Appreciation for what?"

"For saving me."

"I thought that matter was over."

"To me, it's not over yet."

Aimou struggled to open a box, revealing the results of her recent all-nighters at work.

"Although I created this thing, aberrant products inherently are full of randomness; even with a reference, it took me a long time to reforge it..."

Aimou took something out of the box, hiding it behind her back, looking playfully at Bologue.

"Guess what it is?"

From Aimou's explanation about the difficulty in making it, Bologue already guessed it. After all, he's an expert; deducing such things is a breeze. Under normal circumstances, Bologue would have replied with the correct answer, but he felt... a overly rational answer didn't seem applicable at this moment.

Bologue maintained his smile and shook his head, "Can't guess."

"Ta-da!"

Aimou raised the thing behind her back, inside the exquisite container, silver mercury swirled.

"Great partner!"

Chapter 526: Fire Rose

Inside the container roiled the silvery hue with which Bologue was intimately familiar. Apart from Palmer and Aimou, for a long time, it had been Bologue's closest comrade in battle. But under the devouring of the Immortal Heart, it, along with the armor of the Silver Knight, was destroyed.

"Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid."

Bologue softly called out, reaching out to touch the container. Cyan flames engulfed and covered it, and then a copious amount of Ether infused into the silvery liquid.

Driven by the Flame of the Cauldron, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid bubbled as if boiling, agitated in the cyan firelight.

The liquid inside the container was constantly changing form, between solid and liquid, eventually transforming into the Silver Snake that Bologue was most familiar with and adept at controlling, coiling its body inside the container.

As Bologue advanced to become a Prayer Believer, his precise control over Ether took a further step. Previously, the Silver Snake only had a rough snake form, but this time, its dense scales were distinctly visible. The scales rubbed and opened as the Silver Snake moved forward, resembling a real Silver Snake.

To this day, Bologue still highly treasures the solid-liquid transformation nature of the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid. After advancing to a Prayer Believer, Bologue had broken the limitation of touching with his hands, but his command was still confined to solid state entities.

The nature of the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid would help Bologue "cheat," thereby circumventing the constraints of Narrow and Sharp.

"Thank you so much, Aimou!"

Bologue's tone was somewhat excited, now realizing what Aimou had been busy with recently.

Everyone is attracted to something. Serey enjoys entertainment, Lebius is engrossed in work, Palmer... Palmer likes many things.

Weapons undoubtedly have a strong allure for Bologue. As an expert, Bologue finds it hard to resist anything that can improve his work efficiency.

Just like Aimou.

The Silver Snake began to self-transform and expand, the narrow container could no longer confine it, and then it broke open the container, coiling around Bologue's arm.

The smile on Bologue's face gradually faded as he noticed the anomaly in the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid... this was not the familiar Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid.

Amidst the flickering silver-white, faint crimson could be seen, these patches intermixed if not observed carefully, hard to detect.

"Initially, the birth of the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid was entirely an accident. From a work perspective, it's full of flaws, and only due to its peculiar properties was it classified as Corruption Black Level Alchemy Armament."

Aimou thus explained, gently stroking the crawling snake.

Under Bologue's command, the Silver Snake was vivid, flicking its tongue, and the red patches on it gathered in its eyes. Facing those scarlet eyes, this dead object seemed to be endowed with consciousness.

Aimou said, "As a product of the transformation of mercury, I've integrated another transformative substance into it. There were many issues in between, but fortunately, I still managed to forge it."

Bologue roughly sensed the kind of modifications Aimou made to the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid. The Ether gradually intensified, the Silver Snake disintegrated, transformed into sturdier scale armor covering Bologue's arm.

The Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid's extensibility in liquid form was greatly reduced, but this could be compensated by the Prayer Believer's more precise control. As the price, the hardness in solid form saw a significant increase, although its strength temporarily could not compare to protective Iron-Repelling Paint, it was still a very noticeable improvement.

Now it resembled iron-forged scale armor more than a multitude of serpentine mercury.

Flames arose from the scale armor, judging from the flame color, this was not Bologue's Cyan Ether Flames, but a pure, bright red flame. With the infusion of Ether, the flames grew more intense, high temperature scorching, disturbing the airflow.

"Is that so?"

Only then did Bologue realize the true enhancement of the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid. He looked at Aimou in disbelief, this gift truly surprised him.

"I attempted to integrate Red Mercury into it and make it possess the same properties as the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid. Well... let's say it was half successful. Red Mercury can perform some self-transformation, but its efficiency is much lower than the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid. Moreover, it cannot switch between solid and liquid. Most of the time, when you're controlling the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, you're conveniently controlling the Red Mercury attached to it."

Aimou's hand transformed into a cold Steel Body, touching the burning scale armor through the flames.

"I dubbed this property 'Scorching Scale.' When necessary, you can completely view it as a Red Mercury bomb detonation. The enemy will certainly be caught off guard."

The flames extinguished, the metal glowing with residual heat. Once it completely cooled down, Bologue dispersed the scale armor, allowing them to return to a multitude of snakes slithering under his sleeves.

Feeling the metallic pressure on his body, Bologue surprisingly regained a sense of security.

Indeed, Bologue always carries a few self-defense weapons, whether it's a folding knife or an iron hammer. Even with Bologue's Flame of the Cauldron, he would never lack weapons for combat, yet he is unable to give up the feeling of having physical objects accompanying him.

Completely armed.

Bologue likes this feeling, a sense of rigorous and professional perfect stance.

"Now, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid can be considered a genuine Corruption Black Level Alchemy Armament," Aimou said hesitantly, continuing, "In the future, if I have the capability to transform higher-tier Alchemy Armaments, I'll find a way to continue its transformation."

Bologue used terms from novels to describe their relationship, "You are my Weapon Forger."

Aimou was stunned for a second or two before reacting to what Bologue was saying.

This is the setting in Night Hunter, where the armed train that roared by not only carries fully armed hunters, but also serves as their base. They live on the train, hone their skills, and conduct logistical work between the carriages.

The Weapon Forger is a part of the logistics team, specialized in forging weapons for hunters to hunt demons, and they are not traditional blacksmiths. Most of them are also skilled in concocting peculiar magic potions, similar to the Alchemy Potion in the Extraordinary World.

Seeing Aimou's lukewarm reaction, Bologue asked skeptically, "Was my joke really that cold?"

"No... It's just that you rarely joke. Every time you do, I need some time to think whether you're joking or seriously saying something odd, although there's not much difference between the two."

Aimou said this, but couldn't hide the smile on her face, then she corrected, "It should be Guardian Angel!"

"Guardian Angel? Hmm, that's reasonable."

Bologue remained calm, seemingly unaffected by Aimou's words. Not only that, he began to ponder seriously.

During the elevation ceremony, Aimou conducted Shared Chord Body with Bologue, awakening him from Between Nothingness...

Bologue had never understood whether he was awakened by Aimou or banished by an astronaut, but there's no need to think about these things right now, as they only add to his worries.

But looking at it from this perspective, using Guardian Angel to describe it seems reasonable.

"What... what are you doing?"

After handing over the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, Bologue remained silent, watching Aimou. Aimou could clearly sense that Bologue's cyan eyes gradually solidified, as if his gaze had previously been in a diffused state.

The prolonged eye contact was unnerving, and not being able to control her expression was also difficult. Aimou once thought she was a person who showed no emotion, but after transforming into flesh and blood, she realized her Steel Body was simply unable to make expressions.

She tried hard to control her facial muscles, and suddenly turning back into Steel Body would feel like admitting defeat, but what Aimou didn't notice was that the halo in her eyes had already started an uneasy change, completely exposed to Bologue.

Bologue suddenly said, "Even if the Sublimation Furnace Core contains samples of Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, it must have taken considerable effort to recast and optimize it."

"It's alright, in the Steel Body state, I can work continuously for several days and nights."

Aimou exhaled deeply, realizing Bologue was just curious about her work.

Bologue nodded lightly, surprised that Aimou valued her work so much. Truly an excellent recruit he brought in, given time, Aimou would surely become a capable Field Staff.

"You value this greatly, thank you very much," Bologue said, "But I currently have nothing to offer as thanks."

"Ah? No, no, it's nothing."

Aimou waved her hands repeatedly, feeling that Bologue was too strange. Sometimes he's like a stagnant water, with no reaction regardless of what she does, and other times he's as swift as thunder, catching her off guard.

Silver Snake emerged from Bologue's sleeve, molded under the Flame of the Cauldron, the soft liquid metal solidified one by one, intertwining and twisting into a metal rose in Bologue's hand.

Under Bologue's command, it resembled a real rose, each petal distinct and clear, faintly tinged with red. That was the dispersed Red Mercury.

Bologue infused it with as much ether as possible to prolong the lifespan of the Illusory Creation and fully solidify it into a tangible entity.

"Sorry, I'm not a condenser of the illusion school, so I can't make it Fantasy Becoming Reality," Bologue said, handing the metal rose to Aimou, "Try injecting ether, but don't inject too much."

Aimou hazily received the metal rose, following Bologue's instructions and injected ether into it.

A few sparks ignited between the petals, the Red Mercury was ignited, and thereafter the flame fully bloomed within the floral heart, transforming into a rose ablaze with flames, scattering bits of stardust between its seams.

Fire Rose bloomed and withered in flames, destruction and beauty coexisting, bringing an unusual aesthetic.

The pure flame burned quietly and flickered, its light reflected in Aimou's eyes.

She looked at the Fire Rose in her hand, then at the expressionless Bologue, Aimou's face was filled with confusion and incredulity, as if the scene before her couldn't possibly happen in reality, yet it had appeared so concretely.

"I'm so foolish," Aimou said to herself, "for trying to guess your thoughts."

You simply can't guess.

"Thank you."

Aimou put away the Fire Rose and whispered.

Chapter 527: The Master and the Pet

"Bologue! Why!"

Around noon, a shrill scream pierced through the door from the living room. Bologue leisurely glanced at the door, counting down mentally.

"One, two, three..."

On "three," the door was forcefully pushed open. Palmer, in his pajamas, looked at Bologue with a twisted expression.

Palmer loudly questioned, "Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I did wake you, but you said you wanted to sleep a bit longer," Bologue retorted bluntly, "An excellent field staff should strictly adhere to time."

Palmer opened his mouth slightly, pointing at Bologue. He wanted to say more to criticize Bologue, but this was indeed his fault, and Bologue was someone he couldn't out-argue or outfight.

A fit of frustration surged within his chest. Coupled with the fatigue and alcohol aftermath of playing board games with Serey until dawn, Palmer felt dizzy and nearly collapsed.

"Palmer, you need to improve your lifestyle schedule; otherwise, I might have the privilege of witnessing the first sudden death of a Condenser."

This period of shared living made Bologue acutely aware of how terrible Palmer's personal life was. Despite his glamorous exterior, he was rotten inside. Every time Bologue pushed open Palmer's door, he could always smell a scent reminiscent of the Great Rift.

A mix of all sorts of messy stuff fermented in the dark, gloomy environment...

Luckily, Palmer had a strong sense of territory and wreaked havoc only in his bedroom. The living room was still unscathed, but... it was just a matter of time.

Palmer's books, records, and videotapes filled the shelves, with some even piled on the floor. Bologue felt like a babysitter.

"If you can finish tidying up within half an hour, we can still make it."

Bologue raised his hand, revealing his watch, gesturing to Palmer.

Palmer took several deep breaths, refrained from saying anything extra, turned around, and started busying himself. The living room was filled with noise, with no idea what Palmer was doing.

Bologue leisurely sat in a chair, leafing through a novel. Bologue was almost done with "Night Hunter," but "Night Hunter" was a series with many sequels.

Thinking about this, Bologue hesitated for a moment but then opened his laptop, packed a few "Night Hunter" books into the bag, and placed the bag on the suitcase by the bed.

After going through so many events, Bologue finally took a break and planned to travel, returning home with Palmer.

Bologue believed work required seriousness, and travel required complete relaxation. Thinking about the distance between Wind Source Highlands and Oubos, Bologue felt he had enough free time to read and pass the time.

About half an hour later, Bologue picked up the bag and, dragging the suitcase, walked out of the bedroom. Outside, Palmer was ready, although half an hour was a bit too short for him. He looked exhausted.

"So formal?"

Bologue scrutinized Palmer. It had only been half an hour, yet Palmer seemed like a different person.

Palmer had meticulously cleaned himself, groomed his hair, and put on an outfit Bologue had never seen him wear.

Bologue, a supporter of pragmatism, knew little about extravagant fashion, but even so, he could instinctively sense the expense of Palmer's new clothes.

A black sleeveless coat with dark gold patterns outlining the collar, a tailcoat at the back, then a dark green cape... This didn't look like modern attire but rather clothing from a hundred years ago that should appear in an oil painting.

"Is this the 'traditional attire' of your Extraordinary Clans and Secret Societies?"

Bologue took a few seconds to recall related knowledge. When receiving the uniform from Geoffrey, Geoffrey mentioned these to him.

"Pretty much, just some old families still have these traditions, like the Clarks," Palmer, feeling awkward, hadn't worn this for a long time, "This is the outfit I wore when I first joined the Order Bureau."

Palmer spread his arms, stretching a bit, "How do I look?"

"Not bad, at least now you look like an heir rather than a hangover-stricken drunk."

After changing into this vintage outfit, Palmer surprisingly appeared much more formal, possessing a touch of noble aura—a mere flash in the pan.

Palmer was no longer that noble heir. In the brief time at the Order Bureau, he had utterly succumbed to being a drunk, playing board games with mirth.

Bologue, pulling the suitcase to the door, asked, "Are you nervous?"

"Of course, this is my first time returning home since starting work," Palmer said, "Or maybe I just haven't sobered up yet."

Thinking of this, Palmer rummaged through his suitcase, took out a potion, and directly injected it into his neck.

"Is that... a Concentration Potion?"

Bologue's expression turned complex. This potion was distributed by the Order Bureau to debtors, used to remain alert during episodes of Bulimia Nervosa.

Apparently, Palmer used it to sober up.

"You can't blame me entirely. Last night, it was Wei'Er who insisted we play a few more rounds."

Palmer's expression twitched, his eyes rolled back as he pulled out the needle, shivering, and instantly becoming much more alert.

"How do I look now?"

"You look like you're going to drop dead any second..."

Going downstairs, getting in the car, driving onto the crowded streets.

"Ah, going home this time... I wonder what the old folks back home will say about me," Palmer grumbled, holding the steering wheel.

Palmer's life in Oubos initially wasn't as downbeat as it is now. As the heir to the Clarks, the first to embark on the Perfect Path: Wind Fury Way, and the Order Bureau's Employee of the Year, Palmer was once very glamorous.

According to Palmer's own expectations, with his background and work capabilities, his career path should have been bright, with promotions and raises just around the corner. However, fate dealt him a severe blow, turning Palmer into a debtor, after which his life took a sharp downward turn.

The experiences between life and death drastically changed Palmer's disposition, from loving work to his current lazy and laid-back attitude, only thinking about enjoying life's pleasures and retiring as soon as possible.

The Clarks cut off Palmer's living expenses, but Palmer didn't care. He relied on his meager salary, living a minimal life.

Bologue glanced at Palmer, who was driving, feeling he might have worsened Palmer's decline. With him, an immortal partner, he relieved a lot of work pressure for Palmer, which led to co-housing and free drinks at the Undying Club.

After living together, Bologue found out Palmer spent a big chunk of his salary on alcohol. Ever since they started freeloading at the Undying Club, that money got saved and turned into a pile of videotapes, records, and books filling the living room...

Bologue muttered, "Oh well, as long as he's happy."

This is Bologue's current attitude towards Palmer, that one should not die and be happy.

This idea roots back to before the time-axis disorder incident, back then in the Undying Club, Bologue saw Serey's thick photo album and his countless wives.

Spurred by curiosity, Bologue asked Serey, "With your wives... what kind of mindset do you approach those relationships with?"

"No matter how beautiful they are, they will age eventually, and no matter how profound your love, it will ultimately perish with death."

Serey was facing a party that would inevitably end while he would remain, welcoming the beginning of the next act alone.

Serey replied sincerely, without any pretense, candidly saying, "We're merely nominally married."

"And in reality?"

"In reality, it's more like master and pet."

"Is that... some kind of fetish of yours?"

Serey frowned, "Hold on, I'm being serious here, alright."

He continued to explain, "Just like humans who keep pets, we indeed love our pets, willing to invest enough time and affection, and tolerate some of their foolishness.

Humans live far longer than cats and dogs, confident in caring for them their whole lives without needing them to grow up or learn to hunt and survive because we are here. In our eyes, they can forever remain as cubs, even if to them, they are already old and grey."

Bologue asked, "Do you feel your wives are like these 'pets' to you?"

"More or less, I am an Undead, once a Night Race Lord, holding endless wealth. I do love them, caring for them all their lives until death parts us."

Serey hesitated for a moment, then smiled and added, "But sometimes, I feel that this love isn't that 'true love', but more like the love between a master and a pet, an unequal, self-satisfying kind of love.

I give them what they want, and they accompany me through the long years."

"And then there's what I told you before, I've grown tired of these separations, coming here to find my kind," Serey thought it over, as if defending himself, "As for the sincerity of love... I think people don't need to live so lucidly."

Bologue wasn't like Serey. Bologue believed his relationships with everyone were equal; he did not look down on others high and mighty, and he also chose to maintain enough patience and tolerance.

Serey felt it was merely mutual benefit, a fair and straightforward transaction. Bologue believed he was more of a guardian, hoping his friends could live a good life under his watchful eyes.

"Just like watching over a terminally ill patient..."

Bologue suddenly burst into laughter.

Palmer was very annoyed by Bologue's hysterical laughter, "What's so funny?"

"I just think of how you'll be dead in a hundred or two hundred years, and then all those stupid things you've done seem tolerable," Bologue's eyes reflected pity, his tone deliberately somber, "You're going to die, Palmer, that's so pitiful, do more happy things before you die."

"You're insane!"

Palmer slapped the steering wheel hard, the ear-piercing sound of the horn blaring continuously.

Chapter 528: Travel

"Wait a minute, aren't we supposed to go to the train station?"

As Bologue followed Palmer into the Order Bureau, he realized that something was amiss. Before packing, Bologue had already looked at the map. They were supposed to take a train and go through several transfers to reach the Wind Source Highlands, but Palmer hadn't driven to the station. Instead, he headed to the Order Bureau.

The two of them arrived at the Courtyard of the Crooked Path. Bologue had arrived at the Order Bureau from here initially. On the high platform of the Central Courtyard, the towering gate stood silently as always.

Palmer said, "Train station? Are you crazy? It would take us several days to get there."

Pulling out a credential from his pocket, Palmer waved it at Bologue, "We have a more efficient way of traveling."

"A Key of the Crooked Path directly to the Wind Source Highlands?"

Bologue immediately guessed why they had come here. Behind the gate was a strange space known as the "Transfer Station," where endless doors stood in the darkness, with one surely leading to the Wind Source Highlands.

Palmer nodded forcefully in agreement, and Bologue quickly threw out another question.

"Since it's so convenient for you to get home, why are you only going back now?"

"It took me so much effort to get out; I have no desire to return to that hellhole!"

Faced with Palmer's vehement protest, Bologue recalled Palmer's rebellious childhood.

When dealing with the "Man-eater," Bologue and Palmer had a long chat at a gas station. Palmer talked about his absurd childhood, and after a disastrous coming-of-age ceremony, Palmer became increasingly resistant to the fate that shackled him, wanting to escape the Wind Source Highlands.

Now Palmer had indeed escaped that place, but in a few hours, he would return again.

Palmer said nothing, but Bologue could feel he was tense all over, like someone who had run away from home for many years, uncertain if he would feel family affection upon return or face a storm of criticism.

"Ah? You're already here."

A familiar voice echoed, and Bologue turned his head. Aimou emerged from the crowd, carrying a suitcase.

"Why are you here?"

Bologue remembered the itinerary only included himself and Palmer.

"Oh, when I requested leave from Lebius, Aimou was there too. Since everyone was free, I invited her to come along."

Palmer patted his chest and gave Aimou a thumbs-up, "I'm after all the heir of the Clarks, personally showing you around the Wind Source Highlands."

"What about me?"

Another voice rang out from above the platform. The person seemed to have been there for a while. Looking up, an ordinary face came into view.

"Chu... Church?" Palmer's smile froze.

"Don't worry, unlike you, I'm not here for a tour," Church lifted a document marked with the insignia of several departments, "This is a mission from the Crow's Nest. I need to go to the Clarks to confirm some things. Once we reach the Wind Source Highlands, we can go our separate ways."

With that, Church's eyes, tinged with a cold gleam, fell on Palmer. It seemed he still held a grudge over that night. But in the next second, Church's impassive face suddenly broke into a smile, which sent a shiver down Palmer's spine.

"I'm not that petty, Palmer, don't be nervous. We were partners once, weren't we?"

Church smiled warmly, but despite the amicable words, they sounded completely different to Palmer's ears.

Instinctively, Palmer leaned slightly toward Bologue, signaling with his eyes for Bologue to move forward, while Bologue looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"Why are you looking at me? I've never been to the Wind Source Highlands."

"Bologue, you..."

Palmer sighed in resignation and waved to the group, "Alright, alright, let's go together, let's go."

They ascended the platform and pushed open the heavy gate. Palmer plunged into the darkness, followed by Church, with Bologue and Aimou bringing up the rear.

Aimou wasn't unused to using the Key of the Crooked Path, but it was her first time at the "Transfer Station." Confronting the solemn and grand gate, she couldn't help but feel nervous. A faint touch came from behind as Bologue nudged her, indicating he was right behind her.

Darkness enveloped her vision, followed by a physiological wave of nausea. A faint light trickled down from above, gradually becoming brighter and dispelling the surrounding darkness.

Bologue held his breath, overwhelmed by the immense silence swallowing all sound, an unspoken pressure descending from the noiseless world.

Now Bologue was no longer the ordinary person he once was; such bizarre effects couldn't disturb him.

He coughed deliberately, the sound echoing in the darkness, breaking the silence. Soon, Bologue could distinctly hear several deep breaths around him, as if everyone else, like him, couldn't help but hold their breath upon entering the Transfer Station.

In the dimness, the outlines of the group gradually became clear. They huddled together, wandering in the deathly quiet dark world.

After stepping through the gate, an endless black wall stood behind them. In the distant darkness, a few doors could be faintly discerned standing upright.

Palmer led the way in front, retrieving the credential while walking. He shook it vigorously in the air, igniting small sparks. Then, the nameless fire consumed the credential entirely, and Palmer let it burn to ashes.

As the credential burned to nothing, Bologue distinctly felt something stirred in the boundless darkness. More perplexingly, he detected a trace of a sinister feeling.

Like the chaotic frenzy of the Devil.

Before Bologue could grasp this sensation, Palmer's words interrupted his reverie.

"Come on, it's this door."

Palmer walked to the other end of the black wall, where a large door was embedded in the wall in the dim light. The door was entirely cast of cold metal, adorned with a swirling tornado engraving. It was so vivid, it felt as if the craftsman had actually captured the storm and melded it within.

The Order Bureau was initially composed of six secret societies, acting as the main force against the King's Secret Sword, often active in Oubos and the Narrow Countries.

To ensure internal stability within the Rhine Alliance, these secret societies became the limbs of the Order Bureau domestically, extending their reach throughout the nations within the Rhine Alliance.

Accurately speaking, these secret societies are considered branches of the Order Bureau in various places. However, most of the time, they remain autonomous and do not need to follow the Bureau's instructions completely.

Bologue asked softly, "Palmer, do you feel anything?"

"I'm nervous, very nervous, and a bit scared," Palmer said. "The Wind Source Highlands are too far from the Order Bureau, meaning the side effects of this Curved Path Shuttling will be very strong. We might just come out and start throwing up."

Listening to Palmer's nonsense, Bologue thought he shouldn't have asked him.

Bologue tried to chase that maddening intent, but no matter how much he tried to perceive it, he still came up empty, as if it was just an illusion of his, not really there.

Is it really so?

Bologue gazed into the endless darkness.

Strange noises emanated from the depths of the darkness. Bologue looked up as a scene he had never witnessed unfolded before him. Long, pale thin hands emerged from the black wall, extending all the way to the group.

Bologue tensed up, clenching his fists, his secret energy ready to be unleashed when Palmer raised a hand to stop him.

"Don't be nervous, it's the 'Gatekeeper.'

"Gatekeeper? What the hell is that?"

Bologue remained on guard, trying hard to suppress his strong urge to attack. From the moment those eerie, thin arms appeared, Bologue once again detected that maddening intent, which was linked to the Devil.

"One of the defensive mechanisms of the Order Bureau. When someone makes a long-distance move or attempts to open certain important 'gates,' the Gatekeeper appears. Even if you have the key, you still need the Gatekeeper's approval," Church explained at this point.

The thin hands landed in front of the dusty door. The ashes floating in the air were stirred by a faint breeze, resting on those deformed palms, and then slowly clenched.

"Pass..."

A deep voice echoed, and the hands retracted into the darkness.

Palmer took out the Key of the Crooked Path from his pocket, inserted it into the keyhole, and slowly turned it. The faint light traced along the patterns on the door, and with a gentle tremor, the door slowly opened.

"Home at last."

Palmer murmured and stepped into the darkness without hesitation, following closely with the others trailing his footsteps into the darkness as well.

Within the darkness, the sense of space and time completely disappeared. Twisted and bizarre forces rose continually in their hearts as if being bottled up and shaken by a giant.

Aimou was in much better condition. Before entering the darkness, she transformed into a Steel Body, blocking out many senses. Yet, even so, the glimmer in her eyes flickered incessantly.

After a while, the sounds of tides and storm winds came from within the darkness, and faintly, the fresh scent of green grass could be picked up.

The darkness lifted, the door behind them closing slowly. Before they had time to take in their surroundings, a strong wave of nausea had them all bending over, retching.

Bologue and Church managed to maintain some decorum, while Palmer was in a terrible state. Despite his seemingly neat appearance, just hours ago, he'd been partying in a drunken haze with Serey.

With a retching sound, Palmer spewed yellow and white onto the ground, and the smell of alcohol permeated instantly.

Completely gone, all gone.

Palmer originally intended to maintain some semblance of dignity in the eyes of his family, but the moment he arrived home, he utterly lost his cool. Palmer could already imagine the piercing gazes and mocking words.

He wiped his mouth, mustering the courage to lift his head. The anticipated mental blow did not come. Looking around, not to mention welcoming family members, there wasn't a single living person in sight.

Palmer first felt relief that no one witnessed his sorry state, followed by sadness that despite finally making it back, no one was there to greet him. Was he really so unimportant...?

Wait a minute, maybe he didn't notify his family because he wanted it to be a surprise.

"Is this the Wind Source Highlands?"

Bologue had already recovered and realized that they were on top of a clock tower, under an ancient giant clock. The Curved Path Gate was located below the clock, surrounded by towering arches, giving a clear view of the world outside the tower.

Endless green plains stretched out, with steep cliffs lining the seashore, and a gloomy, oppressive sky flashing with thunder, alongside a storm at an arm's reach.

Bologue gazed at the storm raging over the sea, with countless sinister and eerie silhouettes illuminated by the lightning and thunder within the storm.

A sea of ether surged violently, wailing in high-pitched tones. Bologue couldn't visually discern the situation, but judging by the drastic ethereal fluctuations, they undoubtedly found themselves upon an extraordinary battlefield.

Holding their luggage.

Bologue numbly asked, "Are you sure this is your home?"

"Umm... probably,"

Palmer stared blankly at the towering storm.

Chapter 529: Flock of Wind-Eroded Birds

Something... feels off.

A moment ago, several people were safely inside the Order Bureau, and the next, they found themselves in this unfamiliar environment. Intense ether waves enveloped the surrounding area, storm clouds rolled with thunder, gradually advancing from the sea toward the cliffs.

It was like a gloomy gray iron curtain, continuously compressing people's living space, facing it alone was enough to feel an overwhelming pressure bearing down.

Not to mention in that storm, countless twisted and bizarre figures were intertwining, leaping, with the faint sound of sharp, dreadful screeches.

After a brief haze, Palmer's mind completely cleared up. He walked to the edge of the clock tower, rubbed his eyes vigorously, and overlooked the dire castle built along the cliff.

"That's right... we've reached the Wind Source Highlands, this is the Clarks' dwelling, the Fortress of the Morning Wind."

The sight before him differed somewhat from his memory, but Palmer would never forget the scent mingling fresh grass and ocean.

This is the unique aroma of the Wind Source Highlands, already engraved into Palmer's bloodline, impossible to forget.

Several others also reached the edge of the clock tower, overlooking the land. The fierce wind blew, interspersed with cold raindrops, as if the end of the world was upon them.

The Clarks family resides at the edge of the Wind Source Highlands, atop the coastal cliffs. Viewed from afar, the Fortress of the Morning Wind resembles a few wandering paths, both standing endlessly along the steep edges, but the scale and grandeur of the Fortress far exceed those of wandering paths.

The Fortress of the Morning Wind refers not just to a single castle, but a series of castle clusters built along the highland cliffs. They stood like walls blocking the edge of the sea, intricate high towers soared, on this storm-whistling plateau, seemingly born from divine power.

Wind Source Highlands, the origin of endless gale.

Few know that the rampant wind on the highland does not originate from this land. This vast wilderness is merely the starting point of these hurricanes.

All winds originate from the boundless sea.

Adjacent to the Wind Source Highlands is a sea area called Angry Sea by the world. It features erratic and bizarre weather, perennial strong winds raging, frequent storms surging, sweeping over the Wind Source Highlands.

It is the forbidden land for all sailors; no routes go near here. Coupled with the Fortress of the Morning Wind at the edge of the highland, periodically sweeping storms, over time, this place gradually faded from the sight of the world, wrapped in a layer of mystery.

The fierce wind blew over the castle cluster, polishing the rough rocks. Bologue struggled to open his eyes, and then a shadow continuously enlarged in front of him.

Aimou warned, "Watch out!"

Bologue reacted quicker than she imagined. At the moment he sensed danger, a swarm of snakes crawled out from beneath his sleeves. Cold iron extended into dense thorns, tearing the shadow to pieces just moments before it approached Bologue.

Chunks of flesh and blood evenly slapped onto the walls, splashing all over Bologue, staining the inner lining of his white clothes red.

Large fragments of limbs crashed into the clock tower. After a brief identification, Bologue could confirm that it wasn't a human but some kind of bird-like monster.

Broken wings were clad in tough feathers, edges sharp as blades. The monster bird's torso was shredded by Bologue, leaving hind limbs covered in steel-like bird claws.

Within the storm clouds, more similar monster birds were flying around; they gathered together like a storm of blades, capable of slicing living beings into fragments easily.

"Are these the little pets your family keeps?"

Bologue was somewhat angry. He was wearing a new outfit, and upon arriving at the Wind Source Highlands, it got soaked in blood.

Palmer shouted, "Do you think my family would keep something like this?"

"They should be some kind of alchemical creatures..."

Aimou examined the corpse, but before she could conclude, Church identified the monster and explained, "These are Wind-Eroded Birds."

Church's expression turned grave, evidently an occurrence he had been worried about had happened.

Mentioning Wind-Eroded Birds, the group recalled related information. They are alchemical creatures bred by alchemists; officially prohibited by the Order Bureau. These monster birds possess extremely aggressive attributes, large size, wings sharp as steel, highly bloodthirsty, and move in swarms.

Bologue looked out the clock tower, sharp screeches echoed continuously, gloomy clouds turned pitch black, and then thousands of Wind-Eroded Birds broke through the clouds, circling above the Fortress of the Morning Wind like a flock of death-dealing crows.

"Your house suddenly has so many ghostly things; do you think this is reasonable?" Bologue shouted at Palmer, regretting having come here.

Palmer yelled, "Are you kidding? How could this be reasonable in any way?"

Bologue responded with laughter, he indeed was joking, though Palmer didn't appreciate the humor.

"They're here!"

Aimou warned the group. The Wind-Eroded Birds noticed the group's presence; they hovered above the clock tower, forming a dark cloud-like mass, wings slicing the fierce wind, emitting sharp cries of death.

Church decisively retreated to hide behind the group. His Secret Energy·Faceless Man could deceive humans but not these monsters.

A bluish shimmering light released from Bologue's eyes, the Flame of the Cauldron ignited from his arms, further extending to the swarm of snakes.

"Don't tear down my house!"

In the moment before the battle erupted, Palmer tried to dissuade him, but unfortunately, it seemed Bologue could not hear him.

The Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid self-replicated and proliferated, swiftly spreading into colossal silver-white serpents that surged out of the clock tower, rising against the harsh wind and rain. The serpents intertwined, resembling a long spear thrusting toward the sky.

The black mass of birds came rushing in like an inverted funnel. In the instant before they collided, the serpents twisted together, cold scales scraping against each other and sparking profusely.

In the rapidly advancing silver radiance, tinges of crimson appeared. The sparks ignited the crimson, raising some flames, then the Flame of the Cauldron swept over, fully detonating the Red Mercury.

Blazing Scale Burst.

The spear piercing through the flock exploded into a sky full of flames, like a flare reaching its zenith. The intense fire burned on the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid and at the moment of contact with the birds, the spear expanded into dense iron branches, impaling Wind-Eroded Birds one after another.

The flames kept spreading. Looking up, the black flock was interspersed with constant flashes of fire. After the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid's attack, it gradually drifted out of Bologue's command range, losing the support of Ether, and the self-created Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid dispersed one by one.

Along with them vanished the ceaselessly falling Wind-Eroded Birds, easily pierced by steel, their wings burnt through by the fire, disintegrating into ashes, continuously withering and breaking apart on the ground.

In the blink of an eye, the ground below was piled with corpses, blood continuously seeping through the crevices in the steps. But compared to the vast flock of birds, only a few had died, not affecting the group's offensive.

Bologue could only block part of the attack. On the other side of the clock tower, the Wind-Eroded Birds came whistling in, targeting the flesh inside the tower. Yet as they approached, their light wings grew heavy, pressure suddenly increased, like invisible hands pressing them down, forcing them to crash into the ground.

With his back to Bologue, Palmer temporarily restrained the birds' assault with the surging air pressure, but it was merely a temporary measure. The Wind-Eroded Birds had targeted them, circling the tower, their dark, sullen shapes obscuring everyone's view.

Some Wind-Eroded Birds found gaps, getting close enough to scrape against the tower's surface, leaving marks like sword slashes on the walls.

Aimou shouted, "We can't stay here forever!"

"I think so too."

Bologue wielded the Flame of the Cauldron, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid expanded outward, and then swiftly transformed from a solid state to a liquid, turning into countless droplets bearing green flames. As they struck the Wind-Eroded Birds, the Red Mercury detonated, leading to a ceaseless fiery rain.

"Let's get out of here first!"

Palmer agreed with this idea. He needed to know what had happened at the Fortress of the Morning Wind and where these Wind-Eroded Birds came from.

The Angry Wind Pardon summoned gusts of wind, and a hurricane lifted the burning Red Mercury, gathering into a blazing storm around the clock tower, temporarily blocking the Wind-Eroded Birds' attack.

Aimou and Church descended the stairs, followed closely by Bologue and Palmer. Halfway down, Palmer suddenly remembered something, turned to grab his suitcase, cursing all the while.

In the castle built along the Cliff, towering like a city wall, a man lay comfortably on the sofa, flipping through the novel in his hands.

The castle where the man resided was the tallest and largest in the Fortress of the Morning Wind. Within the castle was an almost sky-reaching tower named the Celestial Vault Tower. It was said that relying on the Void Realm covering the Fortress of the Morning Wind, a Condenser could easily summon a storm sweeping the plains at the tower's apex.

The castle was thus named Celestial Dome Castle, holding a special significance, vitally important to the Clarks.

If the Fortress of the Morning Wind was the core of the Clarks in the Wind Source Highlands, then the Celestial Dome Castle was the core of the Clarks within the Fortress of the Morning Wind.

The man put down his book and looked at the stormy clouds outside the window, frowning slightly.

He felt something was off; amidst the raging storm, he sensed a familiar Ethereal Fluctuation, a fluctuation that shouldn't have appeared here.

Putting the book down, the man slowly stood up. Though he looked young externally, his eyes full of vitality, unfortunately, the knife of time still left scars at the corners of his eyes, with fine wrinkles indicating his age.

"Are you going to intervene?"

The young man beside him asked as he noticed the man stand up, trying to dissuade him, "It's just some small tricks from the exiled Night Race. It will be over soon."

"No... I just remembered something."

The man waved his hand, "I remember the Order Bureau is sending someone today to confirm the 'vow', right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

The young man glanced at the recent schedule and indeed found such an entry.

The man continued, "Then, considering the time, he should be arriving too..."

Oh no!

The young man silently exclaimed in his heart, nervously looking out the window. If the staff sent by the Order Bureau arrived, they would face the bird flock directly.

"Don't worry, since he's from the Order Bureau, there would only be a problem if he died so easily."

The man's words echoed in the room, and when the young man noticed, the man had disappeared, leaving only the open window swaying in the gale.

Chapter 530: Dawn Oath

"Palmer, is this your daily life before?"

The group moved through the hallway, where the wind flowed unimpeded through the hollow walls, creating a series of melodious tunes, yet amidst these tunes were endless cries, shadowy figures endlessly moving.

"Although storms often pass through here, in all my years, this is the first time I've encountered such a thing!"

In response to Bologue's questioning, Palmer carried his luggage.

Bologue looked at the hollow walls beside him, and without hesitation, thrust the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, a long blade piercing into the wild wind; several Wind-Eroded Birds couldn't change their direction in time and hit the blade head-on, shattering into pieces, their blood scattered in the wind.

"This is your Clarks' stronghold, you let these monsters fly unchecked, don't you have any defensive measures?"

Aimou sensed something was amiss; the Clarks family had perished, yet they allowed these monsters to rampage.

"Perhaps they are doing it deliberately, like luring the enemy in." Church proposed his thought, quite obviously, his thinking differed from the rest.

"Wait a minute, Church, what mission are you carrying out!"

Bologue sharply captured the issue at hand, the group was all panicked, except Church, who remained calm, as if he had long known it all.

Church calmly stated, "I was dispatched to confirm whether the 'Dawn Oath' is intact."

Upon hearing about the 'Dawn Oath', the group reacted differently; Palmer clearly knew something, his expression instantly turned serious, while Bologue immediately recalled Serey and Olivia, Aimou appeared bewildered.

"More details!"

Palmer pressed Church, "The Dawn War passed so many years ago, and now the Order Bureau suddenly wants to review the 'Dawn Oath', something surely went wrong!"

"We are already amidst the problem," Church pointed to the Wind-Eroded Birds raging outside.

"Damn it! Church, why didn't you say something earlier!"

Palmer felt he was going insane, he came for vacation, not for overtime.

"I thought you knew... you didn't ask me."

Listening to Church's response, Palmer felt certain he was harboring resentment, definitely!

Pushing open the heavy door, the group left the clock tower, a street filled with corpses came into view.

The Fortress of the Morning Wind was grand, like a small city, but now this city lay piled with corpses, engulfed in war.

Bologue surveyed briefly and said, "Don't worry, these are all Wind-Eroded Bird corpses, no humans."

The scene appeared tragic, but mostly resulted from Bologue and Palmer's recent kills, as the group appeared on the street, a swarm of Wind-Eroded Birds swooped down, diving towards them.

"Be quiet!"

Palmer was very agitated now, anyone returning home to witness this tragic scene would be far from calm.

The violent wind suddenly kicked up, Bologue followed suit by hurling the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, forging countless Flying Knives, sent skyward by Palmer, unleashing a bloody rain.

"After so many years, yet another batch of undocumented Night Race has become active, attempting to break the seal of the Land of Eternal Night, releasing the imprisoned Night Race," Church walking behind shared what he knew, adding, "According to confidentiality regulations, I shouldn't be sharing this."

"I'm no longer Field Staff now, but the Clarks family heir, this somewhat counts as family affair, doesn't breach regulations!"

Palmer shouted, with the sea storm gradually approaching the Fortress of the Morning Wind, the roaring winds and thunders easily drowned voices, he had to strain his throat.

Despite it being noon, the dark skies seemed like night, massive seawater was swept up, turned into storm and poured down, striking the group, an implicit pain felt.

"Night Race? Breaking the seal?"

Hearing this, Bologue recalled a face he nearly forgot.

Olivia Villeries.

Since the raid on the Gray Trade Association, Bologue has heard nothing more about the mysterious Night Race, but her actions at the auction have been deeply etched into Bologue's mind.

Not only because she was the second Night Race Bologue had ever seen, but also because of the unknown relationship between her and Serey, and the item she wanted to auction.

A piece of intelligence.

Bologue doesn't know what Olivia really wants to know, but from the current perspective, the one making a direct deal with Olivia must be the Tyrant.

"This appearance of mysterious Night Race has completely broken the constraints of the Dawn Oath..."

Church's words were interrupted by Palmer, "So the Order Bureau thinks the Dawn Oath has a problem?"

"That's right," Church affirmed with a nod, "According to the contents of the Dawn Oath, all Night Race should live in the Land of Eternal Night until the end of the world."

"Don't be so absolute, Church!" Palmer tried to lighten the oppressive atmosphere with a joke, "We just played a board game with a Night Race Lord, didn't we?"

Palmer's words gave Church pause.

Indeed, even with the constraints of the Dawn Oath, not all Night Race were sealed, such as the Night Race Lord living within the Undying Club.

Anyone who knows of Serey's existence would have such doubts—why was Serey not imprisoned? Is it only because of the protection of the Undying Club, or did Serey somehow evade the constraints of the oath?

No, that's impossible.

Strictly speaking, the Dawn Oath was written by the Ethereal Oath of the Contract School, signed by both sides of the conflict during the Dawn War.

The Ethereal Oath originates from the Contract School, whose Condensers do not possess strong combat abilities, but they can borrow the Power of Contract from the Devil to recruit followers for it or bind disputes between people.

The Ethereal Oath is just that, with Condensers of the Contract School as certifiers and the Devil's Power of Contract as shackles, pledging that those who swear will abide by the oath until the oath is torn apart or burned.

Any who violate the oath will be bound and retaliated against by the Power of Contract. The oath signed when the Kagader Empire and Rhine Alliance ceased hostilities was such an Ethereal Oath, as were later secret wars.

Bologue muttered, "What if Serey never signed the oath?"

"If that were the case, Serey would have been hunted to death long ago, even if hiding in the Undying Club wouldn't live so leisurely."

Palmer had a very clear understanding of his family's strength, this generation might not hate the Night Race deeply, but the old undead who participated in the Dawn War are still alive. If they knew Serey was still at large, they would have acted long ago.

But in fact, no one cared about Serey, Serey just lived openly in Oubos, no problem even doing team-building activities with staff from the Order Bureau, as if Serey were an outsourcing worker for the bureau.

Bologue said, "The situation is more complicated than we imagined."

"Rather than whether the situation is complex or not, I'm more curious about one thing—why haven't we encountered anyone else along the way!"

At this moment Aimou spoke up, this Fortress of the Morning Wind was like a dead city, apart from a few people and the sky full of Wind-Eroded Birds, no living creature was seen.

"That's actually normal, do you think the Clarks family has a large population? There's not many of them, and to control the vast Wind Source Highlands, most of them are scattered outside."

Palmer explained, his eyes growing solemn, "But you're right about one thing, we've made quite a commotion, why isn't there anyone?"

The group was pondering when a strong Ethereal Fluctuation was released from the Celestial Vault Tower, a dazzling beam of light shot straight to the sky, scattered into countless starlight after ascending to its limit like a meteor shower passing over the Fortress of the Morning Wind, followed by a large amount of Ether being awakened, calling forth a fierce wind, forming an invisible barrier.

This must be the defense mechanism of the Fortress of the Morning Wind, and they realized what it was defending against.

At some unknown time, the storm like an iron curtain had approached the coast, flashing with lightning in the storm, revealing numerous dense shadows, then the temperature began to drop, and the sea surface was covered with a thick layer of ice, paving a road to shore.

Figures in pitch-black Iron Armor emerged from the storm, treading on frost, unclear whether they are some kind of alchemical creatures like Wind-Eroded Birds, or humans emerging from the storm, but one thing is certain, they are enemies.

The roar of cannons drowned the sound of the wind and thunder, the firepower set on the cliffs roared in unison, instantly covering those figures in pitch-black Iron Armor, blowing them apart, then on the ice and sea, yet seemingly fearless, they continued to emerge, to meet their end.

"Well..."

Palmer listened to the roaring cannon fire, the storm like an iron curtain, the frozen sea surface, and the silent army advancing in succession... he couldn't fathom what was happening in his hometown.

"But at least we know there are still living people here."

Bologue, as though aware of Palmer's thoughts, followed up with his words.