

Endless 571

Chapter 571: Gunshot

The Elder's gaze was filled with surprise; he hadn't expected that under such overwhelming power, someone would still dare to rebel against him. What was even more unexpected to the Elder was that Bologue's target was not him, but the Blood of the Regent King.

Bologue saw through the Elder's assertiveness. The Elder was nothing more than another Night King, another Serey Villeries, just another coward afraid of death.

Whether assisting the Night Race or stealing the "Dawn Oath," all of the Elder's actions were to survive, to obtain the Blood of the Regent King, and thus become a noble member of the Night Race.

Bologue didn't have many friends, but for those few he had, he cared a great deal. At the same time, Bologue was someone who held grudges, and those he hated rarely met with good ends.

If the Elder desired to live on, then Bologue was determined to bring an end to all of it.

For this particular raid, the Iron Spear was almost entirely composed of Red Mercury. Driven by Ethereal Amplification, the Iron Spear reached its maximum speed, piercing through the gale with a thunderous roar, igniting into a firestorm capable of melting through metal.

The roaring flames approached Derby, and at this moment, a surviving Elite Bloodthirster leaped forward, attempting to halt the advance of the firestorm, but soon the firestorm exploded again, spreading into a torrential rain of flames.

Owing to professional competence, Bologue opted for a wide-range attack to ensure the explosion would be enough to destroy the Blood of the Regent King.

Firelight merged together like a collapsing wall of flame. Even though the Elite Bloodthirsters used their bodies as shields, blocking a large portion of the flames, many fires still surged like tidal waves, threatening to engulf Derby in an instant.

Derby clutched the Blood of the Regent King, guarding it beneath his chest. Even with severe wounds, he was determined to ensure the safety of the Blood of the Regent King, for it was his only bargaining chip to reverse the situation.

Derby shouted, "Are you just going to stand by and do nothing?!"

The next moment, a fierce wind descended, roaring around Derby, stalling the advancing firestorm momentarily in the gales, then a stronger hurricane swept past, blowing the flames off in another direction. The high-speed air currents escaping rapidly created a vacuum in the local area.

The firestorm unleashed with all of Bologue's might was easily dispelled by the Elder, and this was not the end.

Ether swirled around Bologue, and before he could land, blood reddened Bologue's vision, and then the chaotic noise filled his ears.

Like innumerable spirits encircling Bologue, they let out shrill, high-pitched screams, and eventually the decibels broke the threshold, shattering Bologue's hearing.

The world fell into silence.

A shallow blood mark surfaced on Bologue's body, quickly enlarging, extending, and penetrating his flesh. The ghastly and terrifying wound spread instantly, the profusion of injuries covering his body almost tore Bologue into a pool of flesh.

He crashed heavily onto the ground, the oppressive wind pressure pinned Bologue tightly, squeezing his body, large amounts of blood oozed from his wounds, and in no time, a pool of blood had formed beneath him.

"Don't hold back, he is just like me, an Undying."

Amidst the extinguished flames, Derby looked at Bologue with lingering fear. If not for the Elder's betrayal tonight, Derby truly didn't know how he would handle Bologue.

Bologue was a formidable opponent, with a professionally rigorous attitude, highly efficient and cold style, treacherous and versatile Secret Energy, and an Undying Body allowing him to rise from defeat countless times.

Derby hated opponents like this.

In ancient times, even the most lowly of the Night Race felt a sense of haughty superiority when facing humans.

Yes, humans.

The Night Race, with their acquired Undying Bodies, had long severed ties with humanity. In their worldview, the two were entirely different species: one could die, and the other could not.

The Night Race stubbornly clung to their various noble etiquettes, taking lives from enemies with extreme elegance. For them, a life-and-death battle was like a game—they could die calmly and stand up again, but their enemies had to exert all their strength.

They had only one chance.

Bologue was like an aberrant cell, a distortion that sent the storyline spiraling into chaos. Now another Undying had appeared, and he took the Night Race as his hunting targets.

The balance of life and death was thus broken, even the haughtiest of the Night Race would be dismembered by Bologue, cast into a coffin.

Upon hearing Derby's words, the Elder increased his power, causing half of Bologue's body to sink into the ground, blood filled the crevices.

Is this... a Defender?

Bologue whispered in his heart; at this moment he was powerless. In the face of absolute force, Bologue had no choice but to comply.

"Hand over the Blood of the Regent King to me."

Having cleared the battlefield, the Elder resumed the previous deal, demanding from Derby.

The backlash of the oath, the aging vessel... numerous negative forces were affecting the Elder, his life could be measured in minutes. He had to complete the Blood Ceremony swiftly to transform himself into a Night Race member.

Derby hesitated for a moment, but upon seeing the Elder's actions, along with the "Dawn Oath" in his hand, it was the simplest and most direct pledge of allegiance.

There was no reason to hesitate. If Derby wished to leave alive, the Elder's power was indispensable.

Derby strode toward the Elder, ready for the Blood Ceremony.

The Elder's gaze was filled with fervor, fixated on the container in Derby's hand, where flowed his "new life."

"Blood... blood..."

The fierce wind lifted the Elder's body, and he floated towards Derby. When there were only a few meters between them, another surge of Ethereal Fluctuation suddenly erupted, and Derby turned around, a shadow shrouding over his head.

Instinctively, Derby retracted his arm, trying to protect the Blood of the Regent King, while the shadow summoned all its strength to deliver a lethal blade strike.

The blade didn't hit the Blood of the Regent King, but it did sever Derby's hand, where the Blood of the Regent King was tightly grasped in the severed hand.

The Elder glared at the figure that appeared out of nowhere. Even though he had already dealt with everyone on the battlefield, another character emerged at this moment.

The Ether surged, an attack full of anger descended.

Aimou only had time to cross her arms to protect her chest; in the next second, dense Wind Blades slashed at her body, leaving dents on the metallic shell, followed by a heavy blow that smashed Aimou into the ruins, the wind pressure returned, grinding the randomly protruding ruins into a flat surface.

A small piece of ruins compressed into a block, Aimou was embedded within it, her left arm completely bent downwards, with arcs of electricity flashing ceaselessly.

If Aimou weren't an Alchemy Puppet, that strike by the Elder would have been enough to kill her.

Aimou managed a weak smile; she succeeded, accomplished the surprise attack, even if she couldn't destroy the Blood of the Regent King, she had still hindered the Elder.

The severed hand rolled within the ruins, Derby clutched his wound, frantically searching for the severed hand, the Elder also grew anxious, just as he was about to summon the fierce wind, a sudden chilling cold descended upon the Elder's heart.

This wasn't a sensory cold, but a chill born of instinctive fear; suddenly, a calm voice reverberated across the battlefield, the voice wasn't loud, could even be described as somewhat deep, yet it entered everyone's ears with striking clarity.

"Act One, gun loaded; Act Three, gun fired."

The Elder's actions halted, the fierce wind dissipating beyond control, his feet reconnecting with the earth; he forcefully leaned on the Scepter, striving not to fall.

"Ha... ha..."

The Elder breathed heavily, the familiar airflow became incredibly sharp, with every breath, he felt like knives were slicing his lungs, his throat, leaving his internal organs a bloody mess.

Indeed, it was like that.

The Elder clutched his heart, something was squeezing his atrium, an unknown entity rapidly expanded, then drawn by another force, rampaged through his body.

Bursting forth.

The Elder saw it, a blood-stained bullet head emerged from his heart, then exited his body, leaving.

Even more bizarre was the bullet's trajectory, resembling time flowing backwards, the bullet head spiraling towards him but continuously retreating until it returned to the barrel.

On the other end of the ruins, the long-waiting assassin appeared, Church watched this drama unfold with a blank expression.

Just like his nondescript face, Church was a person whose presence was exceedingly thin; even in this terrifying battlefield, few noticed him.

As the bullet returned to the chamber, Church's Flintlock Gun underwent a temporal reversal effect too, the flint returned to its starting position, dispersed smoke reconverged, sinking into the darkened muzzle.

Church suddenly felt very drained, as if he had been through an arduous battle, the Ethereal Radiance on his surface completely dimmed; this shot had almost consumed all his Ether.

The Elder stared dazedly at the gun in Church's hand; it was the first time he saw this Alchemy Armament, yet it evoked an inexplicable sense of familiarity.

Many years ago, the Elder saw an Alchemy Armament similar to this one, vaguely remembered, it was known as the "Gun of Destiny," which upon aiming and pulling the trigger, regardless of the enemy's resistance, the bullet would inevitably hit.

Unlike the Gun of Destiny, well before the trigger was pulled, the Elder had already been hit by Chekov's Gun; now Church's arrival was merely to retrieve the bullet, completing the cycle of destiny.

"Just a bit more..."

The Elder murmured, chest wound's drained blood revealing a radiant heart.

Many years ago, the Elder's heart had already undergone Etherealization.

Even so...

The Elder's vision began to darken, he hunched over, spat out more blood, along with his golden mask that fell down, submerged in the bloody water.

Once the Elder's breath steadied, amidst the blood, he saw a face extraordinarily ugly and hateful.

In an instant, the Elder was terrified, that visage resembling a vile specter.

Then the Elder realized, the specter in the bloody water, was his own reflection.

Chapter 572: Scam

The gunshot rang out like a whistle at halftime, temporarily halting all conflicts.

The elder's aged body was heavily injured, and he stood there dazed, the wind pressure he exerted diminishing significantly.

With Vasilina's help, Palmer struggled to stand up. Bologue didn't react, seemingly having passed out, while Aimou was trapped in the rubble, unable to move.

Derby tried hard to suppress the pain in his body, frantically searching for his severed hand. Palmer saw this and, leaning on the Silver Sword, walked towards Derby.

Palmer's fight was not over... It never ended.

Church put away Chekov's Gun. In the Sublimation Furnace Core's rating, Chekov's Gun belonged to the Purifying White level Alchemy Armaments, meaning that to freely use this Alchemy Armament, one needed at least the tier of a Negative Power User.

Generally speaking, it was possible to use the Alchemy Armament across tiers at the tier of Prayer Believers, but the user's ether could not sustain the consumption, making it extremely strenuous.

But as a replica of the Gun of Destiny, Chekov's Gun had very special properties, difficult to reason with common sense.

The properties of Chekov's Gun can be roughly divided into three points. The first is called "Loading," where Chekov's Gun will create bullets in the gun chamber through the illusion at the cost of consuming a large amount of ether. This loading process takes a long time.

Taking Church as an example, it took him a week of continuous ether consumption to successfully create this bullet.

For different tiers and different Condensers, the loading time varies. For this reason, Chekov's Gun is not suitable for emergencies and is mostly used in long-planned assassinations.

After loading the bullet, the second point, "Act One," is triggered. Under the influence of "Act One," the bullet in the chamber will disappear and then appear superimposed on all targets within the "range," which is the area of effect.

Lastly, there is "Act Three," where the user needs to hold the flintlock gun to observe, determine, and aim at their target, so the superimposed state disappears and the bullet is confirmed to exist within the target.

Pulled the trigger, as if time reversed, the bullet burst out of the body and returned to the gun chamber. It looks strange, but looking at it in reverse, Church stealthily hit the elder, who had no power to resist.

The complex and bizarre power ultimately achieved a gunshot like reversing time.

Using clumsy methods such as "Act One" and "Act Three" to cut off the process of "shooting," completing the "gunshot" and "hit." This is precisely the power of Chekov's Gun.

Church didn't like Chekov's Gun; in assassinations, it was indeed very powerful, but also too cumbersome. The various conditions severely limited the occasions for its application.

The overlong loading cycle, range limitations, and massive ether consumption, losing the target would render it impossible to pull the trigger, among other drawbacks.

If given a choice, Church would definitely not use this Alchemy Armament to assassinate enemies, but he had no choice; this time Church's enemy was a Defender.

Launching an attack could be interrupted unless the attack was completed from the beginning.

Apart from the convoluted powers of Chekov's Gun that managed to erase the "shooting" process, other assassination methods could hardly harm the elder.

Even so, Chekov's Gun still couldn't kill the elder. If it were a Negative Power User, this shot would have been fatal, but as a Defender, the elder's body was highly etherealized. He was still alive.

Church leaned against the wall, large beads of sweat dripping down. The consumption of Chekov's Gun on himself was too severe; after this one shot, Church almost lost the ability to continue fighting.

He felt as if all the ether in his body had been drained, and his energy was almost exhausted.

The elder clutched his chest, and soon the blood stopped, as if it had run dry. He raised his head and glared angrily at Church, and Church defiantly raised Chekov's Gun again.

Chekov's Gun couldn't be triggered again for a period of time, but Church, pretending to be powerful, raised the flintlock gun and stood off against the elder.

"Found it!"

Derby dug out his severed hand from the rubble and retrieved the Blood of the Regent King from the clenched fist.

He waved excitedly to the elder and ran towards him. Derby knew there was no more time to waste; he had to complete the Blood Ceremony immediately.

Derby's smile froze.

A cold blade pierced through Derby's waist and abdomen. The contact of silver with flesh made a sizzling sound as if the flesh was being seared by flames.

Palmer grabbed Derby's neck from behind and forcefully drove the Silver Sword into his body.

Derby's and the elder's tiers were both higher than Palmer's; the flow of ether could not deceive their perception. Palmer went against the norm. He did not mobilize any ether and simply relied on his scarred body to crawl out of the rubble and deliver a backstab to Derby.

Simple and straightforward tactics, surprisingly effective in this high-strung, nerve-wracking melee. Derby and the elder were deeply immersed in the power of Chekov's Gun, paying no attention to Palmer's approach.

"Surprise!"

Palmer growled lowly, gripped Derby's neck, pulled out the Silver Sword, and aimed to slash at his throat.

The blood boiled hotly, and explosive flames burst from Palmer's chest. Without the protection of ether, this blow hit Palmer solidly, sending him crashing back into the rubble again, this time unable to climb back up.

Derby clutched the wound on his chest; death was so close to him that he thought he could almost hear the approaching footsteps of Death God.

No... it wasn't the Death God.

The elder summoned the fierce wind, and the airflow carried the Blood of the Regent King, moving toward the elder, the aged hand just a step away from the Elixir of Immortality.

A dagger sliced through the air; to the elder, such an attack was laughable. He didn't even bother to watch the dagger's trajectory, simply relying on the disturbance of the swift wind to deflect it off course.

Urgent footsteps approached. Vasilina mustered all her strength to enter the battlefield. The elder glanced at her contemptuously and with a wave summoned a gust to drive Vasilina back.

To the Elder, this was merely their desperate struggle, as eternal life was almost within his reach.

Suddenly, an ether reaction burst forth from the dagger that had been struck away. By the time the Elder realized he had fallen into a trap, Bologue's figure had already been swapped with the Phantom Dagger.

The dense Wind Blades left Bologue covered in open wounds, his left arm drooped, and several fingers of his right hand had long since broken off, but he stubbornly raised the Iron Hammer and smashed it down.

"Kill..."

A muffled sound emerged from Bologue's throat as a Wind Blade sliced it open, causing blood to gush out continuously.

"Shatter the soul!"

Face of Horror, fully unleashed.

A second? Or two?

Bologue wasn't sure how long this extreme fear could affect the two, but as long as it could cause even the slightest hesitation in their actions, for Bologue, it was already a success.

The panicked, angry expressions of Derby and the Elder were clearly reflected in Bologue's eyes, and he responded with a cruel smile.

Letting the flames ignited by boiling blood engulf him, Bologue swung down the Iron Hammer, piercing through layers of fire.

This was the destined fate, the elegy long written.

The Iron Hammer struck the suspended container, smashing it along with the Blood of the Regent King.

Bologue had no time to admire his great masterpiece as the Elder roared, conjuring a fierce wind that swept Bologue into the sky. By the time he fell again, bloodied and broken, lethal wounds were already scattered across Bologue's body.

"No... No..."

The Elder knelt down, sticking out his tongue like a stray dog, trying to lick the spilled blood.

The vicious fight to the death had lasted too long, the blood had already soaked the earth, the Regent King's blood mixed with Derby and Bologue's, and a nauseating smell came from the tip of his tongue.

The Elder abruptly looked up, grabbing Derby, and yelled madly, "You will perform Blood Donation for me!"

By relying on the Regent King's blood, the Elder could become part of the noble pure-blood tier in one fell swoop, but if Derby performed the Blood Donation, his lineage would be a deterioration of Derby's.

Derby's face was deathly pale. His tier was lower than the Elder's. If he were to perform the Blood Ceremony, the process would be very long, requiring him to transform the Elder bit by bit, but the current situation would not give him enough time.

No longer caring about these things, the Elder raged against death. He had already crawled out of the Wind Cellar, never wanting to endure that kind of life again...

"This farce should end."

A calm voice echoed from high above, just then the Elder realized the constant thunder had long since vanished.

The Elder looked up, and then the heavy wind pressure descended, forcing him to kneel once more.

Fuen hovered above the gale, observing the Elder with indifference, as if looking at a corpse.

The Elder shed hot tears; once, he too was as strong and young as Fuen, and now he had become this.

"Don't push me! Fuen!"

The Elder raised the Book of Dawn Oath in his hand, the blood long since soaking through the pages, each one filled with scarlet. The pages fluttered ominously in the wind.

This was the Elder's last bargaining chip; as long as the Book of Dawn Oath was still in his hands, he held absolute control.

Fuen said sorrowfully, "Has the fear of death already robbed you of your final sanity?"

The Elder didn't understand what Fuen meant. The next moment, the fierce wind tore the book apart, the shredded pages scattering like snowflakes.

Nothing happened, as always.

The Elder couldn't believe what was in front of him. Just days ago, Fuen and Church had confirmed the Book of Dawn Oath in the Wind Cellar...

The Book of Rubbing!

The Elder dazedly turned his head to look at the weary Church, who calmly said, "According to the Decision Room's directive, until the end of the conflict, the Order Bureau will keep the Book of Dawn Oath."

All the Elder had was a Book of Rubbing, the real Book of Dawn Oath had long since been swapped that day...

They deliberately put on a show for him, everything, all to catch the restless black sheep among the flock.

The Elder murmured, "From the very beginning, this was a setup."

"A new war is coming," Fuen responded, "Before we prepare to face the enemy, we need to ensure our own purity."

It was a lesson Serey gave to the Clarks, even such a grand Eternal Night Empire ultimately fell to Serey's hands.

The Elder no longer argued, he lowered his head, his once white and jade-like hands were turning black, the skin becoming wrinkled and brittle, peeling like old paint to reveal dark red flesh beneath.

Chapter 573: Endgame

The Elder lost.

From the moment he feared death and sought the power of the Night Race... no, further back than that, back on the battlefield a century ago, when he first encountered the Night King, he had already lost.

How strange.

Through these long years, the countless memories in the Elder's mind have long yellowed and blurred; those matters that were once incredibly important to him, he can barely remember now.

The faces of comrades, the voice of a lover, the breeze of the Wind Source Highlands, even the scent of fine wine... things once so familiar are now so foreign to him.

Everything is unclear, except the wager with the Night King, which remains incredibly vivid, immune to the ravages of time, retaining its original form.

A hundred-year bet, culminating in such an outcome.

The Elder laughed hoarsely; looking back, the Elder felt as if he was observing the life of another person.

The Blood of the Regent King has been destroyed, and the "Dawn Oath" is nothing more than a copied Book of Rubbing, as for himself... Fuen has now arrived on the battlefield, and the Elder has no hope of defeating Fuen.

His body is old and collapsing, with the backlash of the oath invading his body, even if the Elder could muster his remaining strength for a fierce assault, he still stands no chance against Fuen, he doesn't even believe he can harm Fuen.

It's said that Fuen has long possessed the power of "Ascension," stepping onto that glorious tier.

For so many years, Fuen has lingered before the sacred door, reluctant to enter; no one knows what Fuen is thinking, but what's known is that behind Fuen's casual demeanor and calm smile, he grows increasingly enigmatic, even the Elders find it hard to fathom his thoughts.

Between the Elder and Fuen lies an insurmountable era gap.

The Alchemy Matrix borne by Fuen is the most powerful and advanced in the Clarks family in recent times, second only to Palmer, while the Elder's Alchemy Matrix is an ancient relic from a hundred years ago.

Even though both are Defenders, the advancement or antiquity of their Alchemy Matrix profoundly affects the strength of their powers.

In the Extraordinary World, sometimes the older one is, the weaker they are, for today's Condensers have already begun to use advanced steel and gunpowder, while the ancient Undead still wield those ornate but impractical Etiquette Swords.

"If the Ralph of a hundred years ago saw the Ralph of today, he would surely be disappointed."

Ralph muttered to himself.

Suddenly, Ralph laughed, slowly clenching his fists.

Although he is clearly on the road to ruin, Ralph suddenly feels an indescribable ease, as if all the shackles binding his body have disappeared.

Indeed, this Ralph has nothing left to lose.

Nothing to care for, nothing to lose.

Ralph's connection to this world is completely severed, isolated within this era that doesn't belong to him, like a ghost that should have died but couldn't.

His eyes filled with the glow of Ether, Ralph roars as he unleashes all his power, instantly reaching the peak concentration of Ether, materializing in the air, the storm conjures thunder, calling forth a dense lightning storm.

The heavy wind pressure indiscriminately covers the entire area, tilting and raising ruins collapse flatly in an instant, air rapidly evacuates, all living things fall into a vacuum of suffocation.

Ralph feels the power flowing turbulently within his body, in a daze, he feels young again, although this youthful moment is fleeting, he savors the brief freedom.

The roaring wind repeatedly slices through all reachable substances, shredding them into fragmented dust, swept away by the wind.

Derby half-kneels on the ground, as the pressure gradually increases, he is firmly pinned to the ground, chaotic Wind Blades cut through his body, carving out ghastly wounds.

Ralph went mad; realizing immortality was hopeless, he launched a final frenzy, attacking everyone indiscriminately.

This time Ralph gave his all.

"I had hoped to resolve this matter more gracefully, considering you are one of the Elders."

Even amidst the clamorous wind, Fuen's voice clearly reached Ralph's ears; soon after, he saw a lightning-like sword gleam pulling across.

Whether wind or huge waves, both are cleaved under this lethal edge.

Ralph could not discern the trajectory of Fuen's attack, nor even detect Fuen's figure; as he felt the intense pain in his chest, the bloodstained Blade had already pierced through his body.

Immediately, the storm scatters, along with the compressed clouds upon the night sky, breaking apart, revealing the splendid array of stars.

"It's so beautiful..."

Ralph looked up, suddenly realizing that he hadn't gazed at the stars like this for a long time.

This beautiful world always makes one reluctant to leave.

Fuen drew his blade, with raging Ether clinging to the cold metal, as the Wind Blade spread and slaughtered from the wound.

Ralph's gaze gradually became hollow, even the Etheralized organs were completely shattered and obliterated by this strike.

Fuen left Ralph with a whole corpse. It was his final mercy for Ralph.

With Ralph's death, the night's conflict came to an end.

Fuen gazed at Ralph's corpse, wiped the blood off the blade, and sighed softly.

No one dared to disturb Fuen's sadness, everyone remained silent, and in the absolute silence, Derby's eyes were full of fear.

Fuen's strength far exceeded Derby's imagination. Derby knew Ralph was not a match for Fuen, but he couldn't have imagined Ralph would be killed in just a moment.

Derby began to doubt the information in his mind. Was Fuen really just a Defender?

The more Derby benefited from immortality, the more he feared death. Silently, he got up, and his pitch-black robe began to writhe and gradually covered his body.

The robe spread black ink, slowly blanketing Derby's body, just as he was about to blend completely with the darkness, a heavy blow struck his head, clearly deforming it a bit.

The impact brought unbearable pain and dizzying awareness. Derby stumbled, interrupting the robe's assimilation into darkness.

"Bastard!"

Derby cursed, raising his blood-stained hand, as Blood Boiling surged, exploding a hot flame from his palm.

The bright flames couldn't stop the opponent's advance, as a blurred shadow charged out from the flames, Bologue swung his hammer again, breaking Derby's remaining arm.

The roaring Wind Gun propelled the Silver Sword, precisely piercing Derby's thigh and pinning it into the ground beneath him.

With reddened eyes, Derby tried to counterattack, when Palmer fired more Wind Guns, but the subsequent attacks all missed Derby, with the deadly Blade pinning around him.

Palmer stubbornly raised his hand, a Silver Sword hovering beside him, its sword body trembled along with Palmer's arm, until Palmer could no longer hold on, and collapsed.

Bologue stepped forward, delivering a direct kick to Derby's chest, causing his body to fall uncontrollably backward as the Silver Sword piercing his thigh pulled and sliced through his body, producing relentless screams.

Derby could no longer stand, the Silverware burned his flesh, bringing uncontrollable pain, causing even tears to flow.

Bologue wasn't as merciful as Fuen.

He rode on top of Derby, covered in blood, wielding the Iron Hammer with one hand, repeatedly beating Derby.

Initially, Derby could still rely on Blood Boiling, igniting flames to strike Bologue, but after a brief pause, Bologue moved again, like a cold machine.

The Iron Hammer had a layer of silver plating, rising and falling, breaking bones, crushing the body, each contact with the body similar to a branding iron, producing a burning smoke.

Bologue pounded everything until flesh and blood were blurred, until Derby couldn't even scream, lying immobile like he was dead.

Unrelenting, Bologue swung a few more strikes at Derby's head, ensuring he couldn't temporarily come back, or was entirely dead, Bologue then tossed the Iron Hammer aside, rolling off Derby, and lay on the ruins, gazing at the brilliant stars.

Bologue was so tired, it seemed as if closing his eyes would lead to death, advancing to the next resurrection.

Turning his head, Bologue saw Vasilina carefully cradled Palmer, the two were so intimate, like the Holy Mother in a painting holding her child, Aimou struggled to crawl out from the ruins, covered in dents and scratches, even the glow of one eye dimmed, like a broken machine.

Then Bologue saw Fuen walking towards him...

"I guess Palmer might wonder if this is a vacation... or overtime..."

As Bologue pondered Palmer's possible thoughts, this question flashed through his mind, and Bologue drifted into slumber.

The noisy ruin returned to silence.

Chapter 574: Subsequent Handling

Hangover.

Bologue liked this word. It humorously described his state after resurrection in a very fitting way.

Just like the literal meaning, living in a delirium at the bar, then collapsing in some corner of the street. When you wake up, you complain about the body's pain and the brain's lethargy, and casually wonder where exactly you woke up.

Bologue looked around in confusion. This was a shadowy place, with the sound of wind clearly in his ears, yet his body didn't feel the flow of air, as if he was just a wall away from a storm.

He was in a loose pajama that someone had put on him, and there was a blanket underneath. It seemed like someone had prepared it specially to prevent him from freezing.

Bologue shook his head; the Undead like him weren't that fragile. Then he thought perhaps the other side did these unnecessary preparations to show their respect for him.

After all, he did fight bloodily for the Clarks. If they had tossed him aside like garbage, waiting for his resurrection... that would be reasonable, but something felt off.

Bologue felt a blockage in his throat, coughed heavily twice, and spat out a blood clot, feeling his chest lighten quite a bit for the moment.

What devilry is this...

Bologue recalled the events before his death, really didn't expect to run into such a thing on a trip. He began to suspect if he got caught up in Palmer's luck, should've known to split with him.

Stretching his body forcefully, Bologue slowly stood up, taking a simple look around, with spiral-stacked bookshelves seemingly having no end, and many treasures scattered loosely on the ground.

Golden light reflected on his face, and Bologue felt a slight sense of nobility. If he had rolled over before waking, he would have awoken on dozens of gold coins.

That actually sounds pretty nice, not many have such chances.

"How am I here?"

Bologue recognized this place, it was the Wind Cellar, filled with high concentration ether around the body, bringing Bologue a sense of power.

The relationship between Condensers and ether is like that of fish and sea, a filled ether environment always provides a sense of peace as if in a warm cradle.

Soon, Bologue probably guessed why he was here. A high concentration ether environment helps in his resurrection, and Fuen probably knew this, thus placing him in this important place.

Bologue took one last look at this mysterious place. Don't be fooled by its old, silent appearance; inside this folded Void Realm, many Elders lay in slumber, each possessing the power of a Defender.

Defender...

In the fight with Ralph, Bologue was nearly suppressed the entire time. Even if he took action, it was only by relying on the power of the Undying Body to barely hold through.

This situation was not unfamiliar. He had experienced it once during the skirmish with the Silver Knight. Having thought that after ascending to a Prayer Believer this situation would improve, he still found it difficult to resist the power of a Defender.

Bologue tightened the loose pajamas, the fabric felt very comfortable, presumably it was not cheap.

At that moment, Bologue found himself unexpectedly happy. Knowing he always woke up in that monotonous hospital, dressed in thin clothes, this time waking up, finally something changed.

"Wonder how it is outside."

Speaking, Bologue walked towards the Wind Cellar's exit. To stop Derby's advance, Bologue had nearly demolished all buildings around the Wind Cellar.

He might see his great masterpiece upon exiting, unsure if Fuen would claim compensation from him because of this, but he was also fighting for the Clarks after all.

No... something's not right.

The Night Race's raid was entirely a trap set by Fuen. This perfect scheme even tricked his own people, including Fuen's son, Palmer Clarks.

In other words, regardless of Ralph's betrayal or Derby's raid, all were within Fuen's calculations. So, does Bologue's participation count as messing things up?

For example, in Fuen's estimation, these buildings wouldn't have been destroyed like this at all...

Bologue was thinking, would the Order Bureau pay for the damage he caused, and also, Bologue personally felt really satisfied while destroying the buildings.

Exiting the Wind Cellar, the expected ruins didn't appear. The familiar corridor, the crimson carpet, windows opened one by one, flowers in the vase swaying with the wind...

Bologue's grand destruction seemed like a dream, and now that the dream has awoken, the building remained intact; Bologue couldn't even see any blood stains.

"Oh, you're awake, sir."

A stranger's voice sounded, and there stood a servant not far away, seemingly awaiting Bologue all along, smiling and saluting towards him.

"Y... hello."

Bologue realized that he still underestimated the Clarks' power, and the mysteries in his heart should be answered soon.

"The Patriarch is waiting for you."

The servant said, stepping aside and gesturing to lead Bologue forward.

Bologue nodded, glancing out the window, the shore washed clean, still blood-red as ever, with many bodies piled up waiting for disposal.

It was not a nightmare but something that truly happened. Bologue then turned his gaze to the ground beneath, and the vast Fortress of the Morning Wind.

Bologue suddenly questioned, "Is it the power of the Void Realm?"

In the Void Realm, architectural alternation is not surprising; Bologue had experienced it early on in the Cultivation Room. The mysterious edifice almost seemed to possess true life force, transforming its shape, wildly growing within overlapping spaces.

The servant nodded with a smile, offering no further explanation.

Under his guidance, Bologue saw many guards and personnel along the way. The usually quiet Fortress of the Morning Wind suddenly became crowded.

Some people also looked at Bologue along the way, pointing fingers at this guy casually wearing pajamas.

"Alright, the Patriarch is waiting for you inside."

The servant stopped before a great door, behind which was Fuen's office, deathly quiet with not a sound.

After thanking, Bologue pushed open the door. The glaring light behind the vast window blinds Bologue at first sight, unable to see Fuen clearly until his eyes adapted, revealing the busy guy at the desk.

Fuen did seem quite busy. His usual leisurely smile replaced by seriousness, a pair of brown glasses resting on his nose, reviewing numerous documents.

Upon seeing Bologue, Fuen took off his glasses and motioned for him to sit.

Silence lingered for a few seconds between them, then Fuen broke it.

"You must have many questions to ask, right?"

Bologue nodded but remained silent, not continuing to speak.

Silence persisted a while, Fuen showing a puzzled look, Bologue propped his feet up, only then noticing he hadn't worn shoes, having walked all the way barefoot, no wonder people looked at him like that.

"Wait a moment," Bologue pressed his temples, troubled, "There are so many questions, I don't even know where to start."

Bologue first inquired about his friends' condition, "How are the others?"

"Palmer and Vasilina are undergoing treatment. Vasilina is doing slightly better, but Palmer is still in a coma," Fuen replied. "Except for Ether depletion, Church is fine, Aimou, however..."

Fuen paused. For the Alchemy Puppet's peculiar existence, it surprised him greatly. "Hmm... she is self-healing."

"Self-healing?"

"Yes, she borrowed a few Alchemists from me, guiding them on how to repair herself. She's quite a capable girl, doing most of the work herself. Other Alchemists were more like apprentices, running errands for her."

Knowing everyone was generally alright, Bologue sighed in relief, then noticed the calendar on Fuen's desk and turned it over. According to the red circles on it, Bologue had been in a coma for about a day.

This resurrection time was within Bologue's calculation, considering he died multiple times in a short period, nearly exhausting all Ether.

Bologue said, "You seem prepared to explain all this."

Fuen maintained his kind smile as always.

"Of course."

Chapter 575: Executioner

"Don't underestimate any extraordinary organization that has survived to this day. Even before the Night Race launched their first offensive on the Fortress of the Morning Wind, we had already obtained intelligence on this group of the Night Race."

Fuen began to lay out the long-planned conspiracy before Bologue.

"Since that time, the Clarks have been on high alert, always ready to respond to an attack from the Night Race."

Bologue asked, "And what about the Elder's betrayal?"

Ralph entered the Wind Cellar many years ago. For Fuen's generation, he was almost unlinked to them. For many years, Ralph remained silent, only recently falling due to the Regent King's temptation with the Blood of the Night King.

Bologue thought that no matter how vast the intelligence network, it would be hard to identify such defectors.

"It's a pity you are not a Clarks, and have not thoroughly studied the history of the Dawn War."

Fuen didn't immediately explain Bologue's query but instead brought up something else. "During the Dawn War, after every battle with the Night Race, many of the Clarks would be gravely wounded and on the verge of death."

"At the brink of death..."

It is a prime time for corruption. Many Clarks would succumb to the Blood of the Night Race, betraying the Clarks, and stand against us.

Besides tempting the dying, the Night Race would selectively spare some, granting them blood, planting the seeds of temptation. With enough pressure and promises, these individuals would become deeply embedded defectors within us.

To handle such situations, all families who fought the Night Race have developed their own internal purge strategies to root out traitors."

Bologue was somewhat surprised, "But the Dawn War was over a hundred years ago..."

"But the Night Race still lives, right? It's an iron rule that before any battle with them, a pre-battle purge must be conducted," Fuen nonchalantly kicked his feet up onto the table. "See, we've just dealt with a traitor, and he was an Elder, no less."

Bologue didn't reply. Fuen's story was plausible, yet Bologue felt there were inconsistencies, but he couldn't exactly hold a knife to Fuen's throat to make him tell the truth. He could only stare at him intently.

Bologue's face was expressionless, a gaze that always had an intimidating effect. Fuen chuckled and then said.

"Alright, it was an order from the Decision Room, but regarding the internal purge, I wasn't joking, it's all true. I just didn't expect this time the issue would surface among the Elders."

Bologue asked, "The Decision Room orchestrated all this?"

Once again, it was the Decision Room. For the mysterious supreme decision-making body, Bologue had an indescribable feeling.

As if... the Decision Room was omnipotent.

"No, the Decision Room only provided some assistance; the rest was my doing."

Fuen continued explaining, "After realizing there were internal issues, according to protocol, the Order Bureau sent an inspector, which was Church.

Though he hardly seemed noticeable, Church was quite capable. To prevent accidents, he also brought Chekov's Gun."

To Fuen, the one with the most significant contrast among Bologue's group was Church.

Outwardly unremarkable, like an inconspicuous rock, but he was also the deadliest assassin, always ready to deliver a fatal blow to the enemy.

By this point, everything was clear. Some of the Night Race had broken free of the constraints of the Dawn Oath and were planning to ally with Ralph to seize the Dawn Oath from within the Clarks and release the Night Race from the Land of Eternal Night.

The Clarks had received intelligence and launched an internal purge while the Order Bureau narrowed down the search to the Elders and even sent Church as an inspector for more covert tasks.

For instance, against Ralph's conspiracy.

To lure Ralph out, Fuen paid a great price, allowing the Night Race to breach the Fortress of the Morning Wind. Even during the Dawn War, not even the Night King had accomplished this.

On the way to the Wind Source Highlands, Church had mentioned to Bologue that he was there to carry out a mission, and it happened that the group acted together...

Wait a minute.

Bologue suddenly realized a grand web of conspiracy, belatedly realizing, "Palmer's leave was approved by you!"

The series of coincidences led to the current situation, but Bologue never believed in coincidences, especially not with the unlucky Palmer around.

"You guessed it!"

Fuen gave a thumbs up.

Bologue mourned for Palmer in his mind. As expected, the Field Operations Department wasn't kind enough to let Palmer come back; it was all Fuen's indication.

"But you can't say it's all a conspiracy. Palmer really hadn't been back for a long time. I didn't know how he was doing, although I could just wave my hand, and intel about him would continually flow from

inside the Order Bureau, from whether he clocked in on time today to whether he left early, all detailed."

Fuen appeared like a kindly old father, not good at showing concern for children.

"But these are just cold words. I wanted to see for myself how Palmer was doing."

Bologue uncertainly asked, "This incident wasn't just an internal purge, but also a test for Palmer?"

"I suppose so."

"Then... how about Palmer?"

"Only in the face of adversity does a person reveal their true nature."

The relationship between Fuen and Palmer should have been quite bad, but every time Fuen mentioned Palmer, their relationship seemed surprisingly harmonious.

"Palmer's performance was perfect, truly worthy of being my child, the heir chosen by the era."

Fuen added, "The only regret is that he's still young and needs time to grow."

Bologue nodded in agreement; Prayer Believers were still too weak, merely basic units in the Extraordinary War. The ones who truly determined the war's direction were Defenders and Seekers of Glory.

"Aren't you afraid of Palmer's death?"

Bologue said with lingering fear, "He is a Defender."

The terrifying Ether reaction of Ralph still lingered in Bologue's mind, and relying solely on the Tier One Prayer Believers, facing the Defender was quite challenging.

"You are aware of Alchemy Matrix Technology, right, Bologue? Then you should understand that it wasn't until the modern era, during the time of Scorched Earth Fury, that Alchemy Matrix Technology saw rapid advancement."

"What do you mean?"

"Ralph may be a Defender, but he is already an old relic... can you guess his Secret Energy?"

Fuen didn't let Bologue guess for long and directly gave the answer, "Secret Energy-Wind Source."

"Isn't that..."

"This is the limitation of the era, Bologue. In the era Ralph belonged to, the technology of the Alchemy Matrix was far less advanced than it is now. Many powerful Condensers used cumbersome primitive Secret Energy, like giving him a precision rifle, only for him to swing the butt like a club."

"Is this why Palmer is so special? He lives in an era of explosive growth for Alchemy Matrix Technology."

"Indeed, the Path of Wind Fury, perfected over a century, is the most flawless path for the Clarks."

Fuen sighed, "Think about it, a hundred years ago, we rode on horseback, wielding swords. A hundred years later, we can send heavy steel into the sky... all this within just a century, so it is with Alchemy Matrix Technology."

Bologue suddenly asked, "Do you think the difference in Alchemy Matrix Technology is really just a limitation of the era?"

"What's wrong?"

"I once learned of a theory like this: a hundred years ago, or even earlier, there wasn't much Ether saturating the world, which made it difficult for Alchemists to sense the existence of Secret Sources. But with the passage of time, the Ether concentration of the entire world has been continuously rising, which led to the explosive growth of Alchemy Matrix Technology."

"Hmm... interesting, it's the first time I've heard such a theory," Fuen thought for a moment, "You mean that the eruption of Alchemy Matrix Technology in this era is also due to the increase in Ether concentration, right?"

"Probably..."

Bologue didn't continue speaking; Teda was already dead, and his theory remained unverified.

Then Bologue understood why the battle went so smoothly: "Because of the gap in Alchemy Matrix Technology, you could easily take down Ralph."

That's why Fuen so calmly set the trap, even without Fuen's action, there was Church watching closely. Bologue even suspected that when they were suppressed by Ralph, Church had already taken aim at Ralph, only needing the right opportunity to pull the deadly trigger.

"Ralph had the Ether strength of a Defender, but lacked an adequately advanced Alchemy Matrix. When he swung the rifle butt at me, I had already fired a bullet, penetrating his body."

Fuen added, "Of course, the most important thing is that he was too old, about to die, and had violated the oath."

"The oath restricting the Elders?"

"Of course, maintaining the unity of such a colossal entity is not an easy task. The higher the position a person holds, the more they are bound by the oath."

Fuen pulled open a drawer, took out a heavy book, with the words "Wind Source Oath" engraved on it.

Bologue's expression was somewhat complicated. Would Fuen really just leave something this important in a drawer?

Fuen seemed to know what Bologue was thinking and casually explained, "This is just a copy; it's standard issue in the Clarks."

"The main targets of the oath's constraints are the Elders and Executioner; they are very senior in the family, bear honors, and are in high tiers. If not handled well, it can easily cause disaster."

Fuen opened a page and read one of the most important ordinances aloud.

"Unless with the Executioner's permission, the Elders shall not harm any member of the Clarks."

"Who is the Executioner?"

"Right in front of you."

Chapter 576: The Established Era

Executioner.

Few people know that within the Clarks family, the patriarch also has such a title.

Fuen smiled at Bologue, "Elders and executioners mutually check each other. I need the elders' approval for major actions, and similarly, whatever the elders want to do requires my personal execution."

Bologue said softly, "Ralph can't kill Palmer; the oath restrains him."

"Actually, with some effort, it can be done. After all, oaths can be broken. But when he fully breaks it, the harsh oath will hasten his death... He fears death that much, as you've seen."

Bologue stared at Fuen, suddenly feeling a chill. Fuen's hold over the grand scheme made him truly uneasy.

"I always feel like you've been preparing for many years to clash with the Night Race."

"There's no choice. Every executioner receives such an education," Fuen admitted frankly, "The Night Race is immortal, but humans die. Over generations, ideologies inevitably become distorted."

"In fact, I always feel that until the last of the Night Race falls, the Dawn War is not truly over... I have been preparing, continuously readying for it."

Fuen spoke those frightening words nonchalantly.

"I'm sorry, human lives are too short; one can only achieve certain goals through some extreme methods."

Bologue took a deep breath. Only now did he feel that he truly understood Fuen.

Anyone who can be the patriarch of the Clarks is not a simple person. Just like Serey, if one is fooled by Fuen's casual facade, that would be truly lethal.

A document slid in front of Bologue, and Fuen gestured for him to open it, "You should look at this too. Our conflicts with the Night Race will only increase."

Bologue opened the document. It contained detailed intelligence on the Night Race, far more reliable than Serey's drunken tales.

"The currently active Night Race is led by a Night Race individual known as the Regent King. It's speculated that this Regent King is likely of the pureblood tier."

Bologue continued to flip through, finding a mention of the Night Race's mysterious Blood Ceremony.

The Night Race's Blood Ceremony is not as simple as imagined. It requires the implantation of Night Race blood into the target, then awakening the power of the contract within the blood to establish a blood contract with the Devil, thus becoming part of the Night Race.

Under the interference of Bologue and others, Ralph and Derby never had the opportunity to conduct the ceremony, let alone summon the Devil.

This reminded Bologue of Palmer's unfortunate experience, as if he had a peculiar fate with events like the ceremony.

Bologue asked, "I guess, if we weren't around, you planned to strike during the Blood Ceremony, right?"

Hearing this, Fuen smiled, taking three pens and aligning them together.

"If the angle is appropriate, Chekov's Gun could indeed hit two targets with one bullet."

Bologue thought Fuen resembled a cunning fox, fortunately, a fox on their side.

"Is Palmer really your son?" Bologue suddenly asked, "He seems incredibly dumb, whereas you... are too cunning."

Fuen sighed, "Hahaha, such things can be learned slowly. I never imagined that after becoming an executioner, I would turn out this way."

After understanding the inside story, Bologue asked, "What about those Night Race members? Any survivors?"

"There are several survivors. They thought the Fortress of the Morning Wind was weak, but it was just a facade we created deliberately. You weren't on the frontlines; you should have seen the panic in those Night Race members when they saw groups of Condensers appearing."

"No, I mean the ones I took down. Are there any survivors?"

Bologue didn't care about the frontline matters as he wasn't involved. He was more concerned with his own trophies.

"Oh... Let me see."

Fuen pulled out some documents and inspected, "According to the information we obtained, the Night Race member you dealt with, named Haiqi, is dead."

"Haiqi's blood tier was not high. Under your dismemberment and fiery execution, even an Undying Body was completely consumed. Zefirin, however, is still alive. Though she underwent the same execution as Haiqi, I managed to chisel her out from the Iron Coffin in time."

Fuen frowned, recalling the scene made him somewhat nauseous, as Condensers did everything to chisel the iron stone, bit by bit extracting the charred flesh.

If not for the doctors' confirmation of some ether reaction in Zefirin, they all thought that the twisted, deformed body ought to be dead.

"Derby is also alive. He is, after all, a Negative Power User, not so easy to kill."

Fuen added, "Now they've been transferred to the Crow's Nest, interrogated by Iron Whistles."

Bologue didn't listen to the latter part, flexing his wrist. It showed that the Undead were indeed hard to kill, but rendering them powerless was not a difficult task.

Bologue then fell silent for a while, with unresolved issues lingering in his mind. He felt Fuen couldn't give a definite answer, so he was too lazy to ask, choosing to digest these issues alone.

Fuen said, "You seem troubled."

"I'm contemplating something."

Bologue's mind continually flashed images of Ralph - his greed, fear, cowardice, kneeling, licking blood like a wild dog...

"As you know, I'm a Debtor, burdened with an Undying Body," Bologue said, "Unfortunately, I have no memory of becoming a Debtor, which means I don't know what deal I made or the reasons for it."

"But... obviously, the Gift of Immortality is only desired by those who fear death."

Mentioning this, there was a flicker of aversion in Bologue's eyes.

Fuen prompted, "So?"

"I'm somewhat afraid of the day when I discover the truth."

Bologue tried to maintain calmness, his voice devoid of emotion, "I'm afraid I truly sought the Gift of Immortality out of fear of death."

"Becoming what you despise, right?" Fuen smiled, "A violent bloodthirsty killer was initially just a... coward."

"Who knows? People change."

Bologue suddenly laughed, talking with Fuen about the more distant past, "When I first joined the army, it was just to earn money."

"Back then, I was naïve and clueless, but experiences changed me... or rather, I grew."

Bologue sighed, "Negotiating with the Devil is also part of my growth."

"I think you're merely lamenting the capriciousness of fate, not genuinely troubled."

Fuen noticed the key point, as Bologue seemed more like finding someone to chat with, not seeking help.

"Because I've figured out these things, long ago already figured them out."

Bologue summarized his life.

"No matter what I've been through, or what I am, one thing is certain, I will decide my own fate, and that's enough."

"Sounds pretty good."

"It is good."

Bologue stood up, "If the past me was indeed a coward, it doesn't matter. At least now, I have become brave."

Fuen gently clapped his hands, a silent applause.

"Mr. Lazarus, this is a perfect era, an era of destined fate."

Fuen's tone suddenly became solemn, light streaming through the floor-to-ceiling window behind him, casting his figure in a tall, sacred illumination.

"I don't know what this era means to you, but for me, for the Clarks, this is the opportunity we've waited a century for."

"Palmer, huh?"

Bologue had come to deeply understand Palmer's uniqueness; he was merely the technical vessel of Clark in this era, the destined next Executioner.

"Not just that, think carefully."

Fuen leaned on the table, suddenly standing with a fervent yet low voice.

"In your view, this is a time when ether concentration is continually rising. For us, it is an era when our Alchemy Matrix technology reaches its peak.

So, what about for the Night Race, for... the Night King?"

Bologue perceived the implication in Fuen's words, feeling shocked and... excited by the crazed idea.

"The Night King is far older than all of us, wielding an Alchemy Matrix that's beyond simply outdated.

In the Dawn War a century ago, he might have compensated for flaws with his tier, but now, this is our era. Alchemy Matrices beyond imagination are continually being developed. The gap between us and the Night King is narrowing, surpassing, and possibly even widening!"

Fuen could hardly contain his wild grin, painting that blood-soaked vision for Bologue.

"Now, we hold steel and gunpowder, while all the Night King has is a ridiculous rapier..."

"It is time to completely end the Eternal Night Race."

Chapter 577: Eternal Sun Island

After briefly chatting with Fuen, Bologue parted ways and walked down the corridor, sighing.

It was evident that the current Executioner had an extraordinary zeal for eradicating the Night Race. Even though Fuen had never really encountered many Night Race members since his birth, this did not hinder his hatred towards them. To Fuen, the Night Race was like a ticking bomb, unpredictable and ready to explode into disaster at any moment.

Bologue thought that perhaps one day in the future, he might really receive a task related to the Night Race.

"Oath..."

Bologue suddenly paused, looking out the window at the flickering shadows – members of the Clarks family, busy cleaning the coast.

This internal purge operation was quite successful. Not only were the traitors rooted out, but a certain understanding of the opposing force's strength was also gained.

Currently, the Night Race had only dispatched one Defender to contain Fuen. The thunder and fierce winds within the ominous clouds were stirred by Fuen during his battle with them.

The Defender from the Night Race had Secret Energy suspected to create illusionary weather, and the looming clouds earlier were conjured by him. Judging by the nature of the opponent's Secret Energy, Fuen believed that the opponent's Alchemy Matrix was not state-of-the-art.

He was also a relic of a bygone era.

Therefore, from Fuen's recount, the Night Race Defender wasn't considered strong... Perhaps Fuen himself was excessively powerful. Though outwardly he claimed his tier was that of a Defender, much like the disparity among Prayer Believers as Bologue observed, there were notable differences between Defenders. Fuen was undoubtedly the stronger party.

Fuen was already infinitely close to becoming a Seeker of Glory, yet he still hadn't taken that step, and it was unknown what he was awaiting.

Perhaps, like Bologue, he was anticipating future events.

In some inexplicable way, Bologue always felt that the research by Teda was correct.

Hundreds of years ago, the Secret Source was ethereal and elusive, and the world's Ether reserves were scarce. Even though humans could perceive the existence of Ether and utilize it, the effects were no more remarkable than street magic – merely conjuring flames or barely moving objects.

As time passed, the concentration of Ether gradually increased, and humanity's perception of the Secret Source became clearer, leading to the emergence of the Alchemy Matrix, further exploiting this Extraordinary Power.

A century ago, the Alchemy Matrix was limited to the crude Secret Energy·Wind Source, but through decades of iterations, the Clarks family had derived multiple advanced powers from the Secret Energy·Wind Source, perfecting the Path of Wind Fury.

Earlier generations of Defenders and Seekers of Glory possessed the power corresponding to their tier but lacked sufficiently potent Secret Energy. A hundred years later, the development and refinement of Secret Energy awaited these new Defenders and Seekers of Glory to rise.

Constantly advancing power.

An almost unmentioned term flashed through Bologue's mind, suddenly realizing that perhaps in this predetermined era, someone would eventually wear that elusive crown.

The Crowned.

The Ether concentration across the world continued to rise, and the ethereal Secret Source became increasingly distinct in the eyes of Alchemists, akin to stars that were growing ever closer. Once, they were merely small points of light in the night sky, but their radiance was intensifying, enough to descend upon the earth.

Bologue felt that Teda was right; his conjectures were correct, yet he lacked the evidence to prove it all.

I am the evidence.

As long as Bologue continued to live, he could witness Teda's hypotheses firsthand. It wasn't difficult for him; all he needed was to patiently await the passage of time.

Gazing into the distance, the scenery of the Wind Source Highlands always relaxed the mood, and Bologue leaned against the window as if he were a traveler on vacation.

After contemplating the era's iteration, Bologue wondered whether he too was bound by some kind of oath.

As a behemoth spanning the Rhine Alliance, Bologue believed there must be a formidable oath within the Order Bureau. Perhaps part of an oath was hidden in the job documents he signed.

Having worked in the Order Bureau for so long, Bologue hadn't sensed any power related to the oath, possibly because his tier and position weren't high enough, making his perception of the oath not as clear.

It was also possible that he hadn't truly signed an oath yet.

An oath is both a constraint and an acknowledgment; only by signing the oath does one reach the core of power.

The Elders of the Wind Cellar, under the binding of the oath, perform sacred duties, slumbering in the shadows. When necessary, through special Alchemy Armament, they could even detach from the Wind Cellar and go into battle.

These Elders' Secret Energy was outdated compared to the era, but their Ether intensity was indubitably strong, requiring merely the addition of advanced Alchemy Armament to unleash terrifying power, like the Silver Knights paired with the Iron-Cutting Steel-Slicing Sword.

Advanced Alchemy Armament could bridge the gap between eras, which is why Bologue believed that if Fuen truly prepared to attack the Night Race, it wouldn't be smooth sailing.

As the most ancient Night King, Bologue believed he could foresee the impact of era changes.

Facing such an ancient being, one can never be too cautious.

...

After sending Bologue away, Fuen let out a long breath, sharing with others his hidden ambitions, which made him feel extremely excited, as if he had regained his youth.

"He's gone, you can come out now."

Fuen tidied up the documents on the desk and spoke to the person hiding behind the side door.

After a moment, the side door opened, and a bizarrely dressed guy came out. He was tall, his muscles like armor, stretching a casual floral shirt to the brink, with equally colorful loose shorts below, flip-flops on his feet, and sand still lingering between his toes.

He plopped down on the seat Bologue had just occupied, gently nudged his pink heart-shaped sunglasses, and set the large sunshade he was holding aside.

Fuen queried the beach man, "Were you on vacation?"

"Sort of, they all went out traveling, and I thought, I haven't been out for a while, so I went to see her too."

The beach man pointed to where Bologue had just left, casually picked up a delicate key, and in front of Fuen, stuffed it into his mouth and swallowed it down.

"It only feels safe when kept inside the body."

The beach man coughed twice; putting something so hard into his stomach was no easy task.

Fuen frowned at this scene, "That's disgusting."

"You've seen it before."

"Vacation... long ago, I actually believed you were on vacation then," Fuen laughed at his own naïveté from his youth and questioned, "Where exactly does that Key of the Crooked Path lead?"

"To the island bathed in eternal sunlight."

That answer again. Fuen pressed his temples forcefully; since many years ago when he first knew the visitor, this was always the reply he got whenever he asked this question.

The island bathed in eternal sunlight.

It sounded ridiculous, a man who could only hide in the dark night, swearing to guard the Eternal Sun Island.

But the visitor answered seriously, with sincere demeanor, not like lying, yet Fuen just couldn't believe it.

This guy before him had uttered too many lies, mixing truths with falsehoods; even if he was telling the truth, Fuen found it hard to believe, unless he could witness it with his own eyes.

Fuen once asked to witness the Eternal Sun Island, but was always refused by the visitor; as a habit, he asked again, "I don't believe it, unless you take me to see."

"Oh? That won't do; that's my last harbor."

Yet again the familiar refusal, the visitor denied Fuen's request.

Fuen said, "I thought your last harbor was that Undying Club."

"The Undying Club harbors the body," the visitor pointed at his head, "while it harbors my spirit, even my soul—if I still have a soul."

The idle chat ended, and Fuen sat up straight, facing this flamboyant visitor who was now fiddling with the sand between his toes, scattering sand everywhere.

"We haven't seen each other in years, Serey, what's your sudden visit for this time?"

"What else, to see those Night Race not bound by the oath," Serey turned to look out of the window, where the scarlet coast was clearly visible, "I was the one who buried them back then and built their monument, and yet they reappeared..."

"Do you know anything?"

Fuen recalled that the words in the "Dawn Oath" were smeared and altered.

It had been over a hundred years since the oath was taken, most participants had returned to dust, and those aware of the insider details were now few and far between.

Fuen later had people investigate the witness of the oath, Wolfgang Gold, but still found nothing; even the power of the Clarks couldn't uncover the slightest clue, as if this witness appeared from nowhere and disappeared into nothing.

Now it was different; the greatest hero of the Dawn War, the traitor who destroyed the Night Race, Serey knew the whole of that history. If there were any questions, he would just ask him directly.

"Hmm..."

Serey sniffed the air deeply, even from such a distance, he still caught the faint blood scent, thereby identifying the source of the bloodline.

After a brief contemplation, Serey relaxed, smiling at Fuen.

"Good news and bad news, which one do you want to hear first?"

Chapter 578: Accurate Judgement of People

Fuen sighed; he always had difficulty dealing with Serey.

"Start with the bad news."

"The bad news is, this is an unfamiliar lineage. At least among the Night Race Lords that I know, there is no such branch. In other words, this Regent King might have emerged after the Dawn War."

The bloodline of the Night Race can be traced. Different Night Race Lords represent different branches, which eventually return to the Night King.

After the Dawn War, the Night Race fully retreated to the Land of Eternal Night, severed from the living world. They couldn't continue to breed new Night Race members, trapped in an eternal cage, endlessly tormented by Bloodthirsty Syndrome.

Fuen grew serious, "A bloodline even you're not familiar with?"

"It seems so," Serey nodded, "Maybe he's a newly recognized son of my dad, but that's unlikely. Everyone knows what my dad is like now."

The end of the Night King is not mentioned in the Dawn Oath; even now, Fuen is unclear about the details. But it's certain that Serey must have given everyone a satisfactory answer; otherwise, he wouldn't be living so leisurely now.

Fuen pressed further, "Do you have any ideas?"

Serey glanced at Fuen and broke into uncontrollable laughter, "Haven't seen you in days, Fuen; you've become dumb. Has it been too long since you last had alcohol?"

They hadn't seen each other for many years, but in Serey's eyes, it was only a few days. Fuen couldn't be bothered to quibble over these matters and looked at Serey silently.

Serey didn't keep Fuen waiting long, "Devil, that devil created all this disaster."

"If you look at the devil as a company's boss, then we, the Night Race, are his best employees. By spreading Blood Donation yearly, he can harvest plenty of souls.

Now this dedicated sales representative has resigned; if you were the boss, what would you do?"

"Hire a new sales representative."

"Exactly! When we drafted the Dawn Oath, we made preparations for all possible scenarios. But the one thing we couldn't bind was the Devil, right?"

Serey said, "This mysterious Regent King might be yet another... Night King supported by the Devil."

Fuen grew tense, "Another foundational bloodline?"

"No, no, don't get so excited, Fuen," Serey explained, "Even the greediest devil must abide by the conservation of value."

"Few people's value can surpass my dad in this world, which is why he possesses this Undying Bloodline and is able to propagate it."

Serey sniffed firmly again, then suddenly stood up.

"Is there a blood sample?"

Fuen said, "Our prisoner is still in the dungeon..."

Serey urged, "No need to make it so complicated, just get any blood sample."

Listening to this, Fuen raised his hand, and gusts of wind rolled up along the coast, extracting droplets from the crimson bloodstains, which flew indoors with the wind.

Serey extended his finger to gently touch the flowing water ball, savoring the blood within. After a careful examination, Serey traced the bloodline back and ultimately detected a familiar aura.

"Damn it, that Regent King might really be my dad's illegitimate son!"

Upon thorough examination, Serey sensed the presence of the Night King at the end of the bloodline. Although the Regent King's bloodline was unfamiliar, he was indeed of the same origin as Serey.

Serey proposed another idea, "Perhaps the Devil preserved a portion of my dad's blood and bestowed it upon someone many years later."

"If it's at the Devil's behest, that's not too difficult."

Serey grew a headache; to completely prevent the rise of the Night Race, after sealing the Night King, they destroyed all of the Night King's blood to avoid the emergence of a new pure-blood class. But now it seems that the Blood of the Night King had still escaped.

"It's the Devil again, damn it."

Fuen cursed in a low voice; if anyone could be considered more hateful than the Night Race, it would be the source of all this chaos.

The devils.

"Devils only care about value, about souls. This Regent King might be a mercenary hired by the Devil, sent to rescue his most loyal salesperson."

Serey remained in that carefree posture, as if it had nothing to do with him. Indeed, it had nothing to do with him; Serey had already retired, moved into the Undying Club, and bid farewell to the world's chaos.

"In any case, regardless of what happens, the fact is, an unbound pure-blood Night Race has appeared, and now no one knows what he's grown into."

Fuen covered his eyes with one hand, feeling exhausted. He felt he had been wasting his breath with Serey, raising a bunch of futile guesses.

Fuen noticed another issue, "What about the good news?"

"The good news is... this matter has nothing to do with me."

Serey's words paused for a moment, and he spread his hands.

He meant the good news as good news for himself. As for Fuen, he wasn't within his consideration.

Fuen gazed at Serey for a long time; they'd known each other for many years, and Fuen could sense from Serey's subtle expressions and actions his intentions beyond his words.

"You're hiding something."

"Rest assured; it's unrelated to the situation. You know, my name is also signed on the Dawn Oath."

Serey was right. So far, his actions hadn't triggered the constraints of the oath; all of his activities were within the oath's permissible range.

Fuen frowned, secretly clenched his fist, and then gradually relaxed. He comforted himself that dealing with someone like Serey required immense patience.

"You're always full of lies, Serey."

"If not for my talent for lying, I wouldn't be able to marry so many wives."

Serey raised an eyebrow, taking Fuen's words as praise, "Each one of them believes she's my one and only."

Serey was keen to share his amorous exploits. In his younger days, Fuen often listened to Serey's love stories. Thinking of those twisted tales filled with hatred and distorted feelings, Fuen felt a wave of disgust.

Fuen almost lost his breath. He stared intently at Serey, finally releasing a sigh, "It's quite tedious; as soon as the talks veer into the depths of your heart, you start to change the subject."

"I thought we were friends."

Fuen played his emotional card.

"The depths of my heart? Let's not go there; that place only welcomes gentle ladies, gentlemen please take a detour." Serey gestured, signaling refusal.

Serey always had this casual and frivolous demeanor, like a child who would never grow up. But Fuen was no longer the younger man who could drink the night away with him; now he was the Executioner of the Clarks family, bearing considerable responsibilities.

"Why don't we talk about things outside of work, how about that?" Serey suggested, "Don't you ever feel tired from working all the time?"

Things outside of work.

Fuen pondered briefly and sadly realized that apart from work, he really didn't have much to share with Serey.

Since returning to the Clarks family, Fuen had taken on responsibilities, no longer the arrogant figure of his youth... he didn't even remember when he last had a night of heavy drinking.

Back in the days living in Opus, aside from workdays, Fuen practically spent the rest of his time with Serey in the Undying Club, allowing alcohol to ensnare his nerves, humming that strange tune.

Fuen said, "Bologue, he's also a member of your Undying Club, right? Still not retired."

"That's right, one of the best members in recent years... Why did you mention him, are you interested in him?"

"A bit."

Before the battle began, Fuen knew Bologue was undead, but after the battle, Bologue's Undying Body still surprised him.

With just a period of rest and sufficient Ether, Bologue could revive as if through time reversal.

Bologue's Undying Body had no obvious weaknesses. In terms of Undying Nature, even a Night Race Lord like Serey was hard-pressed to match him, which could not help but draw Fuen's attention.

Serey asked in return, "What do you think of Bologue?"

Fuen carefully recalled the impression Bologue left on him and his conduct during the Night Race's invasion...

"A competent field staff."

In Fuen's view, this was already a very high evaluation.

Serey whistled, clapped, and agreed with Fuen, "You have the same keen eye as me."

Fuen disliked this kind of compliment from Serey; it sounded like Serey had found another way to praise himself.

Chapter 579: Love and Peace

From the mystery of the Regent King to Bologue's evaluation, the two began to chat idly, utterly relaxed.

Fuen stood up, fetched a fine wine from the cabinet, and poured a glass for both Serey and himself. As the cold wine slid down his throat, Fuen was overwhelmed with nostalgia for the past.

Serey spoke of his understanding of Bologue, "Bologue is an exceptional fellow, much like Palmer from the Clarks family."

Fuen shook his head, "I don't understand what you mean."

"Don't you think he's a lot like Palmer?"

Serey raised both his hands, each representing Bologue and Palmer.

"Palmer Clarks is tasked with completing the 'Path of Wind Fury' in this era. If he achieves 'Ascension,' he could theoretically become the most powerful Seeker of Glory you can cultivate.

Now, let's talk about Bologue. He possesses an extraordinarily perfect Undying Body, even outshining my old man's Undying Body when compared. Such a figure appears in this era, the era of the Alchemy Matrix Technology explosion."

Serey laughed, "You know, even when Bologue was just a First Stage Condenser, I couldn't discern the essence of his Secret Energy."

Extending his Alchemy Matrix across matter to make it part of his body, then commanding it, even after living so long, Serey encountered such an Alchemy Matrix system for the first time. As Bologue advanced, this Alchemy Matrix grew increasingly mysterious in Serey's eyes.

"I'm genuinely curious where the Order Bureau unearthed such an Alchemy Matrix system to bestow upon Bologue.

An immortal monster paired with an enigmatic Secret Energy..."

Serey offered another piece of information, "You know, Bologue doesn't actually belong to this era. Despite his appearance, he's nearly a hundred years old."

"Bologue participated in the Scorched Earth Fury, became a Debtor during the Fall of the Holy City, then was taken in by the Order Bureau, only recently released to become a member of the Field Operations Department."

Serey continued narrating at his own pace, completely unconcerned if Fuen was following, pausing afterward as if allowing Fuen time to ponder.

In the prolonged silence, Serey mused.

"Don't you find all this too coincidental, Fuen?"

Fuen nodded stiffly, comprehending Serey's meaning, like staring into the depths of a vast ocean, feeling awe for what might lie beneath the surface.

"It's as if somebody deliberately sheltered Bologue until the Alchemy Matrix system matured in this era, then released him, burdening him with this power."

Serey softly voiced his hypothesis.

"Some force is intentionally manipulating Bologue's destiny."

Ever since Serey first encountered Bologue, he sensed Bologue's extraordinary nature.

The Devils bestowed Blessings upon Debtors, having them stand in their place to disrupt the course of world history. The greater the Blessing someone bears, the higher their value and their potential to skew historical progress.

Just like Serey's father, the Night King, under the rampant conquest of the Night King, they nearly created an Eternal Night Empire. According to normal historical trajectories, neither the Night Race nor the Eternal Night Empire should exist; their emergence erased possibilities that ought to have been.

Fuen asked, "Have you ever discussed this with Bologue?"

"No," Serey replied, "If such a force truly exists, I doubt it would appreciate any interference."

Fuen continued questioning, "What role do you think the Order Bureau plays in all this?"

Serey didn't answer immediately, flashing a sly smile, akin to a cunning fox. "I haven't thought that far."

"Don't make it too complicated, Fuen. This is merely a small conjecture of mine. This world is rife with unsolved mysteries; hence everyone loves conspiracy theories to indulge their imaginations, don't they?"

Serey moved beside Fuen, wrapping an arm around his neck, pulling him up as he did many years ago, urging him to join in song and dance.

Only Serey was singing and dancing.

Fuen watched Serey with an exceedingly cold gaze, conveying a wealth of meaning without the need for words.

The smile on Serey's face gradually faded. He set down his wine glass and plopped down on Fuen's desk, knocking over a pile of documents in the process.

"I just feel a bit uneasy, Fuen."

Serey murmured, "This is a wonderful era; new songs are released every week, new movies premier every month, and every year brings a variety of strange and fascinating new things."

"In the old world, I would curl up in my castle, embrace my lover, ride a horse, occasionally venture out for a hunt—days unchanged for centuries.

But in recent years, castles became tourist attractions; internal combustion engines replaced horses; no one enjoys hunting anymore. People prefer lounging in cinemas."

As an Undead, Serey profoundly felt the shifting times, unsure of his own place amidst the rolling tide.

"A hundred years ago, people were riding horses, brandishing swords and spears; a century later, we are borne by heavy armored vehicles and tanks, and ferocious explosives turn the earth to scorched ground.

The unknown, wild lands paved with sleepers and tracks, the ceaselessly roaring seas opened by ships, even the high sky has been conquered.

Serey sighed, "If the history of the entire world is a movie, the modern era feels like someone pressed the fast-forward button, everything is changing rapidly."

"The world is different every day, I'm afraid if I wake up, it will truly be the end of the world... I wonder if I will die."

"Stop it, isn't this lie too crude?"

Fuen didn't wait for Serey to respond and continued, "Are you worried about the person whose name you crossed out?"

Serey was stunned.

"Serey, you're a despicable bastard. You seem to love each of your wives dearly, but in your eyes, they're just pets to pass the time..."

Fuen intended to continue, but recalling Serey's disgusting love stories, he held back and kept on condemning Serey's nature.

"You don't care about anyone or anything, not your siblings, your father, the power you once held... You don't even care about yourself.

To you, the world is just an amusement park. You don't care what it becomes, even if the world is destroyed tomorrow, you'd raise a glass and laugh heartily at the doomsday storm."

Fuen felt that he understood Serey well enough. Even though Serey never revealed his inner thoughts to him, years of association allowed Fuen to perceive Serey's nature.

"Cold-blooded and cruel Serey, your betrayal destroyed the Eternal Night Empire, your achievements overshadow everyone else's, yet you don't seek any rewards, instead choosing to obscure someone's name from a vow.

You don't care about this world, but you care about that name. Now you're not worried about this world, but about this 'world with that person'.

Serey wore a gloomy expression, his hidden intentions having been blatantly exposed by Fuen and left out in the open.

"When did you realize it?"

"From the moment you confirmed the blood sample and said it was good news."

Fuen clasped his hands in front of him, enjoying the feeling of holding the initiative, giving him a sense of triumph over Serey.

"I've told you, you don't care about anything, not even if I die. You probably wouldn't even come to see me, maybe you'd just pick up my glass and drink to me at the Undying Club.

But here you are, cold-blooded as you are, coming all this way to see me... When was the last time we met? Serey, five years ago? Or ten?"

Serey's expression was somewhat awkward. It sounded as if Fuen was complaining he didn't care about their friendship, if such a thing really existed.

"You came here to confirm the blood sample," Fuen stared intently at Serey, "You're here to confirm the identity of the other party. You're afraid he's the one who sparked the war—the person whose name you obscured."

"In this world, he's the only one worth caring about for you," Fuen interrogated, "Who is he?"

Serey fell silent. Having not seen each other for a long time, he underestimated Fuen, who had cornered him, and Serey responded coldly.

"It's none of your business."

"As this event continues to unfold, it will inevitably involve him."

A silent atmosphere ensued, with Serey turning his head to look at the world outside the window, while Fuen's gaze moved over the documents.

The rigid atmosphere didn't last long. Fuen knew if Serey didn't want to speak, no one could pry his mouth open.

Fuen gave up, exhaling a deep breath and, sitting back in the chair, slumped as if melting into it.

"Go back, Serey, don't get involved. We'll handle this; you just stay at the Undying Club."

An unexpected look flashed in Serey's eyes, and he looked at Fuen in confusion, "Are you concerned about me?"

"I just know that once you leave the Undying Club and choose to intervene in this world... you'll end up miserably," Fuen laughed, "Not to mention all your numerous enemies, that Devil alone won't spare you, for you've cost him a lot of souls."

Serey sneered a few times, picked up a nearby parasol, looking like he was really going to leave, but just as he was about to push the door open, Fuen called out to him again.

"One more question, Serey, why did you betray the Night King back then? Was it really just because you got bored of immortality?"

Till now, Fuen couldn't figure out this question, and he really wanted to know the answer.

Serey said, "You won't believe the answer."

"Let's hear it."

Serey earnestly and seriously replied, "For love and peace, for a better world."

Fuen looked at Serey's serious expression and burst out laughing.

Chapter 580: Professionals

When Palmer awoke, two days had passed since that night, the echoes of the battle still lingered in his ears, and the soft, warm bed pulled Palmer back to reality.

Before Palmer could enjoy the comfort, a strange sensation spread from his body, a pain like needle pricks spread all over, and he couldn't help but move his body, trying to lessen the impact of the pain.

It wasn't the first time Palmer had been injured like this, and over time, he had started to get used to it. After alleviating the pain, he followed the procedure he had developed and first observed his surroundings to confirm where he was.

If Palmer was not mistaken, he was in his room, in the Fortress of the Morning Wind. The familiar room had undergone some changes, with medical apparatus parked to one side, and some trays carrying medication placed not far away.

Palmer tried to move his body, only to find himself wrapped up like a precious package with white bandages.

There was a layer of plaster on his right hand and left foot. In the corner of his eye, he noticed something on the plaster. Palmer struggled to raise his right hand and saw some scribbled handwriting on the surface of the plaster, which read.

"From father's love."

And it was signed with a crooked heart and Fuen's name.

Damn it...

Palmer's blood pressure shot up instantly, the heart monitor beeped wildly, and he struggled to get up, making the hospital bed sway. The medical staff outside the door noticed the disturbance and rushed in.

Before Palmer could explain anything, they skillfully injected various medications into him, and in an instant, the pain that wrapped around his body vanished, along with Palmer's consciousness.

"Truly worthy of the Clarks' heir!"

"Slaying traitors!"

"For the family's honor, even daring to confront a Defender, he really is..."

The medical staff pointed at Palmer and gossiped, Palmer extended a finger, mouth slightly open, ready to curse, but he fell back into unconsciousness before uttering a syllable.

Palmer slept until the evening, and after such a long saturation of sleep, his mental state was excellent.

This time, Palmer didn't react violently, instead, he began to contemplate the current situation.

Obviously, the attack incident by the Night Race was over. Now was a familiar phase of recovery, possibly due to his Blessing, Palmer always survived life-threatening battles...and then lay in the hospital for a few weeks.

"I am lucky, I am lucky..."

Palmer muttered to himself, applying psychological hints, unwilling to believe he was an unlucky fellow.

In fact, Palmer's performance in this incident was extremely fortunate.

According to the doctors, Ralph was bound by an oath and couldn't kill Palmer directly, but that didn't mean he couldn't indirectly cause Palmer's death.

No matter how strict the oath, there were exploitable loopholes. Ralph had evidently realized this early on. Under his assault, Palmer was severely injured, his body covered with hideous wounds, and he would die of excessive bleeding if given enough time.

Doctors struggled to extract Palmer from the ruins, using various Alchemy Potions to keep him alive along the way. When they got him to the operating table, they realized that Palmer merely looked miserable, but he was actually alive and well.

Secret Energy·Wind Source.

In this era of Alchemy Matrix Technology's explosion, this Secret Energy was just a First Stage manifestation of the Clarks', but in Ralph's era, the Secret Energy·Wind Source was an Alchemy Matrix created after years of research by the Clarks.

Even with the power of a Defender, Ralph was limited by the times and by the Secret Energy·Wind Source.

The Ether conversion efficiency of the Secret Energy·Wind Source was not high, and the command directives were rather vague, making precise operations impossible.

As a result, Ralph's deadly Wind Blade, like a chaotic flurry of blades, looked fierce, full of killing intent, but each blade avoided critical areas.

Even the attending physician couldn't help but sigh at Palmer's dumb luck. If any of the Wind Blades had been misplaced, causing Palmer to bleed out and die indirectly, then the Clarks might consider appointing a new heir.

"Damn it... I always feel something is off about all this..."

Once his emotions stabilized, Palmer began to reconsider.

The fatal bullet from Church hidden in the shadows, the swapped oath document, the sudden appearance of Fuen, even Palmer now realized that this was a conspiracy, one that he had been dragged into.

Palmer raised his right hand, looking at the words on the plaster, yelling, "You even trick your own son!"

After venting, Palmer felt relieved again. It wasn't the first time Fuen had done something like this.

A glimmer rose in Palmer's eyes, calling out to the Ether. His body was bound, yet the Ether still listened to Palmer's command.

Under the doctors' treatment, the venom from Zefirin had been completely cleansed from Palmer's body. He easily summoned a gentle breeze, cautiously using the Wind Blades to cut through the straps that bound him.

Once his limbs were free, Palmer shifted his body, experimenting to see if he could have the wind lift him, allowing him to move around temporarily without a wheelchair.

Yet before Palmer could take the next step, the door was forcefully pushed open again. Palmer feared the doctors had detected something unusual and were coming to treat him, and he shouted.

"I'm awake! There's no problem!"

Palmer guessed this "enthusiasm" from the doctors was instructed by his damned father. Palmer could even imagine the words Fuen spoke at that time.

"This is the renowned Palmer Clarks! He's the heir of the Clarks family! He absolutely cannot die at the Fortress of the Morning Wind! That would make us look very incompetent!"

Fuen must have said that, Palmer swore.

Often, Palmer felt his relationship with Fuen wasn't like father and son, more like friends who couldn't see eye to eye.

It wasn't the medical staff standing at the doorway, but a familiar figure. Even though her back was to the light, leaving only a dark silhouette, Palmer could still recognize her.

Vasilina quickly walked to the bedside, easily pressing Palmer back down.

"You look like you're in good spirits."

"Anyone who sleeps this long would be full of energy."

Palmer gave Vasilina a once-over. She was injured as well but far less so than Palmer, covered in numerous bruises and abrasions, with bandages wrapped around her elbow.

Vasilina sat by the bedside, while Palmer obediently lay still, turning his head. Vasilina kept her gaze on Palmer, occasionally lowering her head and smoothing her hair at her temples.

Palmer asked, "What happened afterwards?"

Vasilina recounted to Palmer the events after he lost consciousness. Fuen had killed Ralph, and the Night Race's attack was thwarted... along with the conspiracy and deception parts, all of which were orchestrated by Fuen in conjunction with the Order Bureau.

"Your former partner, Church, was part of this operation. You guys were just incidentally swept into it, coincidentally 'improvising'."

After hearing Vasilina's words, Palmer let out a long sigh, covering his face with his still functional hand. Memories of his encounter with Church at the start surfaced in his mind.

It wasn't a chance meeting but a premeditated encounter.

Vasilina asked, "How does it feel to be deceived by Church?"

"No feeling, just work, and besides..." Thinking back on Church's conduct throughout, Palmer hadn't noticed any oddities. He sighed again, "That's very typical of Church's style. Despite his unremarkable appearance, I believe he can be considered an expert."

Since hanging out with Bologue, "expert" had taken on a distinctive meaning.

"Not the murderous expert like Bologue, but Church is truly gifted in intelligence infiltration and assassination, a genuine expert."

Palmer rarely spoke of the days he worked with Church; back then, he was employed at the Crow's Nest, as a part of the intelligence agency, confidentiality was the top priority.

Just as now Bologue led Palmer in most tasks, back then, most of the work was also completed by Church, with Palmer assisting on the side.

"Church? He doesn't seem as special as you describe."

Vasilina shook her head, Church was too ordinary, so ordinary that Vasilina found it difficult to recall his appearance when she tried thinking about him now.

Palmer sighed again, "Yes, that's why Church is a professional."

Vasilina pondered for a few seconds before she understood Palmer's point.

Church was unremarkable, inconspicuous; unless you deliberately tried to recall, you could hardly remember his presence. From an intelligence operative's perspective, Church's professional skills were evident.

Palmer bowed his head. Despite partnering with Church for such a long time, he still didn't know Church's true face. Recalling the shot from Chekov's Gun, he couldn't fathom how Church had gotten so close.

Did Ralph not notice anything at all?