

Endless 601

Chapter 601: Hunting

Bologue disappeared.

For a gunman, his target suddenly vanishing from sight is definitely not good news.

Even with his rich experience, Ferguson didn't panic. Instead, he cautiously retracted his alchemy firearms and quickly relocated.

As a Prayer Believer, besides honing his Secret Energy, Ferguson devoted all his energy to Ethereal Skills. He excelled in Ethereal Concealment and Ethereal Perception; the former could hide him from enemy sight, while the latter could expose enemies to his eyes.

Ferguson's attacks usually launched from beyond visual range. Although this distance protected him from being discovered by enemies, it also made it difficult for him to promptly observe enemy movements. The alchemy firearms' scope had many limitations as well.

When Bologue disappeared, Ferguson fully deployed his Ethereal Perception, searching for the ethereal remnants of Bologue, like a hound tracking blood.

Ferguson had great confidence in tonight's operation. As an avid fan of Bologue, they had meticulously researched all of Bologue's information beforehand. Whether it was Bologue's Undying Body or his peculiar personality, Ferguson knew it all somewhat.

Besides that, even Bologue's private life was well known to Ferguson. He knew Bologue's favorite movies, his music taste, and the food he frequently ate.

Ferguson's breathing grew heavy. His nerves became more excited, but soon this joy began to quickly withdraw, as if a monster in Ferguson's heart fed on emotions, devouring his joy, anger, sadness, leaving only an emotional void.

The sheer emptiness tortured Ferguson endlessly, urging him on like Bulimia Nervosa.

Gulping the air, Ferguson's expression was both excited and pained. Suddenly, he drew a short knife and slashed along his wrist, leaving shallow cuts, pressing the wounds hard with his fingers, making himself bloodied. In the intense pain, a new wave of joy surged from within.

The emptiness vanished, Ferguson felt joyful again, eyes filled with fanaticism, moving forward once more.

"Bologue... Bologue Lazarus!"

Ferguson cheered Bologue's name. Bologue was his idol, his savior, the rope to pull them from the abyss of nothingness.

It was Ferguson's opportunity to redeem everything.

Under the night, several figures moved among the buildings, close to the world but infinitely distant.

Ferguson wasn't worried Bologue would flee back to the Order Bureau. He knew Bologue too well, even though it was Ferguson's first time seeing Bologue.

Bologue was an arrogant guy, who wouldn't choose to escape because of such setbacks. Though Bologue seemed to hide, Ferguson knew, Bologue was only gathering strength, waiting for the moment to counterattack.

Bologue wouldn't escape. He was devising a plan to kill Ferguson and end tonight's conflict.

Thinking of the possible approaching death, Ferguson murmured, "Amazing..."

Bologue wasn't adept at Ethereal Concealment. Ferguson approached the last location where Bologue disappeared, confident that his keen ethereal perception would detect Bologue's residual traces. Besides, he wasn't alone in hunting Bologue tonight. He had nothing to worry about.

Ferguson whispered to the darkness, "Have you found him?"

Ferguson paused not far from Bologue's last known location, using the scope to survey the area.

"Not yet."

A similarly low voice responded from the darkness,

"I sensed his ether. He should be moving eastward."

Soon, a response from the darkness arrived, and Ferguson immediately changed direction, swiftly closing in on Bologue's location, trying to encircle him again.

While moving at high speed, Ferguson detected another ether reaction—Brow. In this dark environment, he could shuttle through shadows, moving faster than Ferguson.

Ferguson found a nearby vantage point, set up his alchemy firearms, and the scope scanned the surrounding area.

The alchemy firearms in his hands began to unfold further driven by ether, ether pouring into the chamber, enhancing the next shot.

Ferguson gently caressed the gun's body. This alchemy firearm named "Silent Fang" was his beloved.

Silent Fang itself wasn't particularly powerful. It came with multiple alchemical matrices, achieving various effects, sacrificing deception for comprehensive adaptability.

Attached to the barrel was the "Silent One" alchemy matrix, which could silence gunshots. Typically, this alchemy matrix was often used on footwear to conceal assassins' tracks. The scope had the "Hawkeye" effect, allowing Ferguson's vision to exceed limits. The firearm itself carried the power of enhanced warheads, firing bullets of varying strength depending on the amount of ether infused.

Ferguson liked this gun. It was perfectly suited to his strength. Using it, Ferguson didn't know how many heads he had blown off beyond visual range.

"Brow, where are you now?"

"Right near you, otherwise, I wouldn't be able to talk with you."

A familiar voice came from the darkness, Ferguson didn't focus much on the darkness. He knew it was Brow's Secret Energy.

Ferguson continued to ask, "Has the Dark Erosion Beast found him?"

Brow responded in the darkness, "Don't rush, don't rush, controlling it isn't an easy matter."

Light flickered in Brow's eyes. Like Ferguson, he hid in a corner. At that moment, Brow's senses were linked with the Dark Erosion Beast, commanding it as if it were his own body.

Bologue's ether residues hovered in the air, and the Dark Erosion Beast rapidly advanced following the trail. The closer it got to Bologue, Brow experienced the same euphoria as Ferguson, the empty heart was gradually filled, bringing a complete sense of fullness.

Ferguson calmed down, slowing his breathing. His whole aura rapidly decreased, and within a few seconds, he completely concealed himself. In this state of stasis, Ferguson's Ethereal Concealment could reach its limit, becoming like a hibernating creature, devoid of any aura leakage.

The Dark Erosion Beast continually traversed through the shadows. As an ethereal creation, it could switch between an ether energy body and a solid form, a capability similar to the Negative Power Users' etherealization.

"Brow... I see him."

Ferguson maneuvered his firearm. A few hundred meters away, through the scope, he saw the silver-white figure atop the building.

The cyan Flame of the Cauldron blazed on the armor's surface. Bologue was vigilantly watching, holding a massive shield that covered half of his body.

"Mr. Lazarus, this won't be able to stop me."

Ferguson silently loaded the ammunition. The alchemy warheads mixed with regular bullets, and after Silent Fang's enhancement, some bullets would harm Bologue, while others couldn't penetrate the armor. The chaotic onslaught would further disturb Bologue's judgment.

They were hunting the tiger, so they must adopt a professional hunter's stance. Ferguson intended to slowly torment Bologue, gradually sapping his energy and stamina, pulling the fatal trigger the moment Bologue showed signs of weakness.

Ferguson knew Bologue was an Undead. For tonight's hunting, he had specially prepared anesthetic bullets.

Moments before pulling the trigger, Ferguson suddenly shifted the muzzle slightly, aiming it in a completely different direction.

Pulling the trigger, the warhead flew at high speed through the air. In its rapid rotation, its trajectory didn't proceed in a straight line but began to subtly deviate, twisting into a nearly right-angle curve, hitting the armor from another direction.

Indistinguishable glimmers flashed in Ferguson's eyes. He pulled the trigger multiple times, emptying the ammunition. Several warheads raced through the air, hitting the armor from different angles, denting the shield, making the tall silhouette tremble with each shot, sparks flying everywhere.

Bologue couldn't locate Ferguson. Under Ferguson's Command, no one could find his presence based on the trajectory of his shots.

The smile on Ferguson's face became increasingly broad, revealing ghastly white teeth. Like a madman, each time he hit Bologue, he felt ecstasy surging through his nerves.

Again and again.

Suddenly, Ferguson detected another approaching ether reaction. The opponent was fast, far exceeding expectations. Alert, Ferguson rose up, and at the moment of turning his head, he saw the burning Long Spear.

Like a meteor tearing the night sky, it struck Ferguson's vantage point, explosive flames engulfing the rooftop.

Chapter 602: Eroding Darkness and Shaping Shadows

The bright fireworks splashed across Ferguson's body, with the scorching hot air clinging close, bringing a burning pain.

Large amounts of red mercury were attached to the speeding long spear, and the moment it hit the rooftop, the red mercury burned fiercely, releasing enormous heat. The rolling fireworks briefly illuminated the night, transforming into a spectacular explosion of sparks dispersing.

Ferguson leaped out of the flames, descending onto the rooftop below. More iron spears roared through the night, pursuing Ferguson's figure, nailing into the wall behind him in a series, shimmering coldly.

"As expected of you!"

Ferguson shouted, as if Bologue could hear his words.

Ferguson figured out how Bologue could find him; Bologue's earlier position was deliberately exposed to him.

Given the surrounding environment, the only place from where one could directly observe Bologue's position was the vantage point where Ferguson was now.

As bullets hit Bologue, Bologue attempted a counterattack and succeeded. However, Ferguson was puzzled by how Bologue made the spear rush in from another angle.

Ferguson had enough intelligence on Bologue, except for one thing: Bologue's Secret Energy. The Zongge Orchestra went to great lengths to investigate but only managed to find out that Bologue belonged to the Commanding School.

Bologue's Secret Energy might be similar to his, but Ferguson couldn't understand how Bologue could control a commanding object from such a long distance. Bologue's inclination should be "Broad and Blunt" like his, but from Bologue's swift and variable command during the battle with the Dark Erosion Beast, it seemed more like "Narrow and Sharp."

Ferguson muttered to himself, "That makes it interesting."

An alarming etheric reaction rose from the edge of Ferguson's perception, traveling a hundred meters in the blink of an eye, advancing like a cannonball. In a matter of seconds, the opponent would collide with Ferguson.

Ferguson knew who it was. Thinking of the opponent's furious face, he felt an irresistible fear, but fear is also a strong emotion. Quickly, the fear transformed into power and joy within him, dispelling that void of torment.

The pitch-black pupils began to tremble, and Ferguson laughed to himself, moving and navigating among the buildings, pulling the trigger. Under his command, the bullet traced a bizarre arc, flying towards the location of the etheric reaction.

Getting closer.

Ferguson thought every step Bologue took at this moment was accompanied by Ethereal Amplification, effortlessly crushing the bricks underfoot into fragments, with earth-shattering roars.

Fire burned on the rooftop, emanating thick black smoke. People below noticed this, and panicked cries continued. Nearby mounted policemen arrived in time, dispersing the crowd and taking control of the scene.

"Help me, Brow."

Ferguson found a new position, using Ethereal Concealment to hide himself. He set up the Silent Fang, without needing the "Hawkeye" enhancement, and could already see the rapidly approaching silver-white figure through the scope.

Bologue had breached Ferguson's safety perimeter; Ferguson had never tangled with an enemy so close in such intensity before.

"He won't fight me; I can't stop him," Brow's voice sounded in the darkness, warning, "His target is you! Run!"

In the scope, behind the armored knight followed a pitch-black phantom.

The Dark Erosion Beast tried to intercept Bologue, but Bologue's proficiency in Ethereal Amplification exceeded their imagination. Among all the ethereal skills, Bologue excelled most in Ethereal Amplification, unstoppable like a train in full release, moving straight forward.

"Is that so..."

Ferguson's heart pounded fiercely, pumping blood to every inch of his body. In extreme excitement, he felt waves of pleasure crashing into his mind, as intense emotions transformed into power. Excess ether accumulated in his Alchemy Matrix.

With his finger on the trigger, Ferguson's smile solidified, and his agitated heart instantaneously fell into an eerie calm.

Ferguson lowered his breath, tensed all his muscles and nerves, his gaze locking through the scope onto the silver-white armor. All the ether converted from intense emotions was poured into the Silent Fang. The high-concentration ether converged onto the Alchemy Warhead, causing it to glimmer.

Pulling the trigger, the Alchemy Warhead shot out silently. Its speed was so fast that it stretched into a bright light trail in the night, like a line infinitely extending, connecting target and muzzle.

The Alchemy Warhead carried a strong etheric reaction, the etheric intensity so high that even Bologue, who wasn't skilled at etheric perception, noticed it.

The rushing silver-white figure began to decelerate, hiding in a side cover, but the roaring Alchemy Warhead didn't miss, instead self-correcting its trajectory, chasing Bologue.

Ferguson commanded, "Follow him! Brow!"

"I know!"

The Dark Erosion Beast leaped within the shadows, the bright Alchemy Warhead acting like a signal flare, guiding it to Bologue's location.

Climbing the walls of the crisscrossing alleyways, the Dark Erosion Beast rushed to the corner, just in time to witness the impact of the Alchemy Warhead.

Under Ferguson's control of Secret Energy, the Alchemy Warhead was like an arrow destined to hit its target, unavoidable.

The silver armor collided with the Alchemy Warhead, layer upon layer of Scale Armor was easily penetrated, followed by the Ether contained within the warhead exploding, the powerful impact instantly tearing the robust armor into pieces.

The shockwave spread to nearby buildings, fine cracks climbed along the walls, the blast shattered windows along the path, scattering like snowflakes in the air.

Pedestrians and vehicles on the road were also affected, some people were knocked over by the blast, their ears ringing with a piercing buzz, car windshields shattered all over the ground, drivers screamed as they crashed into street lamps, the entire section became blocked off.

After the dust raised by the impact settled, the Dark Erosion Beast saw the shattered armor on the ground. Deprived of Ether's support, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid reverted to a liquid state, flowing like mercury.

"He's gone!"

The Dark Erosion Beast watched its surroundings warily, there was no sign of Bologue behind the broken armor, not even a trace of blood, as if they had only hit an empty shell.

Before the Dark Erosion Beast could observe further, multiple Ether reactions rose beside it, and in the distance, Ferguson also sensed the oddity here.

Are they surrounded?

This thought flashed through Brow's mind, then he felt a surge of delight. The Dark Erosion Beast was an Illusory Creation of his Secret Energy; even if surrounded, what the enemy could slay was merely an Ether creation, and Brow could reform one anytime.

More importantly...

Brow activated his Secret Energy, opened his eyes, his gaze piercing through the darkness and space, his face emerging from the darkness on the Dark Erosion Beast's head.

Secret Energy · Dark Erosion Shadow Sculpt.

Brow's Secret Energy belonged to the Illusion Creation school. It could consume Ether to create an Ether construct called the Dark Erosion Beast. Categorically speaking, Brow was also an Overlord.

As an Ether creation, the Dark Erosion Beast possessed numerous abilities, such as "Shadow Leap" to traverse through shadows, its inherent "Etheralization," and the most vital "Shadow Gate."

The Shadow Gate is an extremely rare shortcut ability, represented by the void of darkness atop the Dark Erosion Beast's head, connecting the beast with Brow. When necessary, Brow can traverse to the Dark Erosion Beast through the Shadow Gate.

For a fragile Overlord, this ability greatly enhances Brow's survivability. He once encountered such a situation where the opponent, having bypassed the Dark Erosion Beast's attacks with great difficulty, found Brow's location.

The enemies thought they had won for sure but never expected Brow could easily use the Shadow Gate to instantly traverse to the Dark Erosion Beast and relocate.

Other than that, the Shadow Gate can also be used to observe the battlefield. With its assistance, Brow can closely observe the battlefield through the Shadow Gate and even launch attacks if necessary.

Bologue did not let Brow wait long. Just as the Dark Erosion Beast was observing around, walls surrounding it suddenly collapsed, transforming into crisscrossing long halberds, fiercely striking at the Dark Erosion Beast.

The Dark Erosion Beast immediately Etherialized part of its body, dodging some of the halberds, but several still hit its body, somewhat limiting its movements.

From the distance, the whistling of air-breaking sounded. Ferguson continuously pulled the trigger, firing the remaining bullets to assist the Dark Erosion Beast's battle. At that moment, several armored knights charged out from the shattered walls behind, their bodies burning with blue flames as if they were controlled undead.

Bullets speeding by successively struck the armor, tearing them to pieces, the broken metal yet to fall when it was once again devoured and reforged by the Flame of the Cauldron onto the armor.

The undying undead brandished swords, spears, and halberds, breaking through the barrage, but the following tail blades easily sliced through these steel shells, reducing them to debris once more.

Brow didn't feel elated because of this. Instead, he was more alert. From beginning to end, Bologue was relying on these Commanded Creations to fight. Brow hadn't found Bologue's position, but he was sure Bologue must be nearby; his command range was limited.

In the next moment, a pair of blue eyes locked with Brow through the Shadow Gate.

Bologue emerged amidst the flying iron debris, the Flame of the Cauldron swirling with metal fragments, forging a sharp long spear.

Ether roared with high intensity, the long spear crashed behind the Shadow Gate like a falling meteor.

Chapter 603: The Chaos of Sin is Solely Joy

The echoing rumble lingered around Brow's ears as he sat down on the ground. In front of him, half of an Iron Spear was embedded in the ground, and cold sweat covered Brow's forehead, his chest continuously rising and falling.

The Shadow Gate is bidirectional. Brow could shuttle through the Shadow Gate, and likewise, things outside the Shadow Gate could reach him via it.

This Curved Path Shuttling ability is extremely convenient but also hugely consuming. Even though Brow is a Prayer Believer, with his Ether reserve, he can only use it once or twice, not to mention using Ether on the Dark Erosion Beast.

Bologue discovered the existence of the Shadow Gate and threw the Iron Spear towards Brow behind the gate. Knowing the threat posed by Bologue, Brow immediately closed the Shadow Gate, causing the soaring Iron Spear to be cut in half, with part of it entering and the remaining breaking outside the gate.

"This guy is tough to deal with."

After a moment of fear, Brow, like Ferguson, draws immense joy from the fear he experiences.

Brow stood up slowly. In his perception, the Dark Erosion Beast was still fighting against Bologue, but with the loss of observation via the Shadow Gate, Brow found it difficult to judge the battlefield dynamics.

Brow continued, "Beware of his feigned attacks, those Iron Armors are all his disguises."

His voice clearly reached Ferguson's ears. On the other side of the battlefield, Ferguson cast a glance at his surroundings, where a small, curled-up Dark Erosion Beast was beside him. Above its head, a small hole-shaped Shadow Gate was transmitting the sound.

Brow's secret energy limit could create three Dark Erosion Beasts, and due to differing Ether amounts, the beasts would have different sizes and strengths.

Usually, Brow only creates a powerful Dark Erosion Beast to battle and restrain enemies, while two smaller beasts are situated by Ferguson and Brow's body for timely communication and swift shuttling in crises.

Brow and Ferguson are seasoned partners; any previous foes they faced together would assume Brow was the strong attacker.

In reality, the strength of the Dark Erosion Beast is merely an illusion. Excluding its sharp tail blade and agile nature, the beast lacks any formidable destructive power.

Most of the time, Brow uses the beast for enemy restraint, aiding with his unique multifaceted effects to generate suitable assassination opportunities for Ferguson.

"Alright, I got it."

Ferguson adjusted the gun barrel, fuzzily sensing Bologue's location, then pulled the trigger to scatter the bullets into the night.

Through Brow's skirmish with Bologue, Ferguson could deduce the prior situation.

Bologue relies on disguised command objects for his counterattacks against Ferguson. Currently, to a certain degree, Bologue can achieve the effect of an Overlord, creating an armor shell to attract their attention, while his true self hides, waiting to move.

Since meeting Aimou, Bologue trained himself in Ethereal Concealment; however, his mastery of this Ethereal Skill is only at the beginner level. Only by remaining stationary can he suppress his Ether reaction.

Utilizing this half-baked skill and considering Ferguson is far from Bologue, the greater the distance, the more vague Ferguson's Ethereal Perception becomes. Bologue barely avoided Ferguson's detection.

In the battle with the Dark Erosion Beast, Bologue formed multiple puppets, dispersing his Ether, confusing the duo further.

"No wonder everyone likes you so much..."

Ferguson admired Bologue's quick adaptability, further understanding the observers' interest in Bologue and the Collector's desire for him.

"I'm beginning to look forward to the rewards afterwards."

Brow agreed as he hid in a corner, conversing with Ferguson through the Dark Erosion Beast positioned next to him.

Brow didn't immediately reopen the Shadow Gate, which was considered a mutated product of his Alchemy Matrix, involving Curved Path power that consumes a large amount of Ether and has relatively slow release time.

Mimicking Ferguson's previous action, Brow picked up the Dagger and slashed his arm, the bone-chilling pain provoking intense emotion, which under the Devil's power, was transformed into continuous Ether.

Protection·Chaotic Joy.

The depleted Ether within Brow was replenished again, with the pain transmuting into power filling him.

In the distance, the battle between the Dark Erosion Beast and Bologue continued. After a failed strike, Bologue did not linger in the fight and instead sprinted down the street, avoiding the beast's pursuit.

Amid their duel, Brow bandaged his bleeding arm and noticed the change in the half Iron Spear.

The absence of Bologue's Ether support caused the solidified Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid to transform into large drops of Silver Beads rolling down. Within this liquefied metal, a small Dagger emerged, for some reason remaining solid unlike the Iron Spear.

Brow stared at the Dagger in confusion until suddenly Ethereal arc light erupted from it, distorting the surrounding space with Curved Path's power and pouring savage murderous intent upon Brow.

"Found you."

The Phantom Dagger vanished as Bologue emerged from the Curved Path, the Flame of the Cauldron exploded, engulfing the surrounding buildings like a tide.

"Smile! Friend, your idol has come to see you!"

The group of snakes twisted into a sturdy gauntlet on his hand, and with Ethereal Amplification, Bologue delivered a rapid thrust punch, denting Brow's chest.

The Phantom Dagger was bound by a distance limit; thus, Bologue had not been fleeing but searching for the Dagger's location. Once within its effective range, Bologue could activate the Phantom Dagger, swapping positions to appear before Brow.

As an Overlord, Brow certainly couldn't stray far from the Dark Erosion Beasts. After just a few attempts, Bologue easily located the place.

Brow was smashed into the rubble by Bologue, spewing out mouthfuls of blood. The intense pain tormented his nerves but quickly transformed into pleasure, filling the Alchemy Matrix with a vast amount of Ether.

Bologue also sensed that the more severely he injured these lunatics, the happier they became, and the intensity of their Ether grew more fervent.

With reddened eyes, Brow clutched his chest injury, retreating quickly. Nearby, a mass of darkness wriggled. He attempted to open the Shadow Gate to shuttle near the Dark Erosion Beast, but Bologue clearly wouldn't allow such an opportunity as Brow was currently within Bologue's domain.

The burning ground extended sharp Long Halberds, crisscrossing to block the writhing darkness, separating it from Brow. Then, the Flame of the Cauldron blazed intensely, the surging Ether and the constructed Shadow Gate's Ether mutually repelling, further hindering Brow's Secret Energy from expanding.

Seeing escape was hopeless, a beast-like growl emerged from Brow's throat. He infused all his Ether into the nearby young Dark Erosion Beast, causing it to instantly swell into a gigantic monster.

"Alright! Idol!"

Brow responded to Bologue's invitation.

In past battles, Brow had encountered this situation, where the opponent hurried to severely injure him. But as long as they didn't kill him with one strike, he could rely on Protection to swap for abundant Ether.

There could only be three Dark Erosion Beasts at most, requiring time for the one in the distance to completely disperse; currently, there's only one fighting for Brow.

Brow's Secret Energy was mainly functional, and the Dark Erosion Beast's combat ability wasn't considered strong. However, with this massive Ether support, Brow was confident to hold against Bologue until Ferguson's support arrived.

The Dark Erosion Beast's size further expanded, roaring and charging forward, then the silver-white tide mixed with bricks from all directions, layered upon each other, heavily restraining the beast, confining it within a sealed stone coffin.

Bologue clenched his fist, Iron Embrace sealing all of Brow's vitality, then Blazing Scale Burst consumed the enormous coffin in a sea of flames.

Brow tried to etherealize the Dark Erosion Beast, but the entire stone coffin was infused with Bologue's Ether, and under Ether Mutual Exclusion, the beast was entirely restrained.

The gauntlet in his hand transformed into a Sheep Horn Hammer as Bologue strode towards Brow, a cruel smile surfacing on his face as he asked, "Are you satisfied with the performance?"

Bologue truly treated this as a fan meeting.

Brow fixed his gaze on Bologue, screaming madly under intense pressure.

The distant Dark Erosion Beast completed its dispersal, and another appeared beside him. Simultaneously, a small Shadow Gate, barely fist-sized, floated atop the head of the young beast.

The sound of a trigger being pulled came from within, followed by an Alchemy Warhead traversing through the Shadow Gate, wrapped in a magnificent roar of Ethereal Radiance.

Beyond the Shadow Gate, Ferguson held Silent Fang, expression a mix of pain and pleasure, blood dripping from his arm, flowing onto the ground where the cut-off skin lay.

Chapter 604: Endless Emptiness

The radiance of the Ether was like a torrent forged of light, its dazzling brilliance instantly robbing everyone of their sight, as if a blazing sun had risen on flat ground, casting its light upon the night, a bizarre phenomenon observable from kilometers away.

To rescue Brow, this was Ferguson's all-out attack, pouring in all his Ether, along with the most lethal Alchemy Warhead.

The two had been partners for years and had faced situations where opponents found Brow's true form, but this also meant Ferguson could shoot the opponent at close range through the Shadow Gate.

Opportunity and danger coexist.

Ferguson stared at the glowing Shadow Gate before him, the twisted sensation of pain gradually transforming into pleasure, which was then consumed by a void, turning into an infinite Ether filling his being.

Protection·Chaotic Joy.

From the Collector's protection, it converts all intense emotions of the Contractor into Ether, and among all human emotions, pain is undoubtedly the easiest to obtain, as long as one cuts themselves.

Ferguson's expression trembled, he stripped off the skin of his entire arm, revealing the crimson muscle tissue beneath, but this wasn't the end, he pressed the exposed wound tightly against his coarse clothes, slowly moving his arm.

This action was akin to grinding flesh with sandpaper, Ferguson took deep breaths repeatedly, his complexion turning pale, fortunately, the pain didn't last too long, the sensation was gradually transforming into pleasure.

Ferguson sometimes wondered whether this was the Collector's compassion or a curse.

After triggering the protection multiple times, an indescribable pleasure would emerge from intense pain, so much so that whenever pain arose, there'd be a powerful pleasure easing the nerves like a sedative.

But the cost is, such pleasure doesn't last long, as the number of times the protection is triggered increases, one's threshold continuously rises, simple pain can no longer extract sufficient Ether from the Collector, she needs more intense emotions, sharper pain.

The retreat of pleasure gradually became faster, and the pleasure weakened, slowly consumed by an inner void, until this sense of emptiness spreads into the Contractor's normal state.

Mockery from the Devil, a taunt of destiny.

The greedy are never satisfied, the hungry never sated, the wrathful never find peace.

The desirer never feels full.

Thinking of this, the old Ferguson would shed tears of sorrow, but now he couldn't feel the emotion of sadness at all, compared to the pain, such emotions were too weak.

Taking up the Alchemy Potion, Ferguson injected it into his arm, accelerating the healing of his injuries.

This was an unstoppable snowball act, from the moment Ferguson first sought power from the Collector, this curse had entwined his soul.

Ferguson was addicted to battle, hunting one target after another, not because he loved slaughter, but because only when soaked in blood could he feel the beat of his heart, the surge of emotions.

In daily life, Ferguson had lost most of his emotions, unable to feel anything, joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness had become unfamiliar terms to him.

Only when gambling with the Death God could Ferguson feel truly alive, and to defeat the Death God, he once again sought the Collector's power, trapped in a sorrowful cycle.

At least Ferguson had not become completely numb, his mind still fluctuated.

Ferguson had seen those truly pitiful souls, having sacrificed all emotions, and even when their bodies were pierced full of sharp rivets, immersed in boiling oil, they could not feel the slightest sensation, leaving only an eternal and maddening void.

Many such numb individuals existed within the Zongge Orchestra, in their attempts to please the Collector, they were the true lunatics, using any means, chasing the Collector's will, to exchange for weak joy, or perish on the path and enjoy eternal peace.

Death, what a merciful term.

"Ha..."

Ferguson's pupils flooded with blood, for the Alchemy Potion contained not only healing agents for flesh but also a portion of nerve toxin, which, upon injection, stimulated the nerves, bringing a pain akin to a blade twisting.

And then came the resurgence of power.

With simple treatment, Ferguson's Ether returned to peak levels, he drew six sharp Blades from his waist, their design peculiar; they had only blade bodies, without hilts, lacking any gripping design.

Driven by Ferguson's Secret Energy, the six Blades floated around him, indeed, these Blades required no grip.

Pleasure receded, pain numbed, Ferguson's expression turned stern, his heart an utter void, as if it had collapsed into a pit that swallowed all things, seeking to drag every aspect of his mind into an endless darkness.

The Collector's power was like an addictive potion, the more painful, the more pleasurable, the more powerful, the deeper the fall...

"Don't lose, Brow."

Ferguson murmured, fixating on the writhing small Shadow Gate ahead, waiting for the moment it fully opened, Ferguson had prepared, to escape the torment of emptiness, choosing a fight to the death.

...

Bologue admitted, Ferguson and Brow were indeed longtime partners in combat, their coordination in Secret Energy was even better than his with that unfortunate Palmer.

Then Bologue began to ponder, was there really any kind of coordination between him and Palmer.

Just as Bologue was about to severely wound Brow, the tiny Shadow Gate opened by Brow had an effect. It wasn't large enough to bring Ferguson to the battlefield, but it was enough to allow a deadly alchemy warhead to travel through.

Ferguson enveloped himself in excruciating pain to exchange for that immense amount of Ether, amplifying it through the Silent Fang and channeling it all into the alchemy warhead, firing off this deadly shot.

Even a Negative Power User, when hit by this strike, would be instantly pierced through, turning into a cold corpse.

Bologue had very little time to react; this alchemy warhead could be considered fired at close range. Before the torrent of bright light engulfed Bologue, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid spread across his body.

This time Bologue chose to enclose himself, layer upon layer of Scale Armor, encasing himself within an Iron Coffin.

The alchemy warhead hit the Scale Armor, and a tidal wave of Ether burst forth, the violent torrent spreading with the shockwave, shattering everything in its path.

This wasn't a sniping shot; it was more like an all-out artillery barrage.

The two Dark Erosion Beasts intertwined in front of Brow, resisting the roaring Ether. Although Brow wasn't directly in the path of the impact, the aftershocks still tore at his body... then brought waves of Ether filling his body.

As long as they aren't killed, the Contractors of the Collector can draw endless Ether from pain.

Amidst the dazzling stream of light, Brow laughed heartily, even though his laughter was easily drowned out by the deafening roar.

Brow knew the Collector was watching this scene; she liked such films, films starring Bologue Lazarus.

As long as they can capture Bologue and offer him to the Collector, he and Ferguson can board that never-ending train, reaching that eternal paradise.

By then, Brow's heart will no longer be empty; unimaginable satisfaction will fill his heart.

The stream of light gathered by the Ether easily pierced through Bologue's Iron Coffin, advancing at high speed through the night, like a fireworks display stretching across, reflecting on every inch of glass between the buildings.

The strong light under the night sky reflected phenomena akin to auroras, followed closely by howling gales. Wherever the stream of light passed, furious gusts easily swept up the street debris, broken glass turning into Invisible Blades, cutting through startled crowds, triggering a chain of panic.

The street descended into chaos, sirens, screams, cries of despair, countless sounds mingling together, joining this insane concerto of the night.

The intense light in front of him dissipated, just as Brow had thought. The alchemy warhead penetrated the Iron Coffin Bologue had created, revealing the oozing blood among the collapsing metal.

The ground shattered, then collapsed, the crumbling bricks burying the broken Iron Coffin, forming a huge crater in front of Brow. Looking through the crater, one could see the dim lower level.

"We won! Ferguson!"

Brow exclaimed joyfully, channeling more Ether, the young Dark Erosion Beast gradually growing stronger, along with the Shadow Gate on its head gradually expanding, barely allowing a glimpse of Ferguson behind the door.

Ferguson raised the Silent Fang, loading an anesthetic bullet, "Don't let your guard down. He's an Undead."

The Shadow Gate expanded to a size of dozens of centimeters, barely allowing Ferguson to reach halfway through, but he didn't. Instead, he waited for the Shadow Gate to fully open. If attacked during passage, the splitting path would slice his body in half.

Brow cautiously moved forward, Dark Erosion Beasts orbiting around him. Amidst the ruins, he saw Bologue's arm, crushed under the rubble, motionless.

Ferguson aimed through the Shadow Gate at the arm, ready to pull the trigger at any moment, while Brow commanded the Dark Erosion Beast to carefully inspect ahead.

But just as the Dark Erosion Beast drew within a few meters of the arm, cracks covered Bologue's arm, then crumbled into dust like rotted sand.

In an instant, the azure Flame of the Cauldron engulfed the ruins, with Brow in the midst of the raging sea of fire.

The scattered Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid was summoned, twisting and writhing, transforming into sharp, slender silver needles that, in the blink of an eye, crisscrossed to pierce through the body of the Dark Erosion Beast, also piercing Brow behind the Beast.

"The more painful, the stronger? What kind of damned fetish is that?"

An eerie, sinister voice arose from behind Brow, a pair of eyes like ghostly flames appeared, as if an Evil Spirit had come from the World of the Dead.

In a static state, Bologue had great confidence in his own Ethereal Concealment. Ferguson's shot was indeed powerful, killing Bologue in one hit, but what they didn't know was that Bologue's first death often resulted in swift resurrection.

The wound on his abdomen had healed, and the severed left arm cut off to disguise his whereabouts was now beginning to regenerate as well, pale bones twisting into place, muscle tissue and blood filling in one by one.

He swung the heavy Hand Axe, the cold metal ferociously cleaving into Brow's back, the emotion of fear turning into Ether, further strengthening the Dark Erosion Beasts. But before they could launch an attack, Bologue brutally pulled out the Hand Axe, swinging it down once more.

Brow's eyes widened, his vision plunging into chaos, and when the scene in front of him stabilized, he saw a headless corpse standing not far away. Behind the corpse, the Azure Evil Spirit hurled the Hand Axe at the collapsing Shadow Gate, attempting to strike Ferguson behind the door.

Death came suddenly, yet seemed expected.

Brow's gaze grew vacant, then he opened his mouth, silently laughing madly, grateful for Death God's grace, freeing him from endless emptiness.

Chapter 605: The Instinct of Survival

Ferguson stood near the Shadow Gate and watched Brow's death; Bologue used his own severed limb as bait to make Brow lower his guard, then struck from the darkness.

Bologue had already noticed the unusualness of the two; endless pain would only bring them strength. For this reason, Bologue swiftly and decisively killed Brow, leaving no chance.

Brow's head fell into a pool of blood, a satisfied smile on his face. Ferguson wasn't surprised by that expression; he had seen such a smile too many times.

Protection is a curse, only the price has not been paid yet.

Such as the Protection·Bloodthirsty Healing of the Crimson Sect, with this protection, a Contractor can rely on devouring flesh to gain powerful self-healing abilities and even maintain themselves in a state of an Undying Body. But the more they consume, the hungrier they become, until they are completely controlled by appetite and turn into ravenous monsters.

The Collector's protection is the same, in the decay of pain and pleasure, losing all emotions, no longer with any fluctuations, leaving only a numb heart inside.

For a little bit of pleasure, undergoing inhuman self-mutilation, but this is just a pointless struggle, unable to escape from the mire of emptiness, falling into madness.

The few emotions Ferguson had told him that Brow was his friend. Not witnessing his friend fall into madness but meet a peaceful death, Ferguson felt a moment of tranquility in his heart, which then transformed into Ether.

All emotions will be devoured; pain is merely the easiest to achieve.

Ferguson felt somewhat sad, thinking that his heart had grown a bit colder, and then the sadness vanished, leaving only a numb mind.

After killing Brow, Bologue didn't pause for a moment. After Brow's death, the Shadow Gate he created collapsed rapidly, and this was Bologue's only chance to catch Ferguson.

This vast Opus was too suitable for hiding; as long as Ferguson wanted to avoid Bologue, relying on his own Ethereal Concealment, Bologue had no chance of tracking him.

The Phantom Dagger had been displaced a hundred meters away, and Bologue couldn't use it anymore. A Hand Axe was thrown, pierced through the Shadow Gate, and struck in front of Ferguson.

Ferguson watched Bologue expressionlessly, raising his Silent Fang coldly. The Shadow Gate collapsed down to a small piece, and this interconnected area would be their duel passage.

He pulled the trigger, an Anesthetic Bullet traversed the Shadow Gate, Bologue swung another Hand Axe, cleaved the Anesthetic Bullet, approached the Shadow Gate, and lunged toward Ferguson.

The Shadow Gate collapsed and closed, severing the connection between the two spaces. Warm blood splattered onto Ferguson, spreading to his feet.

Ferguson lowered his head, unable to understand his emotions at this moment.

Fear of facing a formidable enemy? Joy of witnessing a strong contender? Or the anger of avenging a friend?

Ferguson didn't need to understand. Anyway, all these emotions would be devoured, no need to think too much. Just hysteria, join in the wild party.

"So nice! Mr. Lazarus!"

Ferguson shouted, the six Blades floating beside him began to dance, stirring up a whistling wind.

Bologue relied on his remaining arm to prop himself up, barely raising his body. On his face covered with dirty blood, he showed a crazed smile similar to Ferguson's.

Just before the Shadow Gate closed, Bologue passed through it, unsurprisingly, the closing passage severed him at the waist.

It was as if a giant Blade slashed down from Bologue's shoulder, his entire left shoulder vanished, the arm broke off, and along with the body below the belly, stayed on the other side of the Shadow Gate, innards mixed with dirty blood scattered everywhere.

Blessing·Time Reversing Axis.

Bones were built out of nowhere, muscles hung over the dense bones, tendons and blood vessels intertwined, blood flowed back down into the shell.

Six Blades crisscrossed and chopped towards Bologue, the Flame of the Cauldron sprang up, the ground raised high walls, blocking the Blades' assault.

Ferguson didn't stay to fight; now he was very aware that he had no strength to defeat Bologue. Even though Bologue was injured like this, he was the Undead, such injuries were meaningless to Bologue, and Bologue's Secret Energy was that bizarre, flame-commanding material; the loss of limbs did not affect his combat.

Silent Fang charged, he pulled the trigger, an Alchemy Warhead shot powerfully, detonating a series of Ethereal Shocks.

In the dazzling explosions, Ferguson leapt down from the rooftop. This battle lasted too long and triggered too many anomalies. Ferguson estimated that the Order Bureau must have discovered these sudden Ether reactions by now, and patrolling Field Staff might be on their way.

Silent Fang reverted to its normal form, shrinking overall; Ferguson hid it under his coat, unable to dissipate the blood on him, but there was no choice. Ferguson approached the crowd on the street, trying to blend in.

With Bologue's current state, he still needed some time to move freely, and Ferguson needed to use this opportunity to escape the city.

Indeed, the Collector's promise wasn't so easily fulfilled; after all, she was the Devil, the source of all these tragedies.

Ferguson passed through streets and alleys, walking into the subway station. The crowd was noisily celebrating something, and someone held a sheaf of posters, promoting them everywhere.

"Blue Crow's new book preorder!"

Someone shouted. Behind him on the billboard was a mysterious black human silhouette, with the name Blue Crow beneath. On the other side were various promotional phrases, but Ferguson didn't look closely.

He glanced briefly, noticing the term "Night Hunter." Ferguson felt like he'd heard of this book before but couldn't quite remember.

Ferguson hadn't read a book in a long time; the Collector's protection stripped him of all emotions. The joy that books and movies brought had long been worn away over the years.

At the moment, Ferguson's heart was very calm, terrifyingly calm. Clearly, Brow had died before his eyes just minutes ago, but he felt no sorrow, as if the one who died was someone irrelevant.

Ferguson hated himself like this, but he couldn't even manage hate; the void beast would devour all emotions.

After boarding the subway, Ferguson found an empty seat to sit in. The carriage gradually became crowded, and the bloody smell on Ferguson intensified; some passengers covered their noses, others cast wary glances at him.

Ferguson could hear their whispers. They began to suspect something was wrong with him, and someone was preparing to contact the Sheriff at the next stop.

It didn't matter; Ferguson didn't care about these things. Blood dripped from his sleeve, and passengers looked at him fearfully.

Ferguson just lowered his head, thinking about random things.

For some reason, Ferguson could see Brow's face, the smiling face when he died.

Brow should be happy, finally dying and freeing himself from the cage of emptiness.

Yes, death was a release for someone like Ferguson, but he didn't dare die, just like those madly numb ones.

Ferguson always thought the numb ones weren't truly mad; under the torture of emptiness, they lost all qualifications of being human, but only retained the human fear of death.

The way to break this cycle of decay was simple, just dying would do. Everyone knew this principle, but no one dared to do it.

Every Contractor dared to treat themselves with the most brutal means to exchange for pleasure and power, yet no one dared face death.

Ferguson felt people weren't afraid of death, but rather, everyone was filled with a desire for eternal life.

Yes, as biological creatures, as humans, the most primitive and strongest desire.

Survival.

The subway reached the next station, and most of the passengers fled, leaving a few who didn't know what had happened.

The fire alarm rang within the subway station, urging people. The passengers walked off the carriage confused, and then an explosion sounded in the subway station, fire burst forth, and the crowd fled in terror from the station.

As the doors were about to close, the last passenger stepped up. He wore lightweight Scale Armor, carried a fire axe, rocked on his feet, hummed a song, and glanced around, searching the deserted carriage.

Ferguson raised his head, Bologue wiped the blood off his face, smiling as he looked at him.

The subway moved, rushing into the darkness of the tunnel.

Chapter 606: Collector

In the empty subway car, only Ferguson and Bologue remained. The carriage swayed slightly, and the two locked eyes, the atmosphere tense and oppressive, like a drawn sword.

"Strange...how did you find me?"

Ferguson asked puzzledly. According to the intelligence, Bologue shouldn't have had the means to track him.

Bologue didn't bother to hide it. He raised his hand, showing a silver thread wrapped around his fingertip, lighter than a strand of hair. If Bologue hadn't deliberately shown it, Ferguson would never have perceived its existence.

As Bologue waved his hand to stir the silver threads, the air was filled with countless intertwined silver threads dancing wildly. Ferguson looked down to find a silver thread wrapped around his ankle at some point.

Ferguson realized that when the hand axe was thrown, as it landed, it extended a silver thread connecting to him. Depending on the properties of Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, Bologue just needed to proliferate silver threads within his domain, allowing them to stretch indefinitely.

"Still want to keep fighting?"

Bologue spread his arms wide and leaned back casually. The Flame of the Cauldron was ready to erupt, Bologue would turn this carriage into a sealed iron coffin at any moment.

Ferguson thought about it, then shook his head, placing the Silent Fang taken from his arms aside, disarming himself before Bologue.

"I have no chance of winning."

Ferguson spoke while raising his hands, a pained smile on his face.

A hint of disappointment flashed in Bologue's eyes, "I thought you would resist to the very end."

"I still have some rationality left. Fighting you now is just seeking death."

Bologue was too close for Ferguson. Given Bologue's violent methods, at this distance, Ferguson would still struggle to resist, even with the Devil's protection.

The unending Ether couldn't heal a body scarred by wounds.

Ferguson suddenly imagined that perhaps the Undead matched perfectly with this protection—the undying body could endure all suffering and access an endless supply of Ether.

But Ferguson could only ponder; he didn't envy the Undead, especially those protected by the Collector.

Ferguson had seen the person, whose eternal strength stood forever, yet the emptiness brought by the protection inflicted endless torment.

Having seen that person, Ferguson understood that death was a mercy, a key to release from this cage of suffering.

"Indeed, you have no chance. Your tendency is blunt, whatever you try, I can beat you to it."

Bologue nodded affirmatively, elucidating Ferguson's strength, conquering his spirit.

Now, Bologue had roughly understood Ferguson's Secret Energy. He was a member of the Commanding School just like him, but unlike him, Ferguson's Secret Energy tendency was blunt.

Thanks to this blunt tendency, Ferguson's Secret Energy could influence an area of several kilometers, allowing him to command those speeding bullets to hit their target from deceptive angles.

Ferguson was a skilled assassin; within his limited range, few could survive his gunshots. But once Ferguson was engaged in close combat, his advantage turned into an unrecoverable disadvantage.

The blunt tendency destined Ferguson's Secret Energy efficiency to be lower than Bologue's, making the battle last only a few seconds in this close quarters gambit.

In those few seconds, Bologue could wield a myriad of weapons while whether Ferguson could move to deflect them was questionable.

Ferguson made the optimal choice with an empty heart, devoid of any humiliation.

Sometimes Ferguson felt like he was just a walking corpse.

"Who are you?"

Bologue toyed with the hand axe and began questioning.

"The Zongge Orchestra."

Ferguson replied unexpectedly candid.

"Why did you attack me?"

"The Collector wants to add another item to their collection, so we tried to capture you."

Bologue squinted. He initially thought these lunatics were from the Unfettered Poetry Society, but they turned out not to be, and now there was a Collector involved...

"To collect me?" Bologue smiled. "Do they, like you all, have bizarre hobbies?"

"Sort of," Ferguson replied, "If you truly understood her, you'd comprehend these things."

"What do you mean?"

"The Collector is merely one of her numerous aliases," Ferguson said, "You should know that names carry Magic Power, the closer to her true name, the more it draws her attention."

Bologue feigned a presentable surprise, "So... I'm being watched by a devil?"

Ferguson saw through Bologue's flimsy performance, "Aren't you afraid?"

Bologue shook his head; ever since learning his duties as the Chosen One, Bologue had anticipated direct conflicts with devils.

Humans adapt easily to circumstances. Bologue had begun to grow accustomed to the frequent devil intrusions into his life; he just hadn't expected everything to happen so swiftly.

"You're more mysterious than I imagined. Looks like the information provided by the Collector hid quite a few significant details," Ferguson murmured, then smiled, "But it doesn't matter anymore."

"Yes, it doesn't matter anymore."

Bologue got up slowly, shouldering the hand axe, and he saw something in Ferguson's eyes.

Those pitch-black pupils were mirror-like, reflecting Bologue's form and the floating silver light outside the pitch-black subway window behind him.

Secret Energy: Command of Manipulation.

Commanding School Secret Energy, blunt tendency, Ferguson can inject his Ether into a substance, exhausting the Ether stored within to gain control, with an exceedingly vast range of influence, up to several kilometers.

At this moment, the advantage of range was gone, only Ferguson's desperate assault remained, as the suspended sharp sword pierced the window, and simultaneously the Flame of the Cauldron consumed the entire train in an instant.

...

The subway silently entered the station, stopping steadily beside the platform. Despite the station's usual bustle, it was now desolate, with only a group of grim-faced individuals standing there. Outside the station, they set up a perimeter labeled as a crime scene, cordoning off the crowd.

The adjacent area was under control, with numerous figures lurking within it, searching for those restless individuals among the crowd.

Marion inhaled deeply, the flame on his cigarette brightened then dimmed again. He exhaled clouds of smoke, tossing the cigarette butt onto the ground and stamping it out.

"I'm starting to hate this job,"

Marion complained to his colleague next to him. Minutes ago, he was about to clock out, then a sudden order from the Field Operations Department arrived.

They detected several abnormal Ether reactions within Opus and identified the Field Staff's Ether response among them. The Field Operations Department classified this incident as a sudden Extraordinary conflict. As a Logistics Department member, Marion was responsible for heading to the scene and handling subsequent affairs.

For this operation, only the Logistics Department was dispatched; the Field Operations Department sent no one, implying they trusted the Field Staff in place to manage it adequately.

Great, absolute trust among colleagues. But as the sacrifice of this trust, Marion was very displeased; such sudden overtime would irritate anyone, let alone the numerous disturbances caused by this Field Staff, which all required Marion's attention.

The train doors opened, and a heavy scent of blood wafted towards Marion from within the train. Instinctively, his hand moved to his holstered gun.

Through the open doors, Marion could see the twisted, warped carriage and the blood smeared everywhere.

A figure emerged from behind the train door, noticing the staff on the platform before Marion could raise his gun in warning, the figure revealed his identity.

"Yo! Good evening, Marion."

Hearing that familiar voice stirred a nightmare in Marion's mind, and he gritted his teeth. "Bologue..."

Bologue swung the hand axe vigorously, waving a greeting.

Having worked for a long time, Bologue had become somewhat acquainted with the Logistics Department staff, notably Marion, who often resolved troubles caused by Bologue.

Bologue saw Marion as a good companion, akin to a knight with his steed, while Marion saw Bologue as a harbinger of chaos; every disturbance sparked by Bologue was notoriously difficult to handle, like the time-axis disorder incident.

Marion rubbed his forehead; he'd resigned himself to working late into the night.

"By the way, come over and help out!"

Bologue beckoned as he dragged a body full of scars out of the car. The baffling part was the unfortunate soul was clad in ragged upper wear but had exposed underpants below.

Marion shifted his gaze to Bologue, who awkwardly adjusted his ill-fitting trousers.

Chapter 607: Books

Afterwards, things became much simpler. Bologue had done this type of work many times before and was extremely proficient.

After a brief greeting with Marion, Bologue ignored Marion's murderous glare and went ahead with passing the trouble on to Marion, leaving him with the task of wrapping up tonight's chaos.

Everyone has their role, and Bologue wasn't cut out for cleaning up the aftermath.

Dragging the barely conscious Ferguson, Bologue took the subway back to the Deep Nest Courtyard and handed Ferguson over to the Field Operations Department.

The remaining matters were no longer Bologue's concern. According to the department's protocol, Ferguson would receive preliminary treatment, then transferred to the Crow's Nest for interrogation by the Iron Sentinels, and when his usefulness was exhausted, he would be transported to the Black Prison.

Depending on the target, the Order Bureau has multiple prisons to choose from, and the one people most dread facing is probably the mysterious Black Prison.

Just think, ever since Bologue was released from prison, he hadn't returned to that place. Others might think Bologue was out of his mind if they heard this, but Bologue quite missed that place. Not only did he spend countless years there, but now looking back, it was also an extremely mysterious and eerie place.

During his imprisoned days, Bologue often heard whispers coming from beyond the walls and the occasional midnight cries.

For most of the staff at the Order Bureau, the Black Prison and the Decision Room alike only exist in conversation, with few ever seeing them.

Bologue pushed the door open; the office was shrouded in darkness, with only a desk lamp shedding light.

Work hours had ended, and both Yuriel and Geoffrey had left early, but Lebius remained, as usual.

Lebius was a genuine workaholic, but no matter how dedicated, even he needed some personal space to handle matters outside of work and to relieve his strained nerves.

Piles of documents lay stacked to the side, and a book was open before Lebius. Bologue's arrival interrupted his reading.

Lebius glanced up at Bologue. News within the Field Operations Department traveled fast, not to mention the latest extraordinary conflict that just occurred in Opus; by the time Bologue boarded the subway, Lebius already knew what had transpired.

Bologue removed his bloodstained and tattered coat, rolled it up, and stuffed it aside, then tightened his pants to prevent them from falling down.

During the chase of Ferguson, half of Bologue's body remained on the other side of the Shadow Gate. The Time Reversing Axis could reverse his body but couldn't restore Bologue's clothing. Out of necessity, after shedding his Scale Armor, Bologue had to rob Ferguson a bit.

Lebius clearly noticed Bologue's ill-fitting clothes and the shocking amount of bleeding, yet this wasn't unusual. His expression remained calm.

Inserting a bookmark into the pages, Lebius closed the book and placed it aside. Bologue noticed the cover's title, his expression registering surprise.

Lebius asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing much," Bologue replied, "Just didn't expect you to be reading that, boss."

"You mean this book?"

Lebius picked up the book, glanced at the cover, and explained, "Palmer brought it and insisted it was excellent, told me I absolutely have to read it."

"I quite like reading."

Lebius was not just a workaholic but also quite reclusive. Unless necessary for work, he rarely left the Order Bureau. In this monotonous and oppressive Cultivation Room, there weren't many forms of entertainment to relieve stress.

Hence, Lebius developed a reading habit, spending his free time absorbed in one book after another. He didn't resist book recommendations from his team, showing a willingness to accept them.

Lebius sometimes felt out of touch with society and took this opportunity to see what the younger generation was reading.

Bologue glanced at the "Night Hunter" book and remembered he had a copy at home. It seemed Palmer really loved this book, likely buying several copies and handing one out to everyone he met.

"What happened?"

Lebius asked, following the protocol that Bologue was supposed to report the recent events to him.

Bologue nodded and laid out the entire course of events for Lebius, sticking to a straightforward narrative without interjecting his thoughts.

Collector.

Bologue wasn't quite sure yet who this Devil referenced, but it was clear she had taken interest in him for some reason.

The identity of the Chosen One?

Bologue thought it unlikely. If the motive were to eliminate rivals, she should have sent a Negative Power User or even a Defender, rather than two Prayer Believers skilled in assassination. Apparently, Bologue wasn't that important in the Collector's eyes.

"Collector..."

Lebius pondered, trying to recall any intelligence related to that term.

Bologue asked, "You don't know who the other party is either?"

After a moment of silence, Lebius nodded and explained, "The same entity is referred to by different words in the eyes of different people, and it's the same for the Devil. That's why they have countless names."

Bologue knew this well. As he deepened his contact with the Devil, he often flipped through the book given to him by Nesanel.

"Devil and Electric Guitar Operation Guide."

The book mentioned an example where two small cults clashed in the Narrow Countries. It was only after Group Ten resolved the conflict that they discovered both groups worshiped the same Devil, but within their understanding, this Devil had completely different names and forms.

The Devil doesn't care about his followers. He is a profit-driven merchant. As long as souls are offered to him, any craving for power can be seen as a cold business relationship.

As for faith.

It's merely an addition of fantasy that mortals make about things beyond their understanding. They deify the incomprehensible, thereby arrogantly assuming they understand it.

"Alright, I got it," Lebius said, "I'll have the Crow's Nest keep an eye out for related intel. You can go off work now."

"Alright."

The two exchanged words simply, as if what had just happened was not a life-and-death struggle but just an ordinary street fight.

Working for a long time, such sudden incidents occur frequently. Having dealt with many, the nerves of the Field Staff have long been numb and indifferent.

To Bologue, the battle with Ferguson and Brow was no different from hunting Demons after work or brawling with gangs.

"I'll go next door to change clothes," Bologue said, adjusting his pants.

In the activity room next door, Bologue had stored a lot of his work clothes. He often encountered such sudden incidents and would return to the Order Bureau covered in blood, so the activity room was always stocked with clothes for changing.

When Bologue returned to the apartment, it was late at night. A familiar blue vehicle was parked in the apartment's parking lot.

As he pushed open the door, the room of Palmer echoed with loud snores. Ever since he went home to visit his family, it was as if Vasilina had given him some kind of boost, normalizing his daily life from the previous chaotic days.

At least this time, Bologue didn't smell the strong scent of alcohol in the living room, nor did Palmer return late at night.

Returning to his room, Bologue lay flat on the bed, his mind replaying the events to come.

Suddenly, Bologue sat up, pulling out the "Devil and Electric Guitar Operation Guide" from the bookshelf, flipping through its pages, searching for information related to the Collector.

Bologue felt certain that Nesanel must have recorded something about it; he just hadn't realized because in Nesanel's records, the other party wasn't called the "Collector."

Different Devils wield different authorities, hence the protection they bestow varies. From this point, Bologue could deduce the identity of the Devil.

Sinister whispers resounded endlessly in Bologue's ears. He knew this was the power of the umbilical cord. As he delved deeper into the Devil's nature, Bologue would also endure the backlash of the Devil's power.

Bologue took a deep breath, sweat beading on his forehead. Recklessly probing into the Devil's secrets, Bologue didn't know what might occur. The safest way was to conduct it within the Order Bureau, but Bologue was growing impatient.

Line by line, distorted and blurry text gradually became clear, composing that ancient and obscure story in Bologue's eyes.

Unbeknownst to him, Bologue's breathing grew heavier. In the dark room, shadows began to writhe, and sinister murmurs grew clearer.

A phantom umbilical cord floated from Bologue, gradually gaining substance, connecting into the endless darkness. Someone in the darkness on the other end tugged at the umbilical cord, attempting to drag Bologue over.

Bologue was completely oblivious to these; his mind was allured by the contents of the book, as if bewitched.

The door was forcefully kicked open; Ether whipped up a gale that flipped and closed the book as Palmer shouted.

"Bologue!"

In an instant, the sinister presence vanished, leaving Bologue and Palmer staring blankly at each other.

Palmer clutched a fruit knife, suspiciously surveying Bologue's room, warily asking, "Did something happen?"

Since Zefirin's attack on Palmer in his sleep, Palmer seemed to have developed a psychological shadow. Usually not very alert, but at night, when lying in bed, his whole body tensed up.

Bologue was stunned for a few seconds before retrospectively realizing the danger just now. He wiped the sweat off his forehead and responded.

"No... Nothing."

Chapter 608: Cultivation Room Strange Tales

Not long ago, Bologue discovered that he had a special skill, which was that when he lied to the people around him, they would easily believe him.

No additional performance was needed, nor did he require seamless logic, he just had to maintain his usual demeanor and speak to them. Just like last night when Palmer questioned him.

Palmer, startled awake in his sleep by a sinister force, felt a tug at his own umbilical link, as if the Devil were watching over him. It was indeed a test of Palmer's heart's endurance.

After a brief panic, Palmer sensed the source of the power and immediately went next door, kicking open Bologue's door, interrupting his reading, and questioned what Bologue was up to.

Bologue simply recounted the events of the night, being attacked by Ferguson and Brow, attributing the sinister force Palmer sensed to his Blessing taking effect, healing his injuries.

Then...

Then Palmer believed it.

Bologue summarized that this might stem from his perpetual expert stance. In the eyes of those around him, he was absolutely reliable and trustworthy, hence few would doubt what he said.

Their absolute trust in him made Bologue feel a bit uneasy for a moment, which further reinforced his narcissistic Savior mentality.

Bologue was well aware that he couldn't betray such trust, so he never lied to the people around him... except for times when it was necessary, where he would tell some inconsequential, benevolent lies.

Of course, to a large extent, Bologue was simply afraid of trouble.

Bologue could imagine, if he confessed to Palmer that he was once again being targeted by a Devil, what Palmer's reaction would be.

He might scream, or nervously gear up, or even drive back to the Order Bureau overnight to squeeze into an employee dormitory.

So Bologue was too lazy to explain so much to Palmer. Palmer had already had a rough time lately, it was better to let him live a peaceful life for a while.

Such things were best handled by Bologue himself.

With this thought, Bologue stopped and looked around.

The Field Operations Department's area always seemed deserted, completely different from the bustling Logistics Department. Bologue could only see a few employees moving about, and they soon disappeared from view.

Bologue did not immediately return to Lebius's office; going back now would surely mean a heap of work waiting for him.

For example, the interrogation report sent back from the Crow's Nest, details of on-site processing, oh, and the recovery of Alchemy Armament.

Last night at the subway station, when saying goodbye to Marion, Bologue specifically asked Marion to help retrieve the Phantom Dagger.

The downside of the Phantom Dagger was this: after each use, one had to find a way to recover it. If it was a short distance, Bologue could use the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid to capture the Phantom Dagger for quick recovery, but if it was too far, even after the battle ended, it would be hard for Bologue to find it himself.

He wondered if the Sublimation Furnace Core department could help enhance this Alchemy Armament to overcome this shortcoming.

Bologue thought Belli wouldn't refuse his request, and even if she did, he could commission Aimou... just take her for dessert afterward.

However, Bologue didn't have high hopes for this, because the ability of the Phantom Dagger involved mysterious pathways, disordered space that was so inscrutable, like a raging sea, that no one could tame it.

"Collector..."

Bologue closed his eyes, folding his arms, displaying a troubled look.

The Devil and Electric Guitar Operation Guide was filled with Nesanel's knowledge of the Devil, which included a description of how the more painful, the stronger the Protection.

Chaos Rejoices.

In the book, Nesanel used this term to refer to that eerie Protection, though he did not specify its source.

Bologue felt that Nesanel should know who the Collector was. Besides the written text, Bologue also carefully observed the details on the book.

This book was entirely handwritten by Nesanel. Over the years, the handwriting had slightly changed, indicating that Nesanel wrote it while exploring the secrets of the Devil.

When writing about the Collector's information, Nesanel might not have known its full picture at that time, but over the years, Bologue believed Nesanel must have gained deeper understanding, which hadn't been added to the book.

It was time to meet Nesanel again, though they had just met not long ago. Bologue stood up, took out the Special Operations Group's insignia from his pocket, engraved with the twisted Rupert's Tear.

To facilitate Bologue's search for Nesanel, Nesanel granted him some privileges, such as the ability to directly contact this esteemed Minister of External Affairs.

Bologue turned into the corridor, holding the insignia as he proceeded, according to what Nesanel taught him, advancing through the strange Cultivation Room.

After walking for a few minutes, Bologue stopped in confusion. According to Nesanel, the Cultivation Room should have opened a passage, directly leading him to Nesanel.

Unknowingly, Bologue had walked a great distance. Looking back, the long corridor stretched to the end, shrinking into a small dot indistinguishable to the naked eye, as did the path ahead.

He seemed to be on an endless journey without a destination or a start.

Bologue felt something was amiss, but still bravely moved forward. Here was the Cultivation Room, the Order Bureau's headquarters, and there was no way he would encounter danger here, right?

As this thought flashed through his mind, Bologue suddenly remembered the rumors circulating within the Order Bureau.

During the secret war, Overlord Xilin severely damaged the Cultivation Room, causing the infinite expansion of the Void Realm to become disordered, with some areas falling into chaotic overgrowth, like a self-altering labyrinth. To prevent the spread of this disaster, the Order Bureau isolated these areas from the normal Void Realm.

Ruins District.

After the secret war, when referring to that chaotic Void Realm space, the Order Bureau's employees used this term to describe it.

Overlord Xilin destroyed several sections within the Order Bureau, turning them into what we know now as the Ruins District, with what once was the Sublimation Furnace Core being one of them.

Post-war, the Sublimation Furnace Core began reconstruction work, and while reconstructing, the Alchemists spent most of their time revolving around the Ruins District.

Many important assets of the Sublimation Furnace Core were lost within the Ruins District. They often formed expeditions to delve into the Ruins District for excavation.

The uncontrolled Ruins District housed numerous dangers, often resulting in casualties, which was why Belli once asked Bologue to take a walk through the Ruins District, but Bologue righteously refused.

Over the years, efforts regarding the Ruins District have never stopped, resembling a pathological part of the Cultivation Room, and the Alchemists have been temporarily unable to completely sever it from the Cultivation Room, only striving to stabilize it to prevent further spread.

All areas bordering the Ruins District are strictly controlled. Employees see the warning signs well before approaching.

Ever since the Ruins District was formed, a strange tale spread within the Order Bureau. Some said the distortion of the Ruins District had indeed spread into the Cultivation Room, but this information was sealed in the Decision Room. In reality, many employees had already disappeared in the vast Cultivation Room due to spatial distortion.

Most employees regarded this tale as a joke, though some didn't buy into it, they remained vigilant of the Cultivation Room, like Palmer.

According to Palmer, the Cultivation Room was alive, possessing life, but a form of life not comprehended by humans.

Living long-term in the Cultivation Room was like residing inside the belly of a monster. You never knew if it protected you or considered you preserved food.

Bologue's pace gradually accelerated, his eyes flickering with the light of Ether, increasing his speed as a gust of wind. Yet, no matter how quickly Bologue sped forward, the hallway continued to stretch indefinitely as if it had no end.

Strange tales... Bologue complained inwardly about his paranoia. After experiencing so much on the bewildering paths and knowing about the existence of the Tyrant, he should have realized this.

Those strange tales that no one believed were often true.

The end of the corridor began to distort and collapse, the smooth stone shattering, with endless darkness flowing through the broken gaps.

Bologue stood at this broken path's edge, observing numerous safety passage signs piled chaotically around.

Underneath the plastic casing, green lights flickered, with white figures making running gestures.

Numerous white figures ran in one direction, fleeing danger, advancing toward a safe area...

They were running behind Bologue.

Chapter 609: Sunshine Inn

Solemn, oppressive, heavy, stern, clear straight lines and right angles, advanced and modern, minimalist and efficient...

All along, the staff had numerous words to describe the style of the Cultivation Room, but under Bologue's summary, he felt one word was enough to perfectly encapsulate everything about the Cultivation Room.

Order.

Meticulously organized order.

This is the style of the Cultivation Room, whether it's the resting benches or the division of areas, even down to the grading of permissions, everything is classified and arranged according to some standard, completely bound by cold and solid order.

Order brings reason and stability, like an unshakeable safe house, as long as you are within the Cultivation Room, you can shed all sense of crisis and let the Cultivation Room shelter you.

But now, the reason and order wholly trusted by the staff are gradually collapsing before Bologue's eyes. The neatly arranged bricks are shattered, the straight edges covered with broken gaps, and beyond the collapsed walls lies boundless darkness, streaked with ghastly white arcs of electricity.

The safety passage signs are chaotically piled on the floor, walls, and ceiling, all pointing behind Bologue, as if the will of the Cultivation Room is guiding Bologue to flee this place.

It's too late.

The surrounding lights began to flicker rapidly. Amidst the alternation of light and dark, Bologue could clearly perceive the changes around him; the entire space was twisting and deforming under some force, the straight lines bending into curves, heralding the annihilation of order and reason.

In an instant, the safety passage signs emitting green shimmer turned a striking red, as if a virus was spreading amidst the light, the red glow quickly spreading, engulfing all the green shimmer, casting Bologue's face in a blood-red hue.

Bologue had no interest in delving into the mystery of the Cultivation Room; he turned and ran madly in the direction the safety passage indicated, the formerly straight and deep corridor already beginning to bend and deform.

As if a pair of giant hands were forcefully twisting the space, the corridor was like iron bars being twisted and hammered, the bricks starting to crack, sending up countless fragments and dust. Amidst running, Bologue's steps were somewhat unsteady as the ground under his feet began to curve to one side.

The originally rectangular cross-section of the corridor was twisting into a strange parallelogram, and in some places, the space had already twisted a full turn, with bricks stacked together, presenting a layered screw-like pattern.

The Alchemy Matrix operated efficiently, the ether surging high and unyielding. Bologue again attempted to spread the Flame of the Cauldron to prevent the deformation of space, but this was the Cultivation Room, a vast Void Realm, filled with ether; under the Ethereum Mutual Exclusion, Bologue's resistance was futile.

Bologue still remembered Fuen's praise for the Cultivation Room. If the Void Realm were divided by the Condenser Tier, the Cultivation Room would undoubtedly be a Glory Seeker Level Void Realm, and even among all Glory Seekers, it was the closest Void Realm to the Crowned.

In a stable state, the Cultivation Room was a safe house protecting against the elements, but when it became agitated, it would transform into a chaotic Ruins District.

Bologue poured all ether into his legs, relying on Ethereal Amplification, he propelled forward like a cannonball.

Behind Bologue, the corridor began to collapse, space folding together like twisted reinforced iron, exposing the dark space behind the bricks. Bright arcs broke through constraints, lashing at the objects they encountered, reducing them to dust.

Gritting his teeth, Bologue advanced. He noticed the corridor ahead had changed; it was not the same as when he came earlier. It had split into multiple diverging paths. As Bologue hesitated, one after another, safety passage signs appeared on the walls, continuing to guide Bologue.

Time was of the essence; Bologue had no time to think; he rushed into the branching path indicated by the safety passage. The scenery before his eyes was still that monotonous, unchanging corridor, with no end in sight.

While sprinting, Bologue faintly heard singing, coming from behind the dark fissures.

A woman sang emotionally, in a language indecipherable to Bologue.

Warm liquid traced along Bologue's cheek, causing him to pause in a daze for a moment. He raised his hand to wipe his cheek, only to find numerous teardrops in his palm.

In Bologue's lifetime, the instances of him crying were few and far between. At times, Bologue thought he would never cry again, yet now tears were uncontrollably streaming down.

Is it due to fear?

How could that be? As an Undead, how could Bologue be so frightened by such matters that he would shed tears? Facing the chaotic Cultivation Room, at most Bologue felt some agitation and nervousness, with a worry for the unknown.

The emotions melded together, far from evolving into tears of fear.

Yet Bologue was uncontrollably crying, accompanied by the continuation of the woman's singing, an unimaginable feeling of sadness overflowed from his heart.

This sudden emotion left Bologue bewildered, the melancholy ballad lamented beside his ear, and the unintelligible language gradually became clearer.

"On this day of tears."

The syllables struck Bologue's heart; his tears had long run dry, and his eyes turned red as scarlet blood oozed from beneath his eyelids.

Bologue staggered a few steps, vomiting blood, his mind beginning to blur, an overwhelming fatigue spread over him, urging him to stop and rest here eternally.

Still unable to stop, Bologue had a premonition that once he halted here, even the Time Reversing Axis could not save him.

The building crumbled and collapsed, revealing the dark void behind it, where arcs and lasers coexisted, drawing like a master's strokes, creating a masterpiece.

Bologue dared not look back, nor had time to, as at the end of the corridor, a gentle dawn emitted warmth, like a rope forged from light in this endless darkness.

Grasp that rope tightly, Bologue thought, no matter what's beyond this dawn, it has to be better than being consumed by the darkness behind.

Bologue was getting closer, his body increasingly fatigued, while a wailing female voice grew clearer, louder.

"The sinner about to be tried."

She was so sorrowful, as if she carried all the world's woes.

"Will resurrect from the ashes."

Bologue couldn't run anymore, the surrounding bricks twisted together, shattered into fragments returning to darkness, soon Bologue would join them.

Just as Bologue was about to fall, an indescribable force seized his body, like strings controlling a puppet, forcing him to move again.

Move towards the dawn.

This time, Bologue's speed was much faster than usual, he became like a walking dead, subject to its manipulation.

As the light approached, Bologue saw the form at the end of the dawn clearly.

It was an open door, near the door there were densely packed, overlapping safety passage signs, like burgeoning crystals.

Now all of them had dimmed, leaving only the running figures on the signs.

Running towards the darkness behind Bologue.

This wasn't a safe house, compared to the darkness behind, the area beyond the dawn was truly fraught with danger.

Bologue froze, regrettably, at this moment he had no strength to resist, dragged by that unknown force, crashing into the dawn.

The door closed, the light dissipated, the safety passage sign lights rekindled, flickering with glaring red light.

The female voice grew stern, the darkness became restless, all surrounding bricks collapsed into the darkness, and just before the darkness approached, the door began to blur and fade.

The darkness engulfed everything, within the murky shadows of void, only the female voice continued its lament.

...

Bologue fell to the ground, from the feel of it, he was lying on cold tiles, the threads of coolness cooling his feverish body significantly.

Struggling to open his eyes, through the blood-blurred vision, Bologue could see neatly arranged tile patterns.

Seeing these orderly lines now, Bologue unexpectedly felt happy, even though he knew he might have stepped into another perilous place.

Strength gradually returned to his body, the lost senses sharpened again, Bologue lifted his head, the warm light struck him, evoking a sense of afternoon sunset.

Rubbing his eyes, wiping away the bloodstains, Bologue's vision cleared, and he discovered he was in a peculiar place.

In fact, it wasn't so strange, rather it seemed quite normal.

It's somewhat roundabout to say, having witnessed too many bizarre things, this place seemed too normal, instead giving Bologue a sense of distortion lurking beneath the normalcy.

This was an inn, an inn filled with sunshine.

Bologue swore, the lighting rod here surpassed any house he had ever seen.

As if the sun rose right outside the door.

Chapter 610: Slothful Belphegor

Bologue could be certain that he was still inside the Cultivation Room. Faced with this somewhat warm scene, Bologue couldn't help but laugh to himself.

A Sunshine Inn?

In the depths of the Cultivation Room? What a joke. By comparison, the recent life-and-death escape felt like an illusion.

Bologue took a deep breath and stretched his body. His psychological acceptance was gradually increasing. After a simple complaint, he began to explore this inn.

Being hidden deep within the Cultivation Room, Bologue did not believe this was just a simple inn. It harbors some secret, though Bologue had yet to discover it.

The inn's front desk was empty, only a record player stood there, and as the vinyl spun, an old man's song echoed in his ears.

Bologue softly hummed along with the voice, "Mother, warn your child not to follow in my footsteps."

The song sounded quite nice, seemingly a man's self-confession and a warning to others.

Bologue looked toward the corridor at the side, rows of doors lined both sides. Even there, Bologue could hear the whispered conversations inside the rooms.

The inn was full of people.

Bologue had no interest in knocking and greeting for the time being. He walked toward the glass door directly opposite the front desk.

The frosted glass obscured the outside scene, and the warm sun poured down, spreading gentle light evenly over everything.

Bologue grasped the doorknob and tried to open the door, discovering that it was not locked, only somewhat heavy.

As soon as he opened a slight crack, deadly heat enveloped Bologue's hand. His skin was instantly scalded, blistering in many places.

Bologue watched expressionlessly. Through the crack in the door, he could still only see a mass of pure light.

Familiar light.

As if driven by a mysterious force, Bologue, enduring the pain, pulled the door further open. The gap widened until the first ray of sunlight fell onto Bologue's arm.

Instantly, an unbearable pain released from the illuminated spot, and blazing fire consumed Bologue's arm.

Amidst agony and burning, Bologue realized he was too familiar with this light as if he had spent many years with such light.

Burned to ashes by the light and reborn in the ashes.

Shattered information pieced back together, revealing the true face of history, but the intense pain gave Bologue no time to think.

He tried to extinguish the flames, which only made them grow stronger.

Suddenly, the pain vanished. Immediately, Bologue's entire burning arm detached from his body, as if chopped by an Invisible Blade, leaving a clean, smooth wound.

The burning pain masked the pain of dismemberment, and Bologue felt almost nothing. He fell backward, expecting to hit the ground, only to hear a crisp snap and land softly on a sofa.

The burning limb did not fall to the ground but hovered in the air, flames continuing to burn it into a fireball until it was completely reduced to ashes, with no trace remaining to burn.

"Whew... what a close call, you nearly destroyed my inn."

A familiar voice rang out as a man in a robe appeared beside the front desk, lazily smiling at Bologue.

Bologue recognized the face and the voice but was certain that this mysterious presence before him was definitely not him, not Palmer.

Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid expanded from within, and cold scale armor covered Bologue's body. His only remaining arm gripped a Sharp Sword, the sharp tip pointing at the enemy before him.

"Relax, Mr. Lazarus, I just saved your life, you know."

The newcomer spread his hands, smiling gently.

He then raised an eyebrow, gesturing at the still-warm ashes.

Bologue remained silent for a while, then disarmed himself and sat back on the suddenly appearing sofa, ignoring the newcomer and focusing his gaze on the pile of ashes.

The severed limb quickly revived. Bologue sat bare-armed, and the many fragmented pieces of information linked together at that moment.

Bologue whispered, "A light..."

A light that ended the fury of scorched earth, causing the Holy City to fall.

Bologue questioned the newcomer, "What exactly is this light?"

"Lightburn, a curse from King Solomon, burns all material it touches until it's completely destroyed, unable to be extinguished beforehand."

The newcomer answered directly, explaining why he cleaved Bologue's arm off—if the Lightburn spread across his whole body, dealing with it would become incredibly troublesome.

"Lightburn..."

Bologue clutched his head as blurred and lost memories gradually became clearer.

Bologue thought of the human brain as an enormous library, memories being the books filling it.

Humans can't constantly recall all their memories, so the books written for those memories are given various names—some by date, some by life's stages, and others by significant events experienced.

When someone wants to recall something, they only need to remember the "book title" to find the corresponding book within the vast library and relive the past moments.

But when you don't know the book's name, you cannot find the corresponding book, just as no one knows what they don't know.

No one can remember what exactly they have forgotten.

The burning of light and the name Lightburn assured Bologue of his conjecture's validity, that it wasn't just some illusion or mere rumor.

A light rose up, burning everything, leaving only itself struggling in a sea of flames, dying, reviving, and dying again until a long slumber ended, awakening in the Black Prison.

"Closer..."

Bologue murmured, a step closer to the truth of history.

Returning his gaze to the light-filled view beyond the glass door, the warmth remained.

"Lightburn has been burning for so many years, yet it's still not exhausted... This is a seal, isn't it?"

Bologue said, his pupils slightly trembling. He recalled the Calamity within the Abandoned Land, the world-destroying firestorm, and the ash piled like mountains.

And the old city buried deep within the ashes.

He began to understand why "Red Dragon" remained elusive; perhaps the "Red Dragon" was hidden within the ruins of the Holy City. But entering the Holy City meant facing Lightburn, as anyone illuminated by the light faced destruction.

Whether the Calamity, Desperate Outpost, or this inn itself, they were all parts of the seal on Lightburn.

"Also part of the deal."

Bologue muttered to himself, looking at the newcomer. Bologue realized the newcomer's identity.

"Which Devil are you?"

"I have many names among people—the Observer of the World, the Critic, the Onlooker, the Grand Recorder..."

As the newcomer narrated, his face quickly changed—Palmer, Aimou, Geoffrey, Belli...

All the familiar faces Bologue knew flashed across the newcomer's face, and the voice changed with each face.

"I hope, Mr. Lazarus, you will call me by my true name."

The newcomer remained unreserved, his honesty made Bologue uneasy, and he extended his hand in invitation.

"Belphegor, the Lazy."

Bologue took a deep breath. He finally met the Devil hidden within the Order Bureau, and he came to an initial understanding of their deal with the Bureau.

Two hands clasped together. Even though the other knew his name, Bologue habitually responded,

"Bologue Lazarus."

Belphegor's face paused once more on Palmer's face. He displayed a seemingly familiar smile, yet this smile lacked a certain slyness, replaced by an air of mystery and wickedness.

"Finally, I've met you, Mr. Lazarus."

Belphegor excitedly grasped Bologue's hand and then said,

"I am your fan."

Bologue's expression remained steady; he was growing accustomed to these lunatics' adulations, even if the other party was a Devil.

"Another fan?" Bologue retorted unyieldingly, "Do you need me to sign an autograph for you?"

"Of course."

Belphegor's smile broadened.