

Endless 611

Chapter 611: Movie Enthusiast

Lazy Belphegor.

Bologue didn't expect to witness the Devil that Nesanel spoke of so soon. He started to suspect whether the life-and-death chase he had just experienced was secretly orchestrated by this Devil.

Belphegor signed a Blood Contract with the Order Bureau. He has since resided deep within the Cultivation Room, and the Order Bureau thus obtained his seat, participating in the rivalry among Devils.

"I've wanted to meet you for a long time, Mr. Lazarus."

Belphegor walked ahead, leading Bologue through the corridor filled with doorways, "But you know, I can't directly interfere with the mortal world. Not to mention, after signing the Blood Contract with the Order Bureau, according to the contract, I can't leave here without the Decision Room's permission."

Just as Nesanel said, the Order Bureau had bound this Devil... but only temporarily.

"Finally, I meet you."

Belphegor glanced over, his expression fanatically joyful.

Bologue's expression grew even more solemn. Unlike the Zongge Orchestra that attacked him, Bologue guessed that they were influenced by the devil's Protection, enabling them to maintain such a pathological sense of zeal at all times.

They called themselves his fans, more as a kind of mockery and jest. But Belphegor in front of him was different; Bologue could genuinely feel that fervor in him.

In this state, Belphegor was extremely similar to Palmer when he shouted at him, holding a newspaper of the new book by Crowned Blue Jay; there was hardly any difference between the two.

At this point, Bologue could confirm that Belphegor truly was his fan.

Bologue tentatively asked, "You don't think I'm the 'Red Dragon,' do you?"

"Oh..."

Belphegor's steps faltered for a moment, then he continued forward, "You actually know about these things. It seems Nesanel really trusts you."

He continued, "No, I'm different from my siblings. I don't care about the 'Red Dragon,' just as I don't care about the outcome of this conflict."

Belphegor had no reservations; even regarding the secret of the devil's conflict, he was utterly indifferent.

"As for you, there isn't any complex motive. I really just like you; I'm your fan."

Bologue halted his steps. In the face of Belphegor's candid words, Bologue felt no relaxation and instead felt increasing pressure.

The more passionate and devoid of ulterior motives Belphegor's words were, the more pressure Bologue felt inside. If Belphegor had something to gain from him, he could start from interests and find a way to counter Belphegor.

But, in reality, Belphegor was purely acting as a fan, as if he could derive some sort of pleasure from Bologue.

Facing such an unclear-purpose, madly bizarre existence, Bologue couldn't think of any responsive measures, let alone the fact that he had no ability to oppose the Devil.

This sense of powerlessness, beyond his control, greatly annoyed Bologue.

"A Devil fan... truly flattering," Bologue said, "Do you want to obtain my soul?"

"Soul? How could that be? That's too boring."

Belphegor clarified his purpose, "What I crave is to capture your gaze."

It was the first time Bologue encountered such a strange request, "It sounds like a perverted voyeur."

Belphegor responded with a smile, "I prefer to call myself a tasteful audience."

"This inn is full of people... what's behind the door?"

Bologue didn't want to dwell on Belphegor's perverted hobby and instead started inquiring about the inn.

As a fan of his, Belphegor was very willing to explain his doubts. Bologue needed to seize this opportunity to explore more secrets as much as possible.

This inn was extremely peculiar. It was situated within the Cultivation Room; however, Bologue felt that this inn wasn't part of the Cultivation Room; it was independent.

Just like the Perplexing Intersection to the Tyrant, this inn might also be some Devil's domain, governed by sinister rules, entirely under Belphegor's control.

"Behind the door are my guests," Belphegor said, "those interesting souls will eventually enjoy eternal rest here."

Bologue asked, "Are they considered your 'collection'?"

"Hmm... more like derivatives of the collection," Belphegor was eager to show something to Bologue, beckoning him, "Follow me."

Bologue didn't have many options; he followed Belphegor, walking through the bustling corridor.

At a certain moment, Bologue felt a sense of absurdity.

The anomaly of the Cultivation Room, the life-and-death run, the re-encounter with Light's Blaze, and the Devil before him...

This series of events took place within an hour, continuously impacting Bologue's nerves, even numbing his consciousness, making his inner calm seem devoid of any emotion.

Bologue asked coldly, "Was it you?"

"What are you referring to?"

"Everything I just experienced," Bologue said, "now that I think about it, it doesn't seem like a coincidence."

"Sorry, did I scare you? I had no choice, the Order Bureau forbade me from contacting you. Without some extraordinary means, I really couldn't meet you."

Belphegor answered without reservation. He turned around with an apologetic expression and bowed to Bologue.

"What should I do to extinguish your anger? Commit seppuku?"

Before Bologue could answer, Belphegor grabbed his hair with one hand, his neck slightly stretched, and under great force, his flesh tore, distorting his features.

After a teeth-gritting, spine-chilling screech, Belphegor pulled his own head off and held it in his hand, blood gushing from the severed neck, soaking his clothes instantly.

Belphegor continued, "Is this enough? Or do you need something more drastic?"

"Stop it, this is meaningless."

Bologue shook his head expressionlessly; the Devil is not bound by human values, and so-called dignity means nothing to them.

Belphegor wasn't really apologizing, he just thought this would be amusing, or maybe he anticipated Bologue's reaction to the scene.

Bologue's indifference left Belphegor a bit disappointed, but he immediately felt even more hopeful about Bologue.

Holding his head, leaving behind a bloody trail, he walked forward, reaching a fork in the corridor, then turned towards a white door.

"You'll like what's inside."

Belphegor said cryptically, clamping his head under his arm, and slowly pulled open the door with both hands.

Bologue stood in the empty space, he had to admit, Belphegor indeed surprised him. Looking at the gigantic screen as tall as a wall, Bologue never imagined that deep within this inn was actually a theater.

"Give me a moment."

Belphegor positioned Bologue in the most suitable viewing spot, placing his head on the seat next to Bologue, and then his body swiftly disappeared into the darkness at the back, rummaging through something unknown.

"What do you think? This should be the best cinema in all of Oubos City, no, in the entire world."

Belphegor's head said with excitement.

Bologue did not respond. He sat in the audience seating, observing his surroundings. Besides the seating and the screen, there was an expanse of darkness, as if the theater's space was larger, mostly obscured by shadows.

In the corner, stacks of dark boxes piled up. Some were damaged, with film strips spilling out, tangled together like seaweed stranded on the shore.

Belphegor's body returned, holding a heavy box in his hands, then opened it in front of Bologue, taking out one film tape after another.

"What do you want to watch? Mr. Lazarus, I've collected every film since the invention of cinema."

Belphegor was extremely confident in his collection. "Whether by renowned directors or student projects, it's all here."

The box seemed bottomless, and soon the videotapes piled into a small mountain beside Belphegor, yet he hadn't stopped digging.

"And these rarities," Belphegor took out a few movie posters, "these are signed by directors themselves. I went through great lengths to get them."

"Those damned vendors just wanted to inflate their prices," Belphegor continued to complain, then chuckled, "Of course, they paid the price for it."

Bologue found it unbelievable, "You're a movie enthusiast as well?"

"To be precise, I'm an enthusiast of all artistic creations."

Belphegor placed the box aside, reattached his head to his body, and sat down next to Bologue.

"Whether it's music, comics, books, movies... even scripts from afternoon radio shows, I have them all."

Belphegor snapped his fingers, and a popcorn appeared in front of Bologue, along with a soda.

"Oh, wait, I remember you prefer orange juice, right?"

Belphegor said as he snapped his fingers again, turning the soda into a chilled orange juice.

"I find it hard to understand what you're up to?"

It was true; facing Belphegor, Bologue constantly felt a sense of absurdity. There were no conspiracies or evil intentions; Belphegor simply seemed like a pure enthusiast sharing his collection.

A fan showcasing his treasured items to his idol.

The most damnable thing was, in some ways, Bologue shared common interests with Belphegor. If he weren't a devil and their relationship wasn't so complicated, Bologue might even be willing to chat with Belphegor.

"Oh? You'll soon understand, this is why I went through all the trouble to invite you."

Belphegor found the remote, pressed the switch, and the projector started up, casting a flurry of snowflakes on the screen.

Under the hazy light, Belphegor spoke softly.

"Mr. Lazarus, do you like poetry?"

Chapter 612: Immortality

Poetry.

Bologue had read some poetry, and in his view, it was a thoroughly romantic term—a literary medium composed of highly condensed language and rhythm, imbued with intense emotions, and expressing the myriad facets of the soul.

Suddenly, Bologue recalled the anomaly he encountered during his ascension ritual, where he witnessed the story of a poet and the mountains amidst a sky-piercing storm as if experiencing it firsthand.

Due to this experience, poetry held a peculiar significance for Bologue.

He grew curious, curious as to why Belphegor would raise such a question. The sinister Devil and romantic poetry seemed quite mismatched no matter how one thought about it.

"From many years ago, I've loved all forms of artistic creation; before movies existed, my favorite art form was poetry."

Belphegor watched the screen, where the scene displayed a desolate expanse and a poet persevering in the knife-like cold wind.

"Still surprised?"

Belphegor took a deep sip of his drink and asked.

"Not surprised," Bologue relaxed, watching the black-and-white film, "Even if you took out an electric guitar now and sang to me, I wouldn't be surprised."

Belphegor laughed heartily.

In the scene, the poet arrived at an unfamiliar town, spreading his poetry within and exchanging with other poets in the town, acquiring new poetry to take to another far-off place.

"My brothers and sisters have different interests, like the Tyrant Mammon you've seen; he's like a garbage collector who never rejects anything of value."

"Sounds like a crow," Bologue said, "They love collecting shiny things, no matter what they are."

"Yes, exactly," Belphegor said, "Every Devil has an irresistible inclination, which perhaps is the beginning of our Original Sin."

Bologue internally noted this piece of information, perhaps it would be useful in the future.

Bologue continued, "Your passion is pursuing artistic creation? That sounds way out of character for a Devil..."

He hadn't finished speaking when Bologue immediately dismissed his own thoughts; Devils are like this—unpredictable and bizarre. Whatever crazy act they do, always has a reasonable explanation in their own view.

One could even say that even the reasonable explanation isn't important, as long as they can feel happy.

"I know it's hard to accept, that a bizarre Devil doesn't desire souls but instead favors such things, like an eccentric youth detached from society, collecting things incomprehensible to others."

Belphegor tinkered with his collection; he was right, if Belphegor were just an ordinary person, he'd be a reclusive oddball locking himself away from society.

Bologue's gaze towards Belphegor became peculiar.

The Order Bureau really knows how to pick Devils—choosing such an odd fellow, but well, only such strange Devils would be bound by a mortal's Blood Contract.

Bologue still held significant vigilance against Belphegor; no matter how strange Belphegor's outward behavior was, he remained an abhorrent Devil.

Belphegor said, "I like these things. For these interests, just like my brothers and sisters, I gradually gained a group of followers devoted to me."

"Unfettered Poetry Society."

Bologue watched the screen, invoking the name of that group.

On the screen, the poet came to a field, where countless poets waited for him in the endless grassland, pitching tents and raising bonfires, like a town rising from the ground.

The poets danced around the bonfire, sang and played; the melodious tunes intertwined with recitals of poems, echoing below the skies.

"You might not believe it, Mr. Lazarus; though I am a Devil, the Blood Contract I formed with the Unfettered Poetry Society was not driven by those ignoble desires."

Belphegor's eyes were fixed on the movie, and Bologue also focused on the film, both immersing themselves in the story like friends meeting at a theater.

The poets gathered and danced amidst the fields, with each passing day drawing more poets from afar to join them until on the seventh day, a visitor waded across water to arrive.

The poets encircled him, sharing their stories from dawn till dusk; another seven days passed, and finally, the visitor finished hearing everyone's stories.

It was time to leave.

The poets packed their belongings, dismantling the town built upon the flat ground; they embraced each other and bid farewells, promising to meet again next year.

Every poet, upon leaving, will pause for a moment before the visitors. The visitors bestow blessings upon the poets, who then touch the visitors' robes, leaving vibrant colors upon them.

This is the first stroke of color within the black-and-white film. More and more poets bid farewell to the visitors, painting their robes with brilliant hues. In this monochrome world, they are like a radiant bird.

All the poets have departed, and the brilliant bird begins its next flight.

"I don't really like calling our connection that of gods and followers. It's not equal; we're more like...a group of like-minded friends."

Belphegor whispered, "That's right, friends. They entrust their souls to me, and I bestow power upon them. It's not merely for the Devil's nature, but for our unified, noble ideals."

"Ideals? Do Devils even have such things?"

Bologue grabbed a handful of popcorn, stuffed it into his mouth, and mumbled indistinctly.

Belphegor laughed heartily, "Sounds incredible, doesn't it? But it is true; there are always some things even the Devil cannot do."

"So this isn't just a movie, right?" Bologue said, "These are the memories of those souls, and you've woven them into a film."

Inside the screen, scenes from a century ago are playing. From Bologue's viewing experience, the costumes, props, and actors' performances in this film are the most exquisite he has ever seen. It seems more like filming a real documentary than a movie.

This is the documentary, peeling those images from the souls using the Devil's Power, cutting them into endless records of the era.

"Yes, it's part of the trade."

Belphegor said as he picked up a dark box, pulling out the film within. The images inside the film grid weren't static but continually changing, along with the man's actions swiftly changing.

This reminded Bologue of when films first appeared, and some people rejected them, saying films were a kind of sorcery that would imprison a person's soul into the film.

Now the sorcery seems to have come true. The man inside the grid noticed Bologue, showing a terrified expression and screaming in desperation.

Bologue could hear his screams; every frame of the man was wailing.

"After all, I am the Devil. No matter how much I love them, my primary job still needs to be done."

Belphegor roughly stuffed the film back in, casually throwing the dark box into the darkness. In the corner illuminated by light, Bologue could see the boxes piled up like a mountain.

"I like trading with people to fulfill their wishes, in exchange for their gaze, to observe their entire life. You can understand me as an audience, and they are my actors."

Belphegor picked up another dark box and pointed to the name on it towards Bologue.

"Scott Martin, you should have seen him."

Bologue remembered this name, recalling the silent, desolate statue within the Undying Club.

"That's right, it's the one in the Undying Club," Belphegor continued, "In his youth, Scott traded with me to obtain funds to explore the unknown. I gave him ample funds, and as a price, I wanted to witness his adventure firsthand."

Belphegor expressed disappointment, "It's a pity. Our transaction should have ended then."

"Scott became a world-famous adventurer, and I also obtained an excellent film. Afterward, Scott wasn't satisfied; he began to fear death, asking me for the power of immortality."

Bologue whispered, "You granted him immortality, but in another form."

"But indeed, it's immortality," Belphegor said mockingly, "From the perspective of Alchemy Materials Science, the current Scott is one of the hardest substances in the world. Time and swords can leave no marks on him."

Belphegor put away his smile, gently brushing the surface of the dark box, his gaze fixed on the screen.

"Actually, I've promised everyone who trades with me that they will achieve immortality in my hands, but they don't believe me; they're just focused on merely surviving."

Bologue roughly understood Belphegor's trading rules. If the Tyrant is interested in anything of value, then the Mammon Coin is the quantification of value contributed to the Tyrant.

What Belphegor loves are interesting stories, others' radiant and beautiful lives, awe-inspiring artistic creations. The more a life can move Belphegor, the more valuable it is in his eyes; he craves others' gaze to witness their entire life.

Bologue asked, "Promise of immortality? Is that one of your great ideals?"

"Of course, that's my promise. Every poet who joins the Unfettered Poetry Society and shares their life with me will be written into that endless poetic verse, gaining eternal life."

Belphegor slowly clenched his fists, his voice stern and filled with anger.

"Regrettably, the Unfettered Poetry Society has been corrupted, and the endless verses have thus ceased."

Chapter 613: Train Arrival

Belphegor fell silent; he did not recount the part about the corruption of the Unfettered Poetry Society, merely watching the screen in silence. Bologue did not inquire further but rather watched the film with him.

Watching a movie with the Devil.

Bologue had done this before; previously, he even played chess with an Astronaut. Who knows what will happen next? Playing board games with the Devil?

Thinking about it, his experiences were indeed extraordinarily peculiar, and it was no surprise that Belphegor longed to see through his eyes and share in his life.

What Bologue did not expect was that the mysterious Unfettered Poetry Society had long been corrupted, slipping from Belphegor's control, causing Belphegor's ideals, the plan known as the Endless Poems, to fall apart.

The gray-white light illuminated the faces of Bologue and Belphegor, and in the dim environment, the two resembled marble statues.

Bologue asked, "Will this movie be long?"

Belphegor answered, "Its filming spans millennia and even now it hasn't concluded."

"Sounds really long."

Bologue peeled back his cuff to check the time.

"Do you have something to do later?"

Belphegor asked in a relaxed tone, almost like friends chatting.

"Of course I have something to do; today is a workday."

Bologue tugged at his badge hanging on his chest, showing his photo and brief personal information.

"Oh? No worries, I've already taken care of your leave."

Belphegor smiled, and looking at Belphegor's Palmer-like face, Bologue increasingly felt Belphegor resembled Palmer. Palmer had previously tidied up the living room and prepared snacks and drinks just to recommend a film, like an enthusiastic pup.

Bologue realized that Belphegor and Palmer weren't alike; they merely expressed their enthusiasm similarly.

The cinema fell silent, and the image on the screen began to change. Poets gathered yearly in different places to establish a community for fourteen days, the first seven for sharing poetry with each other, and the latter seven for sharing their views and experiences with visitors.

Year after year.

Bologue had already guessed; these poets were probably the original Unfettered Poetry Society, and the visitor naturally was Belphegor.

In this black-and-white world, Belphegor bore all the beautiful stories, carrying the singular color.

Suddenly, a crisp bird song echoed in the silent cinema, followed by even more raucous sounds, as if someone who had lost their hearing was hearing the low hum of the world again; the melody surged like a tide, filling the ear canals.

It was then that Bologue realized the previous film was silent, like a silent movie, and as the era within the film changed, the black-and-white blurred images gradually became clearer, and the movie had added score, becoming increasingly brilliant.

If one forgets the bizarre, rabid existence of the Devil, in Bologue's eyes, the Unfettered Poetry Society should be the most romantic organization he had ever seen, but soon he recalled Serey's description of the Unfettered Poetry Society.

They were a group of lunatics driven mad by poetry, burning villages, overthrowing castles, reveling in the agony of countless people.

"Corruption."

Subtitles emerged on the film.

"Humanity will decay and grow old with the passing of time, staunch wills will become lost and turbid, even the sturdiest rocks will turn to dust, and mountains will crumble, let alone the dry, cracking oceans..."

In another year's gathering, poets had their first disagreements, glaring at each other and hurling accusations, sounds blaring with a blurred texture, giving a dramatic distant illusion.

The visitor sat silently in the corner; some poets surrounded him, recounting the year's experiences to him, while others stood at a distance, not approaching.

As time passed, the disagreements among poets grew larger, to the point where they began to attack each other, and the annual gatherings began to break down, eventually occurring only once every five or ten years.

The visitor always observed, never intervening, regardless of what happened between the poets, seeming indifferent until, when they poured their hearts out to him, he would exhibit a slight reaction.

Belphegor was idle and lazy, unique among Devils...among many special Devils, he was the most peculiar and innocuous.

He merely watched, observing, refraining from engaging in any disputes, letting changes in the world unfold.

The poets never disappointed Belphegor; they still adhered to the same ideal, purging discordant voices from the Unfettered Poetry Society, re-purifying it.

Then once more, they corrupted.

History always repeats itself. Belphegor's disregard is perhaps due to his familiarity with all this; he understands that humans are fragile, not to mention their so-called ideals.

They will invariably decay. The factions that split still believe in Belphegor, but they have become more extreme, setting wildfires in the wilderness, bringing death to the towns they pass by, composing new poems in the midst of blood and lament.

Belphegor did not refuse.

Suffering, tragedy, death... These too are parts of the Endless Poems.

As eras changed, the power of the Unfettered Poetry Society grew stronger, new entities constantly emerged, and this time the vocabulary for poets expanded.

Similarly, the meaning of poetry was no longer confined to rhythmic words; all crystallizations of human art fell into Belphegor's yearning.

With the progress of civilization and technology, Belphegor's collection grew ever larger, the variety became immense.

From ancient ballads to grand symphonies, from brief verses to lengthy epics, books no longer simply expounded thoughts or recorded history; they bore human imagination, writing stories of those fantasies.

Even to the birth of the first science fiction novel.

"I've witnessed many souls; hers is undoubtedly the brightest."

A deep male voice resounded, his words appearing alongside subtitles. Though the voice was unfamiliar, Bologue knew it was Belphegor's voice.

This film is a documentary; it not only records the development of the Unfettered Poetry Society but also Belphegor's pursuit of ideals.

It can be said to document Belphegor's entire life.

In the picture, a woman's face gradually emerged, then vanished into smoke.

Bologue knew about the birth of the first science fiction novel; he had seen it in Palmer's collection when Palmer introduced him excitedly to the novel titled "Frankenstein."

Palmer uncertainly said, "The protagonist of this book is like you, also considered... Resurrection?"

That book's birth was already a century ago when industrial technology was just beginning to emerge. Hence, Bologue could deduce the historical progress of the film.

Bologue felt somewhat anxious; he knew what was about to happen next, the film's melody became oppressive and deep; the Devil's dispute was about to begin, heralding the Dawn War.

War began.

The poets delved into the battlefield. These folks who usually did nothing but play the lute and recite poetry wielded swords more fiercely than their enemies; they did not belong to any side, merely wishing to witness the course of the war, delivering this cruel Chapter to Belphegor.

Bologue carefully watched every upcoming scene, borrowing Belphegor's assistance to glimpse into the past.

Clouds overshadowing the blazing sun, gales roaring across the land, countless people slaughtering each other, castles rising and falling again...

Countless images intertwined, flashed, and spliced together; this montage technique lasted for over ten minutes, the mixed imagery made Bologue dizzy, the music transitioned from melodious symphony to authentic narrative sounds.

Screams, cries, the humming of swords, the discharge of firearms...

All melded with a metallic roughness, feeling like sharp grains rubbing against the eardrums.

Bologue's expression trembled, became pained, as if attending a frenzied heavy metal concert, amidst the mixed images, a vague figure appeared at the center of the screen, standing firm regardless of the surrounding scene's changes.

The camera began zooming in, and that vague figure gradually became clear. From his appearance, he seemed slightly thin and was not Serey. In Belphegor's depicted scenes, his figure, like Serey's, permeated through the entirety of the Dawn War.

Bologue was about to clearly see that person's face when suddenly, the image turned entirely white, the intense light stung Bologue's eyes, flooding them with tears.

Shielding his eyes, Bologue felt as if facing the scorching sun directly, while beside him, Belphegor was wearing sunglasses from who knows where, laughing heartily.

"This is the beginning of the corruption, Mr. Lazarus!"

Belphegor cheered, waving his hands wildly.

After the intense light, the castle was abandoned, overgrown with weeds, and later became a bustling tourist spot overnight; emerging technology engulfed humanity like a flood, internal combustion engines roared, railway tracks extended into no-man's land.

"Nothing is eternal."

Belphegor lamented, in the scene, poets walked into a shabby little shack. As the projector started, light beamed onto the wall.

The train rumbled in the light; it headed towards the poets as if intending to smash through the wall, along with the poets and that bygone era.

Chapter 614: Will Endures

"Wonderful, Mr. Lazarus, when I first saw this thing, even I was shocked!"

Belphegor shouted loudly as the train on the screen came toward the audience, carrying an indescribable sense of realism. Bologue's body tensed uncontrollably, as if he was really about to collide head-on with the train.

The train rushed out of the screen.

Bologue could smell the burning coal and hear the roaring sounds of gears. In the instant the train got infinitely close, it transformed into an illusory phantom and dissipated before him.

"Ha ha!"

Belphegor's laughter was never-ending, and in the cinema, someone like him was definitely in the less welcome category.

As a movie enthusiast, Bologue knew what this was, "The Arrival of a Train," humanity's first film and possibly the first horror movie. When people first saw this strange "movie" thing, the oncoming train frightened many.

"This thing is amazing, compared to poetry, novels, music, the information it can carry is undoubtedly the richest and most complex."

Belphegor agreed, the film's soundtrack became splendid, and the image grew clearer, even tinged with color.

Poets liked this new thing, as their function was no longer limited to "poetry." They immersed themselves in the new wave, bringing countless films to Belphegor every year.

Bologue's heart remained tense; the friendly coexistence between humans and the Devil in the film was only temporary. After the Dawn War, the continent would usher in another mad conflict.

Soon, the wrath of scorched earth burst forth.

This is not an ordinary film but fragments of memory extracted from the soul. It is not a fake performance, but a reality engraved into the soul.

Everything Bologue saw was from the poets' first perspective; it not only brought real scenes but also imparted those genuine emotions to the audience.

The long-lost feeling returned to the body; in a trance, Bologue felt he was back on the battlefield, becoming one of those charging forward to face death. Shells landed with a roaring boom, falling beside Bologue, who had no means of evasion and could only entrust everything to fate's mercy.

Bologue died, shattered by the shell, and the next moment, he opened his eyes again, becoming another soldier, continuing to charge forward, then dying, reviving, dying, reviving, repeating countless times.

Bologue understood that he hadn't truly resurrected; rather, after one poet dies, his perspective switched to another poet.

Different poets saw different aspects of war, some witnessing the King's servility, some observing great scholars defending their cities, while others saw the gathering of demons plotting something...

A bright light rose from the ground, annihilating everything.

Bologue's face turned pale, feeling the heat rushing towards him, the phantom pain of burning fire coursing through his body, causing slight trembling.

Finally, it all ended. Bologue breathed heavily, hugged the popcorn bucket, and vomited forcefully.

Belphegor brought him to experience this lengthy history, and though it was a rough glimpse, the overflow of information almost burst Bologue's head, causing a splitting headache.

"You're a terrible director... what did you even edit..."

Bologue couldn't stop vomiting, he felt like he was about to throw up his intestines.

Previously, Bologue loved the montage editing method, but Belphegor forced out over an hour of it, under the piercing noise; it felt like a nightmare, a waking nightmare.

"Don't you think I perfectly expressed the oppression and madness of war?"

Belphegor felt he was great, while Bologue failed to appreciate it.

Bologue wiped the corner of his mouth, not refuting.

"Ah... after the war, the world welcomed peace, new technology brought increasingly charming things," Belphegor stared at the screen, enchanted, "Various artistic creations blossomed; the daily birth of new works surpassed those a few years in the old era, dazzling."

"Sometimes I feel the soul isn't that important to me anymore; just living in such a world, witnessing the birth of beautiful things, is enough."

Belphegor rarely expressed his sincere thoughts to someone, shedding his sinister facade as much as possible to appear as an ordinary mortal.

Thus, Belphegor was the least interested in disputes among the Devils.

Bologue asked, "What happened to cause all this corruption."

"Nothing much, in hindsight, it seems more like an inevitability of the era," Belphegor said, "With technological advancement, new things brought simple and straightforward sensory stimulation, numerous as cow hairs."

"In the old times, some couldn't read many books nor hear many stories in their lifetime, making them exceptionally precious, worth poets' pursuits and songs. But the new era is different, what was once cherished is everywhere, easily accessible.

Sometimes the songs you listen to in a week might be more than what your father heard in a lifetime, not to mention stories... These precious things became cheap; compared to reading those ancient poems, new things undoubtedly bring a stronger thrill."

Belphegor slowly clenched his fist, "The arrival of the new era made one of my siblings perceive an opportunity. She took advantage of it to corrupt the Unfettered Poetry Society; people no longer cherished those eternal and distant pursuits, but focused more on immediate joy."

Belphegor pondered for a while, asking Bologue, "How is it usually said... Fast-food culture? I remember reading it in the newspaper, is that right?"

"Sort of..."

"That's about it; under the influence of another Devil, the Unfettered Poetry Society gradually split, and with the temptation to revel in the moment, poets became fewer, nearly extinct. She thus destroyed what I loved, turning it into the Zongge Orchestra."

Belphegor glanced at Bologue, "Which is the group that attacked you."

"But I still don't understand what exactly you promised the poets? Merely eternal life can seduce them?"

From the film, Bologue could perceive that what Belphegor said was true; he and the poets were equal, like friends, moving forward for the same ideal.

This puzzled Bologue, making it hard to imagine such a relationship between the Devils and humans, like a fairy tale.

"Endless Poems."

Belphegor spoke softly, "That's what we called our ideal, which would be a poetry collection, an immensely thick collection recording every 'poem' created by every 'poet' from ancient times to the present, whether or not they joined the Unfettered Poetry Society.

It covers all forms of art humans can create, whether music or novels, even graphic design, are preserved within."

Belphegor continued, "As for the eternal life I promised... Mr. Lazarus, do you believe true eternal life exists in the world?"

Bologue said, "Are you joking? You just mentioned the one in the Undying Club."

"But he also gained eternal life through the Devil's Power. What if one day the Devil dies? Would his eternal life still exist?"

Belphegor's words pierced Bologue's heart like a cold arrow; he widened his eyes, looking at Belphegor beside him, who was still wearing sunglasses, making his gaze invisible.

"You mean... Devils can die too?"

"Just treat it as a hypothesis. If Devils die, would the eternal life they promised still exist?"

Belphegor appeared indifferent, still asking Bologue this question.

Bologue took a deep breath, "No way..."

"Then I ask you, what form do you think would count as true eternal life?"

Belphegor continued to ask, "The immortality of the body or the eternity of the spirit?"

Bologue didn't respond, still troubled by Belphegor's words that seemed less like a hypothesis and more like a real possibility.

Even Devils can die.

Bologue felt gusts and waves rushing toward him, within this absurd cinema.

Chapter 615: The Devil's Ideal

"Are you doing it on purpose?"

Bologue unconsciously clenched his hand, squeezing the drink cup, causing the juice to overflow and spill all over his hand.

"What's on purpose? I'm just conversing with you normally."

Belphegor's mouth slightly curved. He had successfully enticed Bologue. Whatever odd things he might say next, Bologue would continue talking to him, simply for the sake of real or false information.

Bologue felt his heartbeat gradually intensify, his chest becoming feverishly hot, with the clear sound of his heartbeat echoing in the cinema.

Seeing Bologue silent, Belphegor spoke on his own, "If immortality is the indestructibility of the flesh, then you should have seen examples of this in the Undying Club, stone sculptures and decaying shells. Is such immortality interesting?"

"Or perhaps like Serey, eternal youth of the flesh? It's not much better, is it? Look at the state Serey is in. His flesh persists, yet his mind is on the verge of collapse. Haven't you noticed?"

Bologue replied, "I actually think Serey's in good spirits."

Serey might be the happiest member of the Undying Club, roaming around different women every day, indulging in drinking once tired of it, or playing board games with Palmer and the others. Bologue couldn't imagine such a person having any worries.

"That just means you've never truly understood Serey."

Bologue didn't answer. He acknowledged that since heading to Wind Source Highlands, Serey had become shrouded in large mysteries in Bologue's eyes, with various fragmented images stitched onto him, causing unease.

"Getting back to the topic of immortality."

Belphegor used those in the Undying Club as examples, "Like Bode, who is just a skeleton frame, having lost all human sensory stimuli, only a numb heart remains eternal. Or like Wei'Er, who is forever in the posture of a beast, having lost the ability to be human."

"But isn't this the tricks of you, Devils?" Bologue gritted his teeth, "It's you who created all this."

"We merely fulfill their wishes."

Belphegor said, "Don't think of Devils as too complicated. You can see us as a group of... wish-granting machines. That's right, wish-fulfilling machines with self-will."

"Humans want something, and we give it to them. Just during this process, we need to collect necessary rewards... you see, we too are bound by our own rules, not omnipotent."

"I also want to grant humans eternal life, away from suffering and torment. Unfortunately, I can do this, but humans do not possess the value to acquire such perfect immortality."

"Then what about me?" Bologue asked, "My immortality approaches perfection."

Belphegor said, "That's why you are so unique and beautiful. You must be of extraordinary value to one of my brothers, which is why he granted you such immortality. But I understand that one day, you will grow tired of it, just like Serey."

"No, I will never grow tired."

"Really? On some day in the infinite future, everything you know – people, familiar things, eras of living – all buried within the dust of history, leaving you as a specter crawling out of the tomb, utterly incompatible with this world... can you endure this?"

"Absolutely," Bologue said confidently, "as long as there are memories, I can keep on living."

Belphegor fell silent as he took off his sunglasses, meeting Bologue's gaze.

"Then... Mr. Lazarus, would you like to make a wager with me?"

In an instant, all sounds vanished. Bologue felt his body petrified, unable to move, darkness devoured all light, leaving only him and Belphegor in the world of Dark Void.

Belphegor stared at Bologue, the circles around his eyes darkened like smoky makeup. Following that, his pupils transformed into pure black, with tar-like substances flowing out, trickling over his pale cheeks.

Bologue mockingly retorted, "Do you think this is possible?"

Like an illusion, the eerie scene shattered in an instant, darkness dispersed, and dim light returned to the cinema. Belphegor still wore sunglasses, not looking at Bologue, always keeping his gaze locked onto the screen.

"Looks like we won't be able to come to a conclusion," Belphegor said disappointedly, shaking his head, but then added, "but that's alright, we have plenty of time."

"How about we meet every hundred years, Mr. Lazarus, to discuss your experiences and your views on immortality?"

"Are you trying to turn me into your 'Poet'?"

"Perhaps."

Belphegor continued, "I'm your fan because I think your life is extraordinarily fascinating; it must be great movie material worthy of being added to those Endless Poems."

"Is that so..."

Bologue muttered, realizing why Belphegor showed such enthusiasm towards him. This guy was merely a decadent youth detached from the world, lost in his own beautiful fantasies.

Belphegor loved artistic creation, which is why he rallied a group of Poets to collect for him. Arriving in the modern era, he discovered the art of cinema, thereby beginning to extract memories from souls, editing them into great films.

He's both an audience and a director.

The more fascinating a life, the more meaningful it becomes, the more exalted the art, hence worthy of him paying the stakes.

"Oh, sorry, got off topic."

Belphegor enjoyed conversing with Bologue, putting away the evil of the Devil, facing him in the most ordinary manner.

"In general, I believe for mortals, there is no true immortality of the flesh; rather, the spirit and will can be."

The immortality I promise to the Poets is spiritual immortality. Their works will be included in the Endless Poems, while they, themselves, anyone who sacrifices their soul to me, will be under my protection, enjoying eternal rest, until the completion of these poems, where we will watch together in the cinema, endlessly."

Belphegor's tone was deep and melodious, as if he was reciting a poem.

Bologue murmured, "A collection of derivatives... filling the hotels..."

"You see, we've always been in an equal relationship; we're friends, we're brothers, Poets like myself – we all want to witness the birth of Endless Poems..."

Belphegor's tone shifted.

"But such a promise ultimately seems too far away. I can't remember how many millennia have passed; Endless Poems are still being written. I think only at the end of the world, it can truly complete."

"It's too long. Under the impact of new things, many Poets feel my promise is a scam. In comparison to the eternal world after death, they're more willing to believe in the joy of the present."

Belphegor recalled, "Just like we mentioned earlier... fast food culture? Yes, sort of like that."

One of my brothers and sisters seized the opportunity, tempting Poets with pre-death joy, leading them to abandon me. Thus, Unfettered Poetry Society gradually faded from the historical stage, replaced by Zongge Orchestra."

"They don't care about the future; they only care about the present. They don't care about profound thoughts; they just desire the most straightforward, intense sensory impact."

Belphegor's tone was somewhat sorrowful, "Few can refuse such temptation, right?"

Bologue couldn't be bothered to understand the Devil's sorrowful tales. He even doubted whether Devils ever had something called the emotion of sadness.

"The reason you tell me this is still to make me one of yours, isn't it?"

Belphegor revealed a meaningful smile, "Devils never force others, especially since I now have new Poets."

Bologue's expression froze. Belphegor had forged a Blood Contract with the Order Bureau; perhaps the Order Bureau was the new... new Unfettered Poetry Society."

"No, how is that possible?" Bologue repeatedly confirmed, "I haven't felt any anomaly."

With Bologue's deep insight, he could easily detect nearby anomalies related to Devils, but apart from the Special Operations Group, he sensed no other Debtors within the Order Bureau, not even the Contractors under Protection."

"Because this bet isn't over yet, although, I feel I've already won."

Belphegor was confident of his victory.

Bologue tried hard to calm his inner self, strengthening his enmity against the Devil to avoid lowering his guard.

"Indeed... a Devil is a Devil after all."

Bologue questioned, "You're not just trying to influence me with words, are you?"

Bologue believed he would not be swayed by Belphegor's temptations; he saw Belphegor's actions as futile.

"If you could be easily convinced by me, I would actually be disappointed," Belphegor put away his smile, "I'm merely reminding you, Mr. Lazarus."

"I'm not your enemy. On the contrary, I'm your potential ally. Your true enemy is that entity which corrupted Unfettered Poetry Society, turning it into Zongge Orchestra."

Belphegor explained to Bologue.

"Joyful Witch."

Chapter 616: Train Ticket

Joyous Desire Witch.

Bologue had heard this name before; Serey had mentioned it to him previously. From Serey's behavior back then, it seemed he was terrified of this Joyous Desire Witch.

"You want me to avenge you? To confront the Joyous Desire Witch."

Information doesn't come free, and now Bologue noticed the price Belphegor wanted.

Belphegor giggled, "No, the Devil never forces anyone. I just provided you with some necessary information, and whatever you choose to do next is up to you."

Bologue took a deep breath, the feeling was familiar; it was the same when he made a deal with the Tyrant, who offered him assistance to fulfill his revenge.

It seemed the Tyrant helped him, but in reality, he was unknowingly doing the Tyrant's bidding, intercepting that train, preventing the Mammon Coin from getting out.

Now it's the same, the Zongge Orchestra seems to have taken an interest in him for some unknown reason, the Joyous Desire Witch wants to add him to her collection, and Belphegor timely extended a hand. He knew that ultimately, he would be opposed to the Joyous Desire Witch.

Everything made sense, but the thought that he would inadvertently help Belphegor achieve some goal made Bologue feel uneasy.

"Alright, Mr. Lazarus, let's stop here."

Belphegor suddenly spoke; at the same time, the screen froze, and the film stopped playing.

It didn't stop; rather, the film had only been shot up to this point. Bologue looked ahead; the screen displayed a strange picture,

Numerous shattered mirrors interspersed together, all the fragments reflecting the same figure, Bologue's figure.

"Mr. Lazarus, you have the potential to become a Poet."

Belphegor suddenly grabbed Bologue's hand, and in his grip, Bologue's strength vanished entirely; then a fierce burning sensation surged from his palm as if Belphegor's hand had become a branding iron.

Bologue remained calm, and Belphegor looked at him seriously.

"Whether it's cold transactions or interpersonal relationships, sincerity is always the cornerstone of our mutual trust."

Belphegor slowly released Bologue's hand, the burning rapidly receding.

"I won't let you face it alone."

Bologue withdrew his hand, his left palm now showing a burned scar. Roughly, it looked like a blazing sun, or perhaps like thorns bunched together, with sharp spikes protruding outward.

A violent force surged for a moment inside, then quickly calmed down, like an ordinary scar.

"Then... I look forward to seeing you again, Mr. Lazarus."

Belphegor smiled softly and snapped his fingers.

The light flickered and dimmed, the space began to distort, Bologue opened his mouth, tried to say something, but the sound from his throat turned into meaningless whimpers.

His vision plunged into darkness, then brightened a few seconds later.

Bologue's consciousness remained clear, yet his body felt weak, losing balance as he fell forward.

As Bologue was about to tumble, a pair of hands from behind caught him, preventing him from falling.

Bologue leaned against the wall, regaining control over his unresponsive body, his eyes weary and dry. He blinked forcefully before finally recognizing his surroundings.

He was now at the entrance to Lebius's office.

"Are you okay?"

A familiar voice sounded behind him, concerned, "Were you lost in thought? You looked absent-minded."

Absent-minded?

Bologue coughed a few times, turned around, Aimou stood behind him, face showing confusion.

"It's nothing, just had a bad sleep."

Bologue shook his head, forced a smile, "Good morning, Aimou."

Aimou ignored Bologue's words and pressed on, "Are you sure you're okay?"

Bologue confidently said, "I am the Undead."

Aimou watched Bologue, his gaze and aura shrinking down to a thin line.

"Alright then."

Aimou was successfully deceived by Bologue, she opened the office door, Bologue followed her inside. After a series of events, Bologue needed some time to process.

Suddenly, a sharp pain emanated from his palm, Bologue opened his hand where the scar left by Belphegor marked his palm, warning him that what happened wasn't an illusion.

Even worse, the Time Reversing Axis had no reaction to such a scar; it seemed unchanged by Bologue's Blessing, eternally etched on his palm.

...

After sending Bologue away, Belphegor was alone again in the cinema. In the vast space, he appeared solitary.

Belphegor picked up the remote, the screen darkened, then quickly lit up again, this time projecting a completely different scene.

The film's perspective was first-person, the camera swaying constantly with the character's movements.

Huge trees blocked the sky, bright light splintered into fragments, falling to the ground in utter darkness.

The character's breathing echoed within the cinema, holding a Short Sword vigilantly looking in one direction, shortly sensing an Ether reaction from ahead.

The opponent's attack hadn't been released, the scene twisted with the character's rapid movement, the roaring wind passing by.

The character saw a gleaming light in the dense forest. He raised his hand, and the next moment the ground beneath the target suddenly collapsed, then towering trees began to crumble as if an invisible giant hammer crushed everything along the way.

The Ether reaction weakened ahead, then completely vanished, and dying wails gradually came through.

The character approached the collapsed spot; the area had caved in meticulously, a perfect circle with distinct edges.

The target lay in the sunken circular recess, half embedded in the ground, exposed bone fractured and twisted, blood flowed copiously from the body.

The fatal wound was in the target's spine, crushed by immense force, bending the body, struggling to breathe, bloody spittle spilling with each breath.

The character stood before the target, then stooped down, one hand covering the eyes, the other thrusting the Short Sword along the throat, lifting forcefully upward, piercing through the skull beneath the chin, twisting the neck, ending the target's life.

With this done, the character's hands were drenched in blood, he sheathed the Short Sword, searched the corpse, quickly finding a pristine ticket amongst the blood-smeared clothes; it seemed impervious to elements and stayed clean.

"I got the ticket."

In the lengthy silence, the character spoke for the first time; it seemed self-directed, or perhaps spoken to Belphegor.

Belphegor smiled without a word.

The character flipped open a thick book, scanning the pages, the book appeared to have passed through many hands, each section penned differently, and paper varied from old to new.

He inserted the ticket in the latest page, closed the book, and stepped over the corpse, heading further into the forest.

Belphegor watched this scene with satisfaction, a strange smile on his face; the Devil never lies, he just... doesn't tell the whole truth.

Even if the Joyous Desire Witch promises present delights, there remains a fraction of Poets who still believe in eternity after death.

Chapter 617: The Primal Object

Through the observation window, Lebius noticed the injured soldiers lying in the hospital beds. With the rescue efforts at the Border Sanatorium, they were all out of life-threatening danger, but due to severe injuries, most remained in a coma, under subsequent observation.

Retracting his gaze, the wide and silent corridor was filled with heavy pressure. Everyone wore somber expressions, with unresolved worries between their brows, but no one sighed, as everyone held their breath in restraint.

The smell of disinfectant and blood lingered at the tip of the nose, an unpleasant sensation, as if having experienced a battlefield without drawing weapons.

Lebius leaned on his cane, tapping against the solid ground, creating the only noise in the silence. Geoffrey followed behind Lebius, his face also serious, brows furrowed.

At the end of the corridor, Yas, the leader of the Sixth Group, Violence Suppression Action Group, stood with arms crossed. Beside him stood Hart, his muscular body and fur attracting attention wherever he appeared.

The few exchanged glances, and Lebius pushed open a door on the side of the corridor, with the others following him.

The scent of disinfectant and blood was even stronger inside the ward, as if a major surgery had just taken place. Rachel had been waiting here for some time.

Lebius asked, "Can we start?"

"Yes," Rachel nodded, worry evident, "His condition isn't good; it's best to end quickly."

"I understand."

Rachel left the ward, leaving the space to the Field Operations members.

Pulling open the curtain, a wounded Field Staff lay on the hospital bed. His complexion was pallid, breath weak, and his entire right foot had disappeared, leaving a clean stump.

Marlori, the unlucky guy Palmer spoke of, who lost a leg. If he had been slower by a few seconds in entering the path, it wouldn't just be a leg but half his body.

Through the emergency rescue at the Border Sanatorium and various excess doses of Alchemy Potions, after several hours of effort, they finally snatched Marlori back from the Death God's grasp.

Marlori's body was severely tortured, but his mental state was relatively good, clear enough to converse with the others.

"Hello everyone."

Marlori forced a smile, nodding at the two leaders, having known each other for some time.

Lebius pulled up a chair, sitting by Marlori's side, looking at Marlori's severed leg. Lebius ought to offer some words of comfort, but there were more important matters than consolation, and for all Field Staff, this was all too common.

"What exactly happened?"

Lebius questioned. Ever since the incident with the Tenth Group, the Field Operations Department dispatched several squads to investigate, yet no response had been received. To Lebius, it seemed better to directly inquire from those involved rather than wait for them.

After a simple weigh-up, Rachel agreed with Lebius's idea, and the doctors reluctantly woke up one of the team members, the person in front of them, Marlori.

Marlori sighed; indeed, though they hadn't seen each other for some time, Lebius was still that workaholic he was familiar with.

The others were also accustomed to Lebius's nature. Geoffrey, standing behind Lebius, nodded apologetically to Marlori.

Marlori struggled to suppress the physical pain, organizing his thoughts.

"At the beginning, everything proceeded normally, every step strictly following the plan.

We surrounded Iris Town, an important stronghold of the Sangvein sect in the Narrow Countries, with an Extraordinary Disaster: Eternal Rotting Land already formed inside. According to disposal regulations, we poured hundreds of tons of Red Mercury inside; the soaring flames were visible from tens of kilometers away."

Recalling that treacherous battle, Marlori felt a wave of repression. The Tenth Group's action against the Sangvein sect persisted for several months, during which they were constantly engaged in high-intensity combat, and this final siege was undoubtedly the most frenzied of all.

Flames dried and cracked the land, burning all flesh away, while air currents easily incited fiery winds, the ash sweeping toward everyone like a snowstorm.

"Just as stipulated in the regulations, after demolishing each patch of Eternal Rotting Land, we advanced step by step, everything proceeded smoothly. The flesh monsters the Sangvein sect prized were turned to ash by the Red Mercury, and those Condensers perished in the fire.

Only a few High Tier Condensers resisted the flames' assault, but those few High Tier Condensers stood no chance against us. Especially since we had a Defender on our side."

Marlori referred to the leader of the Tenth Group. Under the Defender's protection, their offensive was akin to wildfire, easily crushing the enemy.

"To be honest, everything went smoothly beyond imagination. We simply wiped out these bastards."

Halfway through his words, Marlori's expression turned grim. Hart quickly approached, picked up the tranquilizer, and administered an injection to Marlori. After a few minutes, Marlori's state improved significantly.

"From your report, after months of pursuit, the Sangvein sect's strength had already been greatly weakened. The Sangvein sect in Iris Town was merely residual power, surviving on the Eternal Rotting Land. Your successful attack fell within reasonable expectations."

Lebius said that before coming, he had carefully read the report of the Tenth Group and was well aware of their actions.

Marlori nodded in agreement with Lebius's words. He said, "Then... then we began to clear the scene. You all know, not a trace of the flesh of the Crimson Decay Sect can be left behind on the scene, even if it has been scorched by fire, it must be checked again."

"In the core of the hinterland, we found a cellar, a place of great importance to the Crimson Decay Sect. They built walls of flesh several meters thick to resist the scorching of Red Mercury, and when we discovered it, it had not been affected by the flames at all.

We stormed in, and after a battle, we found that inside the cellar, in addition to the cultists of the Crimson Decay Sect, there was another group of unexpected guests."

Lebius asked, "Who are they?"

Marlori explained, "The Gray Trade Association. Those strange merchants were also there. We speculate that they were in the middle of a transaction with the Crimson Decay Sect, but the deal wasn't concluded before they were surrounded by us. Like the cultists, the merchants had no way out and hid in the cellar."

"Your Tenth Group's post-action report didn't mention this at all."

Yas questioned, as the leader of the Sixth Group, he had also reviewed the Tenth Group's action report, which made no mention of the Gray Trade Association.

"Don't rush, let me explain slowly."

Marlori had anticipated their confusion and had sufficient reasons to explain all of it.

"It was Gold's directive. He instructed us to keep the appearance of the Gray Trade Association confidential."

The room fell silent. Gold, referenced by Marlori, is the leader of the Tenth Group, stationed at the Fourth Stage, with the Defensive War Chariot.

"The battle in the cellar was intense. It seemed like they were protecting something, with an intense desire to resist, but under our leader's assault, their defenses crumbled and collapsed instantly.

During the subsequent cleanup, the leader found something, which was presumably the item being traded between the Gray Trade Association and the Crimson Decay Sect."

Lebius realized that the cause of this incident might have originated from the item that Gold discovered during the trade. He did not urge and remained patient, listening to Marlori's recount.

"I guess you're wondering what that trade item was now?" Marlori said with a bitter smile. "I'm sorry, I don't know what it was either."

"Judging by the leader's reaction at the time, that trade item must have been very important. He has always been a composed person, but after seeing the trade item, he uncharacteristically lost control of his emotions, drove us out of the cellar, leaving only himself behind.

The leader spent some time alone with that trade item, and when he came out, he carried the trade item and ordered us to return to the Order Bureau as quickly as possible."

Marlori felt a headache, covering his head, taking deep breaths repeatedly, striving to control his willpower. Hart intended to administer another sedative to Marlori, but Marlori refused.

"Ah... this feeling is terrible."

Marlori panted heavily, calming his breathing, and weakly said, "Looking back, the leader considered that trade item extremely important, so much so that he didn't even document it in the report, but kept it a secret and personally escorted it back to the Order Bureau."

"For this reason, he even disrupted the original plan. You must know, according to our planned actions, we were supposed to patrol the Narrow Countries for another week before returning to the Order Bureau."

"The entire Tenth Group, escorting that trade item?"

Lebius spoke, feeling a sense of pressure. This was a formidable force, yet it was used for escorting.

But even so, problems arose with the escort action.

"What happened next is as you are aware. We were at our base in the Narrow Countries, preparing to return to the Order Bureau via a shortcut when we were attacked by an unknown group during our return."

Marlori murmured, "It seems this trade item is truly significant... perhaps the recent actions of the Crimson Decay Sect were also for this trade item."

Lebius nodded, now that they had gathered enough information, it was time to report to the Decision Room.

"The Primordial Artifact."

Suddenly, Marlari uttered a mysterious term, looking at Lebius as he continued, "The leader never explained to us what the trade item was, but he referred to it as 'The Primordial Artifact.'

"Alright, we understand."

Lebius nodded again to Marlari, who then fainted after holding on for a few more seconds.

Sustained by medication, the will could no longer hold on at this moment.

Chapter 618: Standby Mode

Pushing the door open, the usually crowded office was unexpectedly empty, with neither Lebius nor Geoffrey present, and even Yuriel was nowhere to be seen.

Aimou remarked in surprise, "Huh? No one's here."

Lebius' workaholic reputation was deeply ingrained in everyone, making this place feel like a convenience store open 24/7, where you could always find someone if you pushed the door open.

Bologue followed from behind, and seeing this, he said nothing, turned, and walked into the adjacent lounge. He flopped down on the sofa, closed his eyes, and lay flat on the couch.

The scenes from the cinema flashed relentlessly in his mind, and the rough, jarring metallic sounds echoed in his ears. Bologue tried hard to calm his mind, but the more he tried, the more he was engulfed in a flood of thoughts, unable to extricate himself.

"Ah..."

Bologue held his head and curled up into a ball, nestled on the sofa.

This lasted for a few minutes before Bologue somewhat relaxed. This was one of the skills he had honed in the Black Prison; he excelled at adjusting his mindset to bring himself into a state of tranquility.

Opening his eyes, Aimou stood silently nearby, as if she had been there all along.

"Feeling any better now?"

Aimou asked, "You seem a bit off today."

Bologue weakly responded, "Really?"

"Yes."

Aimou recalled their earlier meeting, "This morning, you were standing at the door with a blank expression, not responding no matter how I called, as if your soul had left your body."

Bologue was momentarily stunned and glanced at the clock in the lounge. He had spent at least a dozen hours in the cinema watching Belphegor's lengthy film, but only... a few minutes had passed outside.

Glancing at the sun imprint on his palm, Bologue muttered, "An out-of-body experience? Perhaps."

It was only then that Bologue belatedly realized the difference in time flow between the cinema and the outside world. After a brief shock, he easily accepted it all.

In the Alchemists' research, the Void Realm could not only be expanded on a spatial level but also manipulated on a temporal level. However, reality distortion to such a degree faced technical limitations, and no Alchemist had yet succeeded in creating such a Void Realm.

But if shaped by the Devil, it wasn't impossible.

This didn't trouble Bologue for long, as what happened today couldn't compare to the shock of Belphegor's words, "What if the Devil died?"

The Devil could die too.

Bologue felt a sense in the midst of it all that Belphegor was neither joking nor proposing a hypothesis.

Among Belphegor's countless lies, Bologue believed this was an absolutely true statement.

The Devil could be killed.

Bologue sat up straight, murmuring to himself, "Is this also the Devil's way of toying with minds?"

Belphegor deliberately said it to Bologue, planting a seed of desire in his heart. This seed would take root and grow from Bologue's experiences until it broke through the surface.

For the rest of his life, Bologue would unceasingly pursue the truth about the Devils, seeking to end it all because of this nightmarish statement...

While they looked down from above the sky, watching his ludicrous efforts.

"Bologue?"

Aimou's voice called out again, pulling Bologue back from his wild thoughts.

"Are you okay?"

Aimou grew increasingly worried about Bologue. Having known him for so long, it was the first time she'd seen him like this, thoughts overflowing from his eyes.

"It's nothing, just thinking too much as usual."

Bologue quickly adjusted, just as the lounge door was flung open by Palmer, who appeared outside looking puzzled.

"Where is everyone?"

It was clear that Palmer was also surprised by the empty office.

Bologue and Aimou both shook their heads.

After waiting for a while, they met up with Yuriel, who said that this morning, Lebius and Geoffrey had hurriedly left without leaving any instructions. It seemed that once they finished their tasks, they could wrap up for the day.

The Field Operations Department had this advantage; when there were no assignments, it was incredibly leisurely. However, such moments were rare, as the daily norm was running around various places, engaging in life-and-death struggles with all kinds of people.

Hearing this, Palmer immediately collapsed onto the lounge's sofa, falling into a deep sleep. He never missed an opportunity to be a slacker, a trait Bologue was willing to call him an expert in.

Bologue still had things to do. He wrote up the report for the Zongge Orchestra and placed it on Lebius's desk, awaiting his review.

Thanks to Belphegor's interruption, Bologue understood more about the existence of this peculiar group and no longer needed to question Nesanel about it.

Then he patiently awaited feedback from the Logistics Department, hoping Marion had recovered the Phantom Dagger for him.

Hmm... Phantom Dagger.

Bologue looked at Aimou beside him, "Speaking of which... it's been a while since we last met, Aimou."

Since returning from Wind Source Highlands, the few of them resumed their busy schedules. Due to different agendas, their times often overlapped and they rarely met.

Aimou nodded, "Yeah, I have a day off today, so I came to check this out, after all, I'm a member of the group too."

Aimou is a member of the Special Operations Group, but has been long borrowed by Belli. Under Belli's hands-on teaching, Aimou's Alchemy Technology has advanced rapidly, and at the same time, the equipment supply for the Special Operations Group has noticeably improved.

Whenever Geoffrey sees Aimou, he always has a look of deep sighs. Geoffrey is very grateful for Aimou's presence, in every sense.

Bologue asked, "Hmm... Aimou, you've also seen the alchemy armament, Phantom Dagger. Do you think it can be further optimized?"

"What kind of optimization are you referring to?"

"For example, changing its effect to some extent, making it not just spatial displacement, but also allowing the user to shuttle along the curved path to its vicinity?"

Bologue tried to describe the effect he wanted.

Aimou pondered in silence. During this time, Aimou hadn't stopped updating herself. Now when Aimou is deep in thought, the halo in her eyes turns into a rectangular outline, gradually filled with light over time.

In Aimou's own words, she calls this effect the "progress bar."

After the progress bar filled up four times, Aimou stopped thinking, "I'm not really sure, after all, the target of the operation is the curved path."

The curved path, which means space, is a mysterious power not yet completely mastered by alchemists. The power of the curved path is full of unpredictability.

For this reason, alchemists even take the ability to drive the power of the curved path as a standard for rating their capabilities. Those Alchemy Masters possess abilities to shape the curved path to some extent, thus owning the technology to construct the Void Realm.

Aimou is far from this level right now; her understanding of the curved path is still in the entry stage.

Bologue nodded, "Is that so? Then I'll ask Belli later."

Belli is somewhat proud. She never rejects her own requirements but without letting them be achieved smoothly, always adding some hurdles in between to test herself.

Aimou thought for a while, gritting her teeth, "Actually... I can try?"

"Oh? Can you really?"

"Are you underestimating me?"

The brightness of the halo in Aimou's eyes increased while the icon turned into a warning symbol.

Bologue scrutinized Aimou; not having seen her for a few days, he wondered how many updates Aimou had applied to herself, and why they were all in such odd places.

"Is there more?"

Bologue suddenly leaned closer, observing Aimou's eyes.

"Huh? Is there... anything else?"

"The icon in your eyes, what kind of updates have you made to yourself?"

"Ah... this... wait a minute."

Aimou stepped back a bit, maintaining distance from Bologue, eyes downcast, looking at the ground.

"It's okay, Aimou."

Aimou internally mused, "This guy just wants to see it, purely out of curiosity."

Bologue is straightforward, without any twists and turns, a pragmatist. Essentially, he's a pure person entirely made up of work and few hobbies.

During this time, Aimou has deeply understood this. Bologue just wants to see the icon's variations, really out of mere curiosity, without any other distortions.

Aimou lifted her head, a myriad of dynamic icons flashed through her eyes; most were to express emotions, while some Aimou just found aesthetically pleasing without any significance.

Among them, what caught Bologue's attention was an ellipsis icon, horizontally arranged dots disappearing one by one and then reappearing.

"What does this mean?"

"Ah... standby mode, or... zoning out?"

"You specifically made an icon to indicate you're zoning out!"

Bologue's voice rose, then enviously said, "That's amazing."

"Huh?"

"I want to make one too."

"Ah!"

Chapter 619: Linked Together

Bologue is a person burdened with worries; long before, he was troubled by the mystery of his identity as a debtor. Now, after meeting the astronaut and knowing his identity as a Chosen One, Bologue's thoughts have become even heavier.

Whenever he has free time, Bologue likes to daze alone, thinking about these exhausting things. Actually, Bologue understands that his overthinking solves nothing and only causes him considerable torment.

But Bologue just can't control his thinking, like some kind of quirk, picking at scabs repetitively after a wound heals, making it bleed non-stop.

Bologue keeps pondering over everything, as if by facing the pressure, he could adapt to it all, and when the disaster truly arrives, he could confront it calmly.

Blogue's overthinking results in a dazed expression outwardly, and depending on the outcomes of his thoughts, he occasionally shows a smile or a fierce look.

Palmer is quite touched by this; on lazy holidays, the two of them snuggle on the couch languidly, with Palmer immersing in the beauty of a book, only to hear Bologue suddenly let out a foolish laugh beside him, wearing that peculiar expression...

Palmer has reminded Bologique about this more than a few times, but Bologique just can't change this habit; Bologue thinks maybe he and Belphegor share some similarities, often indulging in self-fantasies and consequently forgetting the world's existence.

Bologue said, "That's nice, this way it can save a lot of social words."

If his eyes could also signal a "standby mode," he wouldn't have to waste so many words explaining to others that he is just dazing off, not plotting some evil massacre plan.

"Yes! That way, when working, a single look would make the other party understand what I am going to do."

Aimou gave Bologue a thumbs up; this was Aimou's original intent for her upgrades.

For a long time, Aimou was a cold Alchemy Puppet. Due to technological limitations, she couldn't express as many complex emotions through facial expressions like humans, so she shifted her focus to her eyes.

Now, Aimou possesses flesh and blood and has acquired complex expressions, yet she still loves conveying emotions through her eyes and hasn't given up on improving that aspect.

Bologue smiled and nodded; his discussion with Aimou helped quiet his restless thoughts a bit.

He had been through too much in the past few days, leaving him utterly exhausted, and he needed some relief.

"Um..."

Aimou seemed to have something to say to him.

"Bologue, do you have time after work?"

"Hmm..." Bologue thought for a moment and joked, "If there are no unexpected visitors, I should have some time."

Aimou invited, "Then would you like to go to the cinema?"

Cinema.

Bologue's expression trembled slightly, a detail that didn't escape Aimou's eyes, "You don't really want to go, do you?"

"No, it's not that, just..."

Bologue's expression was bitter. To the outside world, only a few minutes had passed, but in that peculiar cinema of Belphegor's, Bologue had been pressed by the Devil to watch movies for over a dozen hours.

Even the most avid enthusiasts wouldn't have a desire to watch films again in the short term after experiencing all that.

Those with slightly weaker willpower might even consider it a nightmare, vomiting uncontrollably at the sight of a movie from then on.

"Alright, see you tonight then."

Bologue ultimately agreed to it.

From Bologue's perspective, Aimou was still just a kid. Kids need friends and play.

Thinking about it this way, Bologue felt a bit sad. Aimou had grown up in a distorted environment, and now that she's escaped the nightmare, she's no longer a cold machine but a living, breathing being. Besides work, she also needs social interaction and leisure.

Clearly, Aimou didn't have many friends, only limited to Bologue and the others, but they were all busy and had little time to accompany Aimou.

A thought rose in Bologue's mind.

Bologue couldn't bring himself to refuse Aimou's invitation, so he continued, "Besides going to the cinema, do you need anything else?"

Aimou's eyes widened in surprise, "Anything else? Like what?"

"Perhaps to a dessert shop? My treat," Bologue said, "My financial situation is excellent right now."

Compared with other field staff, Bologue's working hours were not long, but his work record was impressively good, each life-and-death action yielding him a big bonus.

"A normal field staffer, after going through your events, could start considering retirement already."

That's how Geoffrey appraised Bologue, and Bologue took it as Geoffrey's praise for him.

Aimou asked, "Oh? Just... a dessert shop?"

"Is there anywhere else you want to go?" Bologue thought deeply for a moment, "I can't think of another place."

Bologue had hobbies... but not many.

The halo in Aimou's eyes transformed into a rolling jumble of characters, she sighed helplessly but still smiled.

"Okay, see you tonight."

...

Bologue waited for a long time in the activity room. Near afternoon, Lebius finally returned to the office; Bologue didn't wake Palmer and instead went to find Lebius alone.

Lebius looked exhausted, and no one knew what he had been doing all morning. After returning to the office, this workaholic didn't immediately peruse Bologue's action report but opened a drawer to take a few pills.

"Don't worry, just for alertness,"

Noticing Bologue's gaze, Lebius explained.

Lebius didn't pay much attention to Bologue's report currently; his mind was full of the tenth group matter and Gold's "Primordial Thing".

This transaction item called the Primordial Thing seemed extremely important to Gold; for it, this stubborn, rigid guy would disrupt his plans, opting to escort the transaction item with the entire group and quickly return to the Order Bureau.

Unexpectedly, the tenth group still suffered injuries and even lost contact, disappearing within the Narrow Countries, despite having Defender Gold present.

The Narrow Countries lie outside the Order Bureau's control range, a chaotic area with frequent conflicts among multiple forces. Despite the incident having occurred for so long, the Order Bureau hasn't been able to obtain much information, not even identifying the attackers.

The only available intel comes from the tenth group members who traversed by Curved Path Shuttling, yet their reports are also extremely vague, like Mallory mentioning one before fainting.

"They were like a bunch of utter lunatics, the more mortally wounded, the more astonishing their power."

Mallory didn't engage with the enemy for long, only a few rounds, but as a battle-hardened field staffer, he sharply noticed this trait.

Lebius furiously rubbed his temples, the more injured, the stronger the combat ability—such examples are common, many forms of Secret Energy can result in similar effects, it only requires slow database comparison and analysis.

But following Lebius's intuition, this incident must be related to the Devil, with the crux lying in the Primordial Thing.

This item was a trade between the Gray Trade Association and the Scarlet Decay Sect, but the problem was, who among them was the buyer and who was the seller?

Listing over Bologue's report briefly, the records detailed every piece of information Bologue obtained while fighting Ferguson.

A casual glance, and Lebius' eyes halted, he grabbed Bologue's report tight, reading it with careful scrutiny.

Bologue was a diligent person, unlike Palmer's extremely perfunctory reports; Bologue's were substantial, sometimes even with added time nodes when necessary.

If Lebius were a director, he could even use Bologue's report as a blueprint to film the entire event process.

"The Devil's Protection... Bliss of Transgression."

Lebius recited the words on the report in a low voice; according to Bologue's description of the nature of the protection on Ferguson, it matched entirely with Mallory's description.

"They call themselves the Zongge Orchestra?"

Lebius's gaze cut like a knife on Bologue; thinking it was a problem with his report, Bologue nodded and returned the question.

"Hmm, what's the matter?"

Chapter 620: A Plan

Lebius glances at the report, then at Bologue; he could hardly have imagined that the mystery of the Initial Object would see a breakthrough here.

"The Zongge Orchestra works for the Collector, and they want... to collect you?"

Faced with Lebius's question, Bologue nods in affirmation.

In truth, Bologue already knows the history of the Zongge Orchestra. They are an organization corrupted and split from the Unfettered Poetry Society, and the so-called Collector's true identity is the Joyous Desire Witch, one of the Devils.

But Bologue hasn't told Lebius about this. He doesn't know how to reasonably explain the source of this intelligence to Lebius, he can't exactly tell Lebius that there's a Devil being kept in captivity deep within the Cultivation Room who told him everything.

It's too terrible, Lebius is such a dedicated person, he holds an almost faith-like fervor for the Order Bureau. If he were to know that the Order Bureau has a blood contract with the Devil, it might hit him hard.

This is the secret between Bologue and Nesanel.

"The Zongge Orchestra... the Zongge Orchestra... if it was them who attacked the tenth group..."

The mystery is finally getting a bit clearer, but now it's become complex and bizarre again. Lebius is suffering from a splitting headache, unable to quite make sense of it all.

The sudden appearance of the Zongge Orchestra, the repeated attacks, and the connection to the Initial Object...

Fortunately, Lebius is not one to pretend to be strong. He takes out a sheet of paper and quickly begins writing his report, leaving Bologue aside.

After spending more than ten minutes, Lebius finishes the report, places it together with Bologue's report, stuffs them into a logistics capsule, and with a dull pressure sound, the capsule speeds through the pipeline, reaching the Decision Room directly.

The Decision Room is omnipotent.

When you encounter difficulties at work, entrusting the problem to the Decision Room is definitely the right choice.

"Is there anything else you need me for?"

Bologue is unclear about the tenth group and the Initial Object affair; he just feels that Lebius might be overworked.

"Nothing really, you can leave," Lebius waves his hand wearily, still a bit worried, "Stay safe."

"Alright."

Bologue doesn't reject Lebius's concern, even though he feels it should be his enemies who need to be careful instead.

Standing up, as Bologue turns around, Lebius catches a glimpse of something and calls out to him.

"Bologue, wait a minute."

Lebius suspects he might have seen wrong, but recalling his obsession with Bologue, Lebius does not allow for any deviations.

"What's wrong with your hand?"

"Hand?"

Bologue looks at the palm of his hand, where the scar of the sun remains, the imprint left by Belphegor.

In an instant, numerous lies arise in Bologue's mind; he believes that, given the image he's left in Lebius's mind, Lebius wouldn't doubt him...

Bologue opens his palm and shows the sun mark to Lebius, saying nothing.

Lebius remains silent, the office instantly falls into a dead silence.

If Lebius doesn't recognize the mark, he could easily say anything and brush it off; if Lebius recognizes the mark... Bologue doesn't know what will happen next.

A long sigh breaks the silence, Lebius leans back against the chair with force, pressing his temples even harder, his brows tightly furrowed, unable to relax.

"One trouble after another, huh..."

Hearing Lebius's sigh, Bologue realizes that Lebius has recognized the mark.

Lebius asks, "What did he say to you?"

"Things like ideals," Bologue continues, "He told me intelligence about the Zongge Orchestra too. Unfettered Poetry Society is the predecessor of the Zongge Orchestra, and now... the Zongge Orchestra is no longer under his control."

"Ah... is that so?" Lebius mutters, "Of course, how could I forget this guy."

From Lebius's composed demeanor, it's not hard to see he is aware of Belphegor's existence.

Lebius knows that the Devil dwells within the Order Bureau; he even has just as much understanding of this Devil as he does himself.

Suddenly, Bologue feels that Lebius has become unfamiliar.

Lebius asks again, "Did you promise him anything? Whether a trade or a wager."

"No, I rejected them all."

Bologue hesitates for a moment, then continues, "But I still feel I've entered the game."

"Entered the game?"

"It's like an open scheme; he tells me who the enemy is, so I will inevitably clash with them, inevitably allowing Belphegor to benefit."

Bologue speaks Belphegor's name, with no unusual expression on Lebius's face.

"Belphegor... was it your first meeting?" Lebius chuckles disdainfully, "He actually revealed his true name."

"Yes, the first meeting; he even said he's my fan, asked if I'm interested in becoming one of his poets, writing endless stories together."

Bologue emphasizes again, "I refused."

Lebius beckons Bologue over, who walks towards him and holds out his hand.

Lebius carefully examines the mark and says, "Belphegor's mark."

"Will it affect me?"

Bologue is extremely cautious about the mark's ability to avoid the influence of the Time Reversing Axis.

"It contains Belphegor's power inside; I don't know what this power will do," Lebius says, "Just like his inscrutable schemes."

Lebius jokes, "Congratulations, Bologue, these days there aren't many debtors who have contact with so many devils."

"If this world were a ball, you'd be the beautiful lady catching the eyes of all the devils."

Bologue chuckles awkwardly, "This joke isn't funny."

Lebius's humor skill is on the rise, "But I certainly can't have a sad face and say bad luck to you."

Bologue slumps onto the sofa nearby, his gaze drifting over Lebius's face, "So you've known all along? That there's a devil hidden within the Order Bureau."

Lebius nods honestly.

Bologue continues to ask, "Ah... damn it, how many people know about this?"

"I don't know," Lebius says, "You know the regulations; you either know or you don't."

The Order Bureau's confidentiality rules cover all levels, and this confidentiality is one-way. Others cannot inform you of information beyond your authority, but you can dig up these secrets through your own efforts.

To solely bear this horrifying truth.

"If you've met Belphegor, and he specifically informed you of all of this at this moment..."

Lebius's mind gradually outlines a vague silhouette, turning his gaze to Bologue, Lebius says, "You can leave now, Bologue."

"Just like that?"

Bologue feels that the plot development is off; he thought they would confront each other seriously, but what's actually happening feels more like a casual chat.

It seems they're discussing not a devil but merely a troublesome fellow.

"Otherwise?" Lebius says, "What do you think the purpose of the Special Operations Group was?"

Bologue is speechless.

Lebius has a headache, and many worries; he waves his hand, "You have nothing today, go rest, don't interfere with my work."

Seeing Bologue reaching the door, Lebius adds, "Take Palmer with you."

Bologue leaves, feeling a bit dizzy; matters as crucial as the Devil seem so... light in Lebius's words.

Was he treating it too seriously? Bologue couldn't grasp it; after waking Palmer up, Palmer jumps for joy, delighted with the sudden leisure.

Bologue feels a bit torn, on one hand, dealing with the devil, on the other, the easy-going work life; he even has an engagement for the night...

In the office, Lebius isn't concerned about Bologue's strange thoughts; the most important matter now is the Initial Object.

Lebius had anticipated Bologue forming a connection with Belphegor, just not so quickly. But he's grateful that it happened so fast, as all matters have conveniently coincided together.

Picking up the phone, Lebius grabs the receiver.

"Everyone, I have a plan."