

Endless 621

Chapter 621: Fledgling Complex

"What do you think of this one? ... How about this one?"

"Not quite right, this outfit doesn't really suit your style."

"Well... what about this? By the way, should I spray some perfume? I read that's what you're supposed to do."

"Perfume? Let me think."

Sublimation Furnace Core, employee housing area, Belli's room.

Aimou, like a life-sized doll, stood in front of the full-length mirror in her tight-fitting underwear, allowing Belli to dress her up.

In preparation for tonight's date, Aimou had gone all out, suppressing her initial reluctance and seeking help from her senior, leveraging Belli's authority as a department head to take some time off for preparation.

By now, Aimou had already tried on many outfits, which piled up on the bed, covering all seasons and styles like a blooming garden.

These clothes didn't belong to Aimou, but to Belli. During Aimou's time at work, she mostly focused on her job, and any personal time left was spent on reading and studying.

Even though she had an interest in beauty, Aimou channeled this into self-improvement, opting for colorful halo-like upgrades in a peculiar direction.

Until now, Aimou hadn't gone shopping much; most of her new clothes were bought by Belli. As for other common activities, Aimou mostly learned about them through books.

For a long time, Aimou didn't care about these things, much like a fish nestled in water wouldn't care about the experiences of a bird in flight. Aimou saw herself as that fish, now wanting to befriend a bird, thus naturally needing to explore the sky.

"Hold on, let me find something else."

Belli opened the wardrobe, rummaging through and pulling out a few more dresses, cheerfully helping Aimou into them.

"Pretty nice, fits quite well."

Belli looked at the full-length mirror from behind Aimou, repeatedly complimenting her fashion sense.

Previously, Belli had made several adjustments to Aimou's damaged body, improving Aimou's figure in each alteration.

During Aimou's self-upgrades, she made some slight adjustments according to her own preferences, but largely, the two remained quite similar. Most of Belli's clothes fit Aimou well.

"Hmm... this one's decent too, let's promote it to the next round of selection."

Belli said, taking the outfit off Aimou and throwing it back on the bed, while the ones on the floor were already eliminated from this dress-up game.

"How long do I have to keep trying?"

Aimou asked softly; she had been changing clothes for almost an hour and it seemed endless.

A pair of hands reached out from behind, pinching Aimou's face, forcing her to look at the full-length mirror.

"Little junior, you're really concerned about tonight's date, aren't you?" Belli whispered behind her ear, "Otherwise, you wouldn't have come to me."

Aimou kept a straight face; she knew her senior's nature well, staying silent to deprive Belli of feedback to dampen her interest.

"Sigh, you usually resist even a hug, but this time you're being so cooperative; it shows your sincerity."

Belli said as she squeezed Aimou's waist, resting her chin on Aimou's shoulder, whispering gently in her ear.

The shared past and complex emotions overlapped heavily, shaping Belli's current attitude towards Aimou. Belli liked Aimou very much, viewing her as one of her few family members.

Unfortunately, Belli's expression of affection was rather rough. Like seeing a cute kitten and, without considering its feelings, rubbing it excessively... most of the time, that's how Belli treated Aimou, leading to Aimou's strong resistance to Belli's initiations of physical affection.

Belli often complained, "Why is it okay when you hug me first, but not when I hug you first?"

Aimou had given up arguing with Belli; she could never win, so Aimou firmly said, "Then let's keep some distance."

That didn't always put Aimou at a disadvantage. As long as she said this, Belli would show a mischievous smile like Palmer's, circling Aimou endlessly until Aimou took the initiative to reconcile.

"Are you sure you're helping me pick out clothes?" Aimou was fed up, "Or are you just indulging your peculiar ideas?"

"More or less, more or less, this one's not bad either, note it down."

Belli dropped the pretense, put on a new outfit, and tossed it on the bed as well.

"Huh?"

Seeing Belli like this, Aimou realized she had been treated like a plaything for a while, her eyes reflecting glowing exclamation marks.

"Sigh, these things take time."

Just as Aimou was about to get angry, Belli sat down on the bed with her arms crossed, looking at Aimou with an expression as if judging a rookie.

Belli's posture as an expert extinguished half of Aimou's anger.

Belli sincerely said, "Think about it, Aimou, from Bologue's perspective, does he really see tonight as a date?"

Aimou thought for a while, considering her understanding of Bologue, and Bologue's current attitude towards her...

Aimou shook her head in despair.

"See, right? It's like a duel," Belli pulled Aimou close, "You go fully armed to the meeting, while the other person is in pajamas... the other person doesn't even realize it's a duel."

"That's awful."

"Right, it's awful."

"What you need to do now is change Bologue's perception of you," Belli advised Aimou, "Only when he sees you as an opponent in the duel will your full armored appearance have value in his eyes, otherwise he'll only think you are dressed in a flashy pair of pajamas like him."

Aimou nodded vigorously; Belli rarely said anything useful.

Belli added, "But perceptions are hard to change... at least in the short term, that's how it is."

Aimou let out a long sigh, helplessly collapsed into the blooming flowers on the bed, with large crosses in her eyes, like denying mistakes.

"That's why people say the first impression is important, of course, you might not quite understand these."

Belli lay down next to Aimou, staring at the ceiling, and after a moment of silence, Belli provocatively added, "But... by human lifespan calculations, you're still considered underaged..."

"Shut up!"

Aimou turned over, grabbed a piece of clothing, and covered Belli's head.

Belli couldn't stop laughing, and after laughing, she moved on to addressing Aimou's worries.

Belli asked, "Are you still hung up on what happened before?"

"Sort of," Aimou said, "Looking back now, it was still a completely wrong decision."

Sometimes Aimou still felt guilty about what happened then.

Belli said, "There's no way around it, you made the wrong decision to escape the predicament, it's like a paradox, if you could make the right decision, the predicament wouldn't exist."

"You've apologized to Bologue, and he's forgiven you... it's nothing, no one is bound by a mistake for life, and..."

Aimou interrupted Belli, she knew what she was going to say, "And I'm still a kid?"

Belli smiled, "Yes, sometimes a very willful little kid."

Aimou turned over, burying her head in the clothes, "Bologue sees everything this way too, right? In his perspective, I'm a child in need of saving."

Belli added, "Nope, already saved, now you're a child in need of healthy growth."

Aimou buried her head even deeper.

Suddenly, Belli lunged at her, wrapping her arms around Aimou, holding her tightly.

"More than all this... Aimou, do you really like Bologue?"

"If I didn't like him, would I be worried so much?"

"No, not that, I mean, truly like him," Belli continued, "The reason I say you're a kid is because sometimes kids can't understand their true feelings."

"Kids are like that, someone gives you a candy, and you might just follow them, but that's not real affection, just a fleeting... fondness?"

Belli kept talking, "You've read a lot of books, you probably understand the so-called imprinting complex, right? Bologue saved you, giving you a new life, if I were you, I think I'd definitely fall in love with Bologue too, but I'm different from you, Aimou, I'm an adult, but you're still a... child, you've experienced too little."

Aimou remained silent.

"Bologue is an expert, emotionally he might be quite slow, but morally, he's absolutely The Sober, doesn't he often invoke axioms and rules?"

Aimou retorted, "Are age and experience so important to humans?"

"Not really, it's just that human lifespan is limited and growth is slow, that's why people say so, we often need a long time to understand certain things, but when we do, it's all regretful."

The accumulation of age and experience leads to the growth of human wisdom, only then can we be considered truly adult, understanding what we want and what to do."

Belli pulled Aimou up, "If you want to change Bologue's perception of you, first become an adult."

"How do you become an adult? Just wait for time to pass?"

"There's no standard answer, some people look like children after living for decades, while some might become adults overnight."

Belli thought for a moment, then smiled, "Anyway, the one thing you and Bologue aren't lacking is time, don't rush."

Aimou seemed thoughtful, nodding as if understanding but not completely.

"It's a duel! Aimou," Belli exaggeratedly clenched her fist, but soon her voice softened again, "But experts won't duel with a kid, it's unfair, he knows that."

Chapter 622: What is Love?

The sun sets in the west, Aimou stands in the Order Bureau's parking lot. After a fierce interaction with Belli, Belli finally recommends that Aimou wear her usual ordinary clothes.

"No, no," Belli picks up a piece of clothing, pretending to blush, "These clothes are a bit too ahead of their time for a child."

Considering the previous dress-up was purely for Belli's amusement, Aimou doesn't have the time to waste. She carefully tidies herself up and heads to the parking lot, waiting for that familiar blue car.

Perhaps due to Belli's words, Aimou feels a change in her mood and becomes a little nervous, sometimes adjusting her hem, sometimes fiddling with her hair.

She felt like an Alchemy Armament about to undergo a test, going through one last round of tight adjustments before the test begins.

She sniffed the air, a faint fragrance wafted around, a scent Belli had prepared for Aimou before departure.

"Honestly, I think Bologue would prefer this scent."

Belli pulls out a compressed container from somewhere, which doesn't seem like a proper perfume at all.

Aimou picked up the compressed container, and the label "Special Universal Potion" caught her eye.

Special Universal Potion produced by Sublimation Furnace Core, able to address all sorts of mechanical issues like rust removal, rust prevention, lubrication... In the Sublimation Furnace Core, it's a standard item to have, even Aimou keeps a few for maintaining her Steel Body.

Due to its practicality, Alchemists really like the thing, and its strong pungent smell certainly makes it memorable.

Aimou resisted a chuckle, "Maybe Bologue would truly like this."

Belli brightly recommended, "Right, right."

"But never mind! It's time after work, don't exude a scent that reminds people of working!"

Aimou firmly vetoed it.

Returning to the present moment, Bologue didn't make Aimou wait long. The blue car appeared in view, accompanied by the low growl of the engine, stopping right in front of Aimou.

The car window on the driver's side rolled down, revealing Bologue gripping the steering wheel. They nodded in acknowledgment, and Aimou walked around to the other side, getting into the passenger seat.

At the moment, Aimou was unaware of the changed circumstances.

Buckling up the seatbelt, thinking about what's next, Aimou felt extremely happy, completely forgetting to ask about Bologue's rarely seen experience of sitting in the driver's seat.

The car turn onto the street, the interior unexpectedly quiet, Bologue didn't ask Aimou about work as usual but rather looked straight ahead, silent, while Aimou's mind was a mess from the previous conversation with Belli, unsure what to say.

Duel, it's all about seizing the initiative.

Aimou took a deep breath, various sentences rolled through her mind, and she took the lead to speak.

"We..."

"So..."

Both spoke in unison, the atmosphere became awkward, Aimou quickly followed up.

"You first..."

"You go ahead..."

They froze, completely froze.

Bologue sighed, even though he's a man of steel, after experiencing so much in these few days, now heading to an appointment, it inevitably dulled his sharp thoughts.

Aimou tried to take control of the topic, "So... where are we going next?"

"Well, I have a new idea," Bologue hesitated, "but it's... um... more of a private activity."

"Are we doing it together?"

Aimou was puzzled by Bologue's confusing words. Instantaneously, her mind retrieved hundreds of similar conversational scenarios, various plotlines rapidly playing out...

Her hand rested on the door handle as if preparing to jump out, but reason prevailed over instinct, and she asked, "Where to?"

"My place."

"Huh?"

To relieve the awkwardness, Bologue mimicked what Serey had once said, "I have a cat at home that does backflips, want to see it?"

Aimou was silent for a moment, even though her face was expressionless, the progress bar in her eyes was scrolling at an incredibly fast speed.

"The tiger cub is not found without entering the tiger's den."

Aimou answered with a bold voice, "Sure!"

Upon hearing this, Bologue breathed a sigh of relief, when suddenly a voice emerged from the back seat.

"I told you she would agree, no one can refuse a party hosted by Palmer!"

Aimou sharply looked up to find the rearview mirror filled to the brim. Eyes shifted to the back seat, where Palmer sat in the middle, on the right was the furry Hart, on the left was the tall skeletal frame of Bode, holding Wei'Er in his arms.

"Woohoo!"

Palmer twisted the party popper, sending a shower of sparkling fragments throughout the carriage. Behind Aimou, Bode pulled out a garland, like celebrating Aimou's birthday, and placed it on her head.

"Wait... wait a moment."

Aimou's mind froze, just as Wei'Er crawled over from the back, snuggling into Aimou's arms.

"I can flip one for you right now."

With that, Wei'Er did five consecutive backflips in Aimou's arms, her fluffy tail brushing against Aimou's face five times.

At the corner of her vision, Aimou glanced at Bologue. Not surprisingly, he looked like a true professional; even in such a situation, Bologue remained serious, his hands steadily gripping the steering wheel.

A few hours ago, after an inexplicably strange conversation with Lebius, Bologue and Palmer had essentially taken a break, sitting on the couch discussing what to do in the afternoon.

Suddenly, Bologue said, "By the way, Aimou asked me to go out tonight."

"Oh."

Palmer's reaction was quite indifferent; he had just woken up.

"I think Aimou might be feeling lonely at the Order Bureau," Bologue worried, "She doesn't know many people, and doesn't have many friends..."

Bologue understood Aimou's feelings. At first, Bologue had been alone too, for a long time thinking he couldn't make any friends. Luckily, Bologue didn't care too much about that; the number of friends didn't interfere with his ability to smash enemy's heads.

But unknowingly, Bologue gradually connected with many people, and his daily life became more varied, filled with randomness. Tonight he might go to the movies with someone; tomorrow night, he might chat idly at a bar.

The world is vast, so vast that some people never fully traverse it in their lifetime. Now Aimou had arrived in this world but seemed at odds with it.

The world was right before her, yet she was unable to step into it.

Bologue always felt a sense of responsibility for Aimou. He had rescued her from despair and suggested she join the Special Operations Group. He felt he should be responsible for Aimou until she could stand alone.

"Why not throw a party for her?" Palmer proposed, "The members of the Undying Club are experts at this."

Bologue didn't refuse. He wanted to share his friends with Aimou, so she could shed some of her alienation in this vast world and establish closer connections.

Most importantly, whenever he saw Aimou, Bologue felt he was seeing himself from a certain period in the past.

Back then, he was alone, no one to save him, and experiencing such sorrow once was enough. Bologue chose to extend his hand, as if this could transcend time, to save himself back then, bringing a bit of peace to his present self.

"Don't be nervous; everyone here is nice!"

Palmer leaned forward from the back seat, speaking to Aimou while searching for something.

Aimou was completely dazed. She had seen these people before but wasn't very familiar with them.

Several pairs of eyes met hers. Bode gave Aimou a thumbs-up, his well-maintained bones gleaming smoothly. He had taken good care of his skeletal frame.

Hart seemed a bit awkward but quickly mimicked Bode's gesture, also giving Aimou a thumbs-up.

"Ha! Found it!"

Palmer pulled out a cassette tape, inserted it into the car radio, and turned up the volume.

"What is love?"

The music mixed with a male voice instantly engulfed Aimou.

"Baby, don't hurt me!"

Aimou felt she was at a joyful dance party, though the venue felt somewhat too cramped.

Palmer started nodding his head on his own. Seeing Bode and Hart were unmoved, he nudged them with his elbow. Reluctantly, they began nodding along in sync.

"What is love?"

Seeing Bologue still grim-faced, Palmer patted him, "Hey! Stop pretending to be dead."

Bologue resolutely stared ahead, yet Palmer continued shouting in his ear, "We agreed on this!"

The relentless melody persisted. Through the rearview mirror, Hart and Bode had fully immersed themselves in the song. Although still somewhat unwilling, they eyed Bologue with the intention of dragging him into it.

Bologue kept his stern expression but started nodding his head along with them.

"What is love?"

The four synchronized their head movements, causing even the car to sway along. Aimou thought if there were colored lights, they would be flashing too.

Aimou sank into her seat, somewhat dazed. Belli was right; to them, this wasn't really a duel but more a crazy dance party.

Her gaze swept to the rearview mirror, seeing Palmer nodding while looking at her. Aimou understood his meaning; these lunatics were inviting her to join the dance party too.

Aimou took a deep breath, abandoned her thoughts, and joined the craziness, humming along with the song.

"What is love?"

Chapter 623: The Cook

Bologue is a man who keeps his promises. Generally speaking, if he agrees to do something for you, he will definitely get it done, though the way he completes it might see some deviations, at least in Aimou's opinion.

Aimou sat on the sofa, wearing a flower crown, watching others busy themselves. She wanted to help too but was persuaded back by Bologue, who said that as the main character of the night, she didn't need to do anything except stay put obediently.

Similarly, Wei'Er didn't need to do anything either. As a cat, it was fortunate enough that it wasn't causing trouble. The two of them nestled on the sofa, watching others busy themselves.

Aimou asked, "What are they doing?"

Wei'Er shook its head, "I don't know."

"Ah? You don't know anything, yet you came out with them?"

"Palmer said something about having moved to a new house and hadn't invited us to visit yet. He asked if we were interested," Wei'Er thought hard, "Anyway, what else would we have been doing?"

Bologue came over, "Hold on a second, there's still some things not done yet."

"Oh, oh."

Aimou gradually gave up thinking.

"You can have some of this first."

Bologue picked up a bag and took out some pastries. Aimou nodded, reaching out to take one.

It didn't end there. Bologue's bag seemed like a bottomless pit; he took out pastry after pastry, neatly stacking them in front of Aimou, building a high tower.

Aimou widened her eyes at Bologue, who remained clueless. Not knowing what Aimou liked to eat, he simply bought one of each kind of pastry.

Palmer brought a stack of videotapes, piling them on the sofa, and said to Aimou, "You decide what to watch."

At this moment, Hart also came over, sitting heavily on the sofa.

Hart had met Aimou several times, but they weren't particularly familiar with each other. Bologue hoped Aimou could have more friends, so he brought along these familiar acquaintances.

Hart felt a bit awkward, and Aimou looked even more awkward.

"We've met several times, but let's introduce ourselves again," Hart said, extending his hand, "Hart Vine."

"Aimou Yazhede."

Aimou said as she shook hands with Hart, cheerfully saying, "I feel like we can have a lot of common topics."

Hart thought for a moment and nodded, affirming Aimou's words.

Like Aimou, Hart had been forced to stay away from the world for a long time due to his own circumstances. Now Aimou had a flesh-and-blood body and could walk openly on the streets, but Hart still couldn't do it.

"Oh, right."

Hart rummaged through his bag and pulled out a felt doll, which looked exactly like a miniature version of himself.

"Consider it a gift for meeting me."

"Thank you!"

Aimou received the felt doll. It was exquisitely crafted and felt heavy in her hands.

Palmer caught sight of the felt doll, and upon seeing the familiar fur color, his gaze uncontrollably shifted to Hart.

The two of them locked eyes, each with different expressions.

"Don't meddle."

"What kind of weird hobby is this?!"

An excessive amount of information was exchanged between their glances.

Ever since he caught Hart using his own fur to knit scarves, Palmer had been putting all the items Hart gave him together. Not that he disliked Hart; in fact, Hart maintained himself quite well, his fur shiny and glossy, but it was just... too weird.

Every time he used those items, Palmer's mind flashed with the image of a grinning Hart giving a thumbs up, and just the thought of wearing his "friend" on his body was enough to make Palmer's brain nearly crash.

Hart was somewhat aware of this and began to channel his crafting skills into felt dolls and the like; luckily, no one except Palmer and Bologue had noticed.

Hopefully, no one else would find out.

"Come over and help."

Bologue, wearing an apron, came out of the kitchen, calling over to Hart.

Bode sat on another chair across the room, his body all skeletal. To avoid appearing too thin, he'd draped a thick coat over himself, looking just like the Death God wielding a scythe from stories, solemn and oppressive.

Aimou initially met Bode with some fear in his heart; the skeletal appearance was quite terrifying. However, he quickly realized that Bode was essentially the same as himself and Hart—they all possessed unusual appearances, making them absolute outcasts in the eyes of the world.

Aimou felt that he could somewhat understand their thoughts, unconsciously feeling close to them.

When Bologue and Palmer lived together, the living room was quite spacious for them both. But now, with so many people, the room suddenly felt cramped, especially with everyone busily moving about.

Bode looked at all this and exclaimed, "How wonderful!"

"It reminds me of the days before I became an undead," Bode initiated a conversation with Aimou, "Now that I think about it, those were actually the happiest times of my life."

Aimou shifted towards Bode's position, his hand continuously stroking Wei'Er's back.

"Were the days as an undead very terrible?" Aimou asked, "I see you all in the club, seeming happy every day."

"That's just a group of walking corpses trying all they can to kill time."

Feeling the atmosphere, Bode unexpectedly began to speak more; ordinarily, he was the most silent one.

"We chose to 'retire' here, like those devils, unable to interfere with this world, just to enjoy infinite and pale time... In fact, hearing this, we seem more like prisoners shackled by eternal life."

Bode spoke while knocking his own bones, producing a crisp sound.

"I used to be a businessman as wealthy as a nation; beneath my mountain of riches, everything in this world was within my grasp, except for one thing... time.

I made a trade with the devil, offering everything I had to obtain eternal life, but in doing so, I lost the ability to perceive things."

Bode spoke with a sorrowful tone, "Now, in this shell, I cannot feel anything."

"I really love drinking, not like Serey, who uses alcohol to mask cowardice; I genuinely enjoy it," Bode joked half-heartedly, "But a skeleton figure cannot drink alcohol; at most, it can use wine for a bath."

Aimou quietly responded, "I can understand."

Before receiving the blessing, Aimou could only rely on the Shared Chord Body to perceive the world; she could relate to Bode's sense of monotony.

"I have lost the physical stimulus, but on a spiritual level, the influence remains," Bode contentedly observed the interior, "Unlike the decadence and lifeless joy of the Undying Club, this place is full of vitality; it's been a long time since I engaged in such a scene."

Aimou scrutinized Bode, whose face was just a large piece of white bone with no expressions or eyes, only able to gauge his emotions from his tone.

Aimou recalled stories about the Night Race back at the Wind Source Highlands; she softly asked, "Does everyone regret gaining eternal life?"

The question stumped Bode; he pondered for a moment before replying, "Perhaps."

Bode felt his answer was too vague, so he continued, "Most often, people don't truly know what they want.

Humans are such; pitiful short-lived creatures, some spend a lifetime searching for what they really desire, while others die without an answer.

To keep searching, we start chasing time, seeking what we want and live for in the eternal time."

Aimou asked, "Have you found it?"

"I have, yet I haven't," Bode smiled, shifting the topic to Aimou, "You're a fortunate child; your father paid the price for you, so fate does not toy with you."

Bode blessed, "May you find what you live for in the long course of time."

"Thank you."

"It's nothing; I should be the one thanking you."

Aimou did not understand, "Why?"

Bode relaxed, "I haven't felt this kind of atmosphere for a long time, and this atmosphere is caused by you."

"It reminds me of my family... although I can't remember how they looked," Bode continued in a regretful tone, "It's a pity Serey isn't here; he enjoys this too."

Remembering Serey's state, Aimou waved her hand repeatedly, "I'd rather not; his presence only leads everyone to get drunk."

Bode complained quietly, "True... it's strange indeed, Serey muddled through life for so many years, but lately, he's suddenly become clear-headed, not knowing what he's up to."

Bode stopped dwelling; he had no energy to worry about such things, and considering Serey's past deeds, he felt it wouldn't be a shame if the guy died out there.

"Make some space!"

From the kitchen came a shout; Bologue wobbled in carrying a large plate of roast chicken, its aroma filling the room.

Smelling the fragrance, Aimou was surprised, "You can cook?"

Bologue confidently picked up a cookbook, "Is it difficult? Just strictly follow the procedure."

Bologue believed this was one of his expert traits, quickly mastering skills as long as there was a manual to follow.

Chapter 624: Friends! We've arrived in heaven!

Among Palmer and Bologue's many movie collections, Aimou picked and chose for a long time before finding a warm and fun movie suitable for everyone to watch together.

Even so, the warmth and beauty of this movie were relative, filled with lively black humor and violence, with everyone noisily seeing the plot through to the end.

When Aimou was picking the movie, Bologue didn't feel anything, but Palmer was extremely nervous.

Palmer muttered, "It's like someone's going through my closet."

Having someone go through your collection and see their judgmental expressions based on the types of movies you collect is indeed quite nerve-wracking.

Aimou maintained her manners, but she was still shocked by Palmer's...to be precise, both Bologue and Palmer's taste.

The majority were crime thrillers, followed by some comedies, which was reasonable, but then there were some childish cartoons, like finding a pile of blood-stained knives in a drawer and then pulling out a few baby pacifiers.

"Don't ask me," Palmer shook his head, "Bologue picked those."

"You're wondering why there are cartoons?" Bologue tried to come up with a reasonable explanation, "They were promotional giveaways from the video store."

Aimou didn't pursue the matter further. When these two got together, anything strange could happen; she was already used to it.

Everyone gathered together, Bologue sat next to Aimou, watching the movie and eating, sometimes cheering for the plot, sometimes whispering to discuss.

Palmer seemed like he hadn't eaten for a day, shoveling cake into his mouth, and before swallowing, tearing off a chicken drumstick.

Hart carefully held his cake, being furry, he was constantly shedding hair, and he was trying to avoid others getting his hair in their food.

Wei'Er weaved in and out among the few people, occasionally knocking over cups or stepping on cream, smearing it everywhere.

Bode remained silent, watching everything like an elder.

At that moment, the focus was no longer on the gathering, nor on eating or watching the movie; the point was the time spent together, something Bode hadn't experienced in a long time.

Thinking about these things, Bode felt an endless sorrow inside, and more sadly, he couldn't make a pained expression or shed tears, and as for crying, it felt meaningless.

The people familiar with Bode had long died, no one could understand his sadness, and now showing it would only worry others.

Bode stopped thinking about those things and, like Bologue and the others, tried hard to enjoy the moment.

It wasn't just Bode with such strong feelings; at a certain moment, Bologue also suddenly felt a surreal sense of disorientation.

The living room was messy, filled with stuff, everyone sprawled out on the sofas in all directions. Even though it was crowded, no one moved.

Bologue looked at Aimou beside him and at the friends around him.

At this moment, the movie was reaching its end, with the two protagonists driving on the highway, their travel funds were low, and the gas tank was almost empty.

The two unlucky guys had been driving nonstop for several days, extremely exhausted. The guy in the top hat had bloodshot eyes, gripping the steering wheel tightly, while the one in the cowboy hat lounged beside him, chatting to keep them both awake.

Top Hat said, "I must be crazy, letting your nonsense convince me to cross half the continent to see the sea with you."

"Haha, isn't it great," Cowboy Hat replied, "I've never seen the sea, and neither have you, right?"

"I would have seen the sea someday, just not now!"

"Someday, someday, you've said that too many times! Friend," Cowboy Hat cheered, "How long have we known each other, ten years? Or twenty years? Since the day I met you, you've been saying that."

"And then? For that one sentence, you crazily ran all the way here!"

Top Hat screamed, this impromptu trip by Cowboy Hat had completely disrupted Top Hat's peaceful life, and he hadn't stopped complaining the entire way.

Top Hat, in a fit of pique, floored the gas pedal, and the rundown car spewed black smoke, like an exhausted old horse, making a final sprint.

Top Hat shouted, "This is the worst memory of my life."

"And also the most unforgettable!"

Cowboy Hat was overjoyed, the wind hitting his face, as he shouted his philosophy to his friend.

"What a crazy act! Isn't it wonderful!"

We need to do something so that when we're about to die, we have something to look back on, instead of just waiting to die!"

Cowboy Hat sang along with the wind, while Top Hat didn't want to pay attention to him, and now he was so tired, feeling like his hands were welded to the steering wheel.

It wasn't clear how long they had been driving, but the car began to bounce violently. Cowboy Hat didn't react at all, having fallen asleep in exhaustion, leaving only Top Hat struggling to hold on.

The car slowly climbed a hill, and the moment it crested the top, the vast blue sea appeared before them.

Top Hat was stunned.

The sea breeze brushed against his cheeks, driving away the heat and thirst. The dust on him seemed to turn into grains of salt, and his hair carried the scent of lemon and tuna.

Top Hat stopped the car and slapped Cowboy Hat awake, shouting at him in a choked voice.

"Damn! My friend, we've reached paradise!"

With that out-of-control shout from Top Hat, the film came to an end.

At the moment the screen went black, it was like a dimming frame, reflecting the people on the sofa in a brief group photo.

Bologue leaned back, his eyes filled with countless images.

The others were talking about their impressions of the movie, while Bologue silently laughed.

Once upon a time, things he didn't dare to desire actually came true, without him realizing it until this moment, as if suddenly enlightened, he became aware of their existence.

The time for dispersal came, Palmer said something to Bode, and Bode picked up Wei'Er, after a simple farewell, grabbed the Key of the Crooked Path, and headed straight back to the Undying Club.

Before leaving, Palmer stopped Bode, Hart had no idea what was happening, he only had time to wave at Bologue before Bode held him, taking him back to the Undying Club together.

From the Undying Club, it wouldn't take Hart long to walk back to the Order Bureau, and as for being discovered...it was already midnight, anyway, the urban legends of Opus wouldn't mind one more "Midnight Beastman."

Bologue was unexpectedly happy, humming a tune as he cleaned up the dishes in the kitchen; he wouldn't let guests clean up the remnants, and as for Palmer? Asking him for help would only be counterproductive.

During the time Bologue was busy, Palmer sent everyone else away, only leaving Aimou confused and standing there.

Suddenly, Palmer plopped down next to Aimou and whispered, "I know what happened today."

Seeing Palmer's sly smile, Aimou felt something was amiss.

"You wanted to invite Bologue alone, right? But it turned out like this."

Aimou said, "Well... to be precise, I did think it might turn out this way."

"Huh?"

This time, it was Palmer's turn to be stunned, but he quickly bounced back, "It's okay, we lost the first half, but we still have the second half."

"Now the coach is here, I'll help you win the second half," Palmer said, flashing car keys, "You know what I mean, right?"

"I guess so..."

Aimou recalled when Bode was leaving, with Hart on his back and Wei'Er on his shoulder, already heavily burdened, but he didn't forget to give her a thumbs-up before leaving.

It was clear that Palmer was clearing out those irrelevant people for Aimou, and Aimou's view of Palmer changed, she was actually a bit touched.

"Incredible, you actually grew a brain."

"It's just what brothers do...wait, what do you mean brain?"

"Nothing."

"Fine, I won't argue with you," Palmer whispered, "Normally, I wouldn't do this kind of betraying a brother act."

Aimou said, "But what's different this time?"

Palmer paused for a moment, then explained, "You helped Vasilina before, she really likes you, so I'm helping you this time for her."

Then Bologue walked out of the kitchen, and before he could speak, Palmer interjected.

"You give Aimou a ride back."

The car keys were tossed over, Bologue caught them in one go, he didn't refuse, sometimes Bologue's mind was quite simple. After all, his troubles were already plenty, no need to overthink things.

Before sending Aimou off, Palmer kept winking at Aimou, while Aimou felt that Palmer seemed more excited than she was, and in comparison, she thought Palmer was more like the child.

Chapter 625: Driving without a License

Time was nearing midnight, a time Bologue was very familiar with. During his internship, he would often roam the city at midnight, hunting demons, traversing between city districts, and pausing under high bridges.

After joining, Bologue would often spend time with Palmer at the Undying Club, usually until midnight when Serey would head out for his side job as a pole dancer, and everyone would disperse then.

The song from earlier still echoed in the car, the man kept humming along.

"What is love?"

Compared to the crowded joyful atmosphere on the way here, now only Bologue and Aimou were left, and the city outside the car window had fallen asleep. No matter how cheerful the song, it carried a bit of desolate joy at this moment.

"Quite like the atmosphere after a revel," Bologue broke the silence, "Although it truly is."

The items scattered all over the ground, wine glasses lying and rolling on the long table, water stains everywhere on the red carpet; the guests had long left, only the phonograph was still singing, echoing in the empty hall.

Aimou lazily leaned to one side, she just managed to curl up in the seat, hugging herself.

"Thanks."

"It's nothing," Bologue said, "Helping people to the end, we all often meet together, you'll know them all sooner or later."

"Mm..."

Aimou looked out the car window. The street shops had long closed, but the lights on the signboards hadn't gone out, they were connected together, like an aurora floating above the ground.

The rain had just fallen in the morning due to Opus's gloomy weather, even now the water hadn't dried, leaving a shallow puddle on the ground, reflecting the neon lights.

The street was desolate at night, only the red light was obstructing the progress of the two. At the current speed, they would soon return to the Order Bureau, leaving Aimou not much time.

Aimou was just about to say something, ready to start an attack, but Bologue spoke before her.

Bologue looked ahead, "I also have to thank you, Aimou."

"Thank me for what?"

"Without the excuse of you, I wouldn't be able to invite everyone over, to cook together, watch movies, and whatnot."

When he said these, Bologue had a smile on his face.

Aimou didn't think it was a problem, "Mm? What's difficult about that?"

"How to put it," Bologue pondered for a moment, "Suppose one day Lebius invites you to an amusement park, what would you think?"

A vividly colored X floated in Aimou's eyes, "Damn, it means I'm about to receive a task that's bound to be life-threatening."

"What if Lebius goes to the amusement park by himself?"

"The team leader is kind of pitiful..."

"Then Lebius says, this month we have a team-building event, everyone's going to the amusement park," Bologue said, "What would you think?"

"The team leader is really nice."

"See! See!"

Bologue emphasized repeatedly, and then with some embarrassment said, "I often say, I don't care much about others' opinions, but when it involves these things, I actually feel a bit embarrassed. Having you as an excuse makes it much easier."

This gathering was not only for Aimou, but also for Bologue himself.

"This is a win-win scenario."

Aimou didn't respond, Bologue glanced at her with his peripheral vision, only to see Aimou suppressing a laugh, which she soon couldn't hold back, and burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?"

"I'm just laughing at the fact that you have this side," Aimou said, "Your cooking skills are pretty good, you must have practiced for a long time."

"I often bring breakfast for Palmer, that counts as basic training," Bologue emphasized, "Those today, they were really my first time making them."

"Then your cooking potential is truly limitless."

Aimou sighed, rolled down the car window, resting her hand outside, feeling the aftertaste of the revelry.

Bologue said, "Actually, I was a bit afraid you wouldn't be happy."

"Why?"

"You reached out to me, yet I brought a whole bunch of people along."

"It did bother me a bit at first," Aimou didn't hide her emotions, "Especially when seeing Palmer with that conspiratorial smug smile."

"But you also said that you needed me as an excuse."

"Yeah, so shall we hang out again tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow what?" Aimou didn't understand. "What's happening?"

Bologue stopped at the red light, turned his head, and said, "A date, of course. This time it's my turn to invite you. I happen to know a nice place."

Aimou thought she misheard and kept repeating, "You... invited me?"

"Yes, today doesn't count because we got interrupted by the crowd, so I'm making it up to you."

"Huh?"

The halo in Aimou's eyes widened slightly, and with an incredulous expression, she then held her head and sighed, "Bologue, sometimes I really can't figure out if you're dumb or smart."

Bologue defended himself, "Actually, you can think of me as someone who is wise and appears foolish."

Aimou rubbed her face vigorously, perhaps because of the wind, she felt her cheeks were a bit warm.

"Looking back at everything that's happened, you're always so efficient. Why would you do those extra things for me?"

Aimou looked at Bologue's profile. Whenever she thought she could grasp Bologue's inner thoughts, he would dart past like a nimble deer. But when she felt hopeless, he'd peek out from behind the jungle,

"Extra things... how should I put it?"

Bologue leaned forward, lying on the steering wheel. This red light was unexpectedly long.

"Every time I see you, it's like I'm seeing myself, the old me."

Bologue tried to recall his childhood. His childhood wasn't bad, but not good either, mediocre like the general populace, where you could easily lose track of him in a crowd.

"In the past, when I faced some difficulties, I would wonder if someone could come help me. Regrettably, no one came to help me.

When I was sad, when I was heartbroken, when I failed miserably, I thought like this, but regretfully no one came..."

A gentle figure flashed by in front of Bologue's eyes.

Bologue murmured, "No, it's not that no one came."

"So when I see you, it's like seeing myself who was once in trouble. I faced the same troubles as you, experienced the same pain. Back then, no one came for me, but now I can help others."

Bologue turned his head, "Helping you feels like helping my past self."

"It's that complicated?"

Aimou felt a bit cold, she rolled up the car window, vigorously rubbing her hands together on her chest, "I thought experts only have work and how to improve work efficiency on their minds."

Facing Aimou's teasing, Bologue smiled, then sighed, "How could that be? Even the most efficient experts grew up from kids."

This statement moved Aimou. She carefully examined Bologue's face, an indescribable feeling rose in her heart.

The demeanor of an expert like Bologue impressed deeply, so much that Aimou often forgot that Bologue was a person too. He likes his friends but doesn't have a good way to express emotions.

Yes, just like when Lebius invites you to an amusement park, if one day Bologue suddenly becomes extremely enthusiastic about his friends, they would likely think they are terminally ill.

Aimou found it difficult to imagine what Bologue was like as a child, as if he was born with cold steel, fiery flames, and blood scattered in a storm.

But Bologue still inherently has the essence of a human. He was once an unruly child...

Growing up is like putting on heavier armor, burying the childish and youthful parts deep in the darkness of the armor, leaving only the strong side to face the enemy.

Aimou thought this was a suitable opportunity, she wanted to ask Bologue, what does it mean to truly grow up? After all, it's her first time being human, and she doesn't have much experience.

"Bologue..."

Aimou was about to ask her question when she noticed Bologue's expression changed, from being relaxed and comfortable to very tense and focused.

Aimou also became tense along with Bologue; there weren't many situations that could make Bologue reveal such an expression. The Blessing·Doppelganger was on standby, transforming Aimou into a Steel Body.

Bologue said, "Aimou, put on your seatbelt."

Aimou obediently fastened her seatbelt, then a figure approached from the roadside and knocked on the car window.

"Sir, may I have a moment of your time?" Rolling down the car window, the sheriff said to Bologue, "Recently, there have been frequent street racing disturbances in this neighborhood..."

He said this while glancing inside the car, "Could you please show me your driver's license?"

Bologue didn't respond, and Aimou nudged him, whispering, "What's wrong? Just give him your driver's license."

Bologue turned his head, his face ashen. Aimou suddenly felt a bit confused, and the next moment Bologue slammed the accelerator, the engine roaring under the night sky.

As a Field Staff car, though it looked unremarkable, its body was bulletproof, and the engine was a product from the Sublimation Furnace Core, the roar of which was ear-piercing.

"Damn it!"

Bologue cursed, starting to reconsider whether he should get a driver's license.

Chapter 626: Predetermined Prophecy

Order Bureau, Field Operations Department, Special Operations Group office.

Bologue sat in a familiar position on a familiar sofa, with a familiar partner leaning beside him, his head tilted back in a familiar way, looking like he was dozing off.

In the familiar office, his familiar team leader was working in a familiar posture, the room filled with that familiar silence, Yuriel brought coffee with a smile, quietly asking if he needed some.

Everything was so familiar, like replayed scenes from a movie, similar to every previous day, indistinguishable in any way.

Yes, the familiarity was comforting...

Bologue's peripheral vision was fixed on Lebius, sensing in this familiar atmosphere a slight discordant noise coming from Lebius.

Like some kind of premonition, Bologue felt that something unfortunate was about to happen, and just as this thought crossed his mind, Palmer suddenly woke up.

Palmer sat up straight, staring blankly ahead, his body awake but his consciousness taking a moment longer. After a dozen seconds, he looked at Bologue with a somewhat fearful expression.

"Why do I feel something's off today?"

Even the unlucky Palmer noticed something was wrong, and Bologue was certain some major event was happening today.

Just as Bologue was about to ask Lebius, the office door opened and Geoffrey entered with Aimou.

Now all members of the Special Operations Group had arrived, even the often unnoticed Yuriel was present.

The usually spacious office suddenly felt crowded. Bologue nudged Palmer, trying to make room for Yuriel, who just smiled and stood beside them.

Palmer looked slightly panicked, maybe due to his own Blessing, Palmer sometimes felt like a Prophet, able to foresee impending disasters.

Indeed, something unfortunate was about to happen.

Palmer clutched his stomach, pretending to be in pain, wanting to quickly flee this oppressive place. Just as he got up, he saw Geoffrey standing guard at the door, like a wall, blocking everyone's exit.

"We're doomed, Bologue."

Palmer slumped back onto the sofa, saying weakly.

"Is everyone here?"

Lebius put down the documents, glanced around the office, made eye contact with the team members, and nodded affirmatively.

Bologue asked, "Is there something happening today?"

"Yes, some matters."

Lebius picked up a stack of file folders, and Yuriel took them and distributed them among everyone.

"Everyone, we've worked together for so long, but it seems we've never done anything together," Lebius coughed a couple of times, trying hard to look like a leader, "We have a team-building activity coming up."

Bologue's expression changed slightly, while Aimou's reaction was worse, repeatedly seeing crosses in his eyes.

"What if Lebius invites us to an amusement park?"

Echoing last night's conversation in his mind, Aimou covered his face and shouted, "We're doomed! There's a suicidal mission waiting for us!"

"If no one has any objections, you can all disperse, pack your bags, and we'll prepare to depart this afternoon."

Though he said no objections, Lebius's words, in any interpretation, allowed no refusal.

Bologue sighed; his stern team leader was indeed trying hard to become approachable, even attempting to issue tasks humorously.

Regrettably, Lebius, in this aspect, was like Bologue. The more humorous they tried to be, the more frightening they became.

The group was already clearly aware that this was not a team-building exercise but an urgent mission with significant importance, requiring the full mobilization of the Special Operations Group.

Except Palmer, who didn't grasp Lebius's humor at all.

Opening the file folder, Palmer pulled out a train ticket with his information and the destination on it.

"Wow, Narrow Countries? I haven't been there in a long time... and it's still Free Port? I should buy a swimsuit."

Palmer flipped through with excitement, not expecting to encounter a team-building right after a vacation.

"Wait, what's this?"

The smile on Palmer's face vanished, as inside the file folder, besides the train ticket, there was an ID.

After a simple check, Palmer found the ID information was fabricated.

Palmer looked blankly at Lebius, then at Bologue, and the others.

He did not understand why such things were needed for travel. Strictly speaking, they were civil servants of the Rhine Alliance and should receive high-level treatment everywhere they went, so why sneak around...

Now Palmer's expression was like a meerkat, clutching its little paws, hunched on a mound, blankly gazing at the boundless prairie.

Not everyone understood Lebius's humor, he sighed, then spoke.

"The specifics of the mission, we'll discuss on the way."

...

Oubos, Central Railway Station.

As one of the key transportation hubs of this city, the Central Railway Station was always crowded, with foreigners from all over moving back and forth; some just arrived in the city, while others were about to leave.

Like a confluence of ocean currents, bringing people from different worlds together briefly, they smile at each other, then part ways, never to meet again.

The massive canopy of steel and glass looks from afar like the rib cage of a monster, half-buried in the sand after death.

People crawl over its carcass like ants.

As a ticket clerk, the woman sees countless faces every day at the counter, but among all the faces she's seen, this man's gives her a feeling she's never had before.

The woman's heartbeat quickens a little as she works with her head lowered, while observing the man out of the corner of her eye.

The man's appearance is not outstanding, rather quite ordinary, but there is a mysterious aura about him, like a book waiting to be read, making the woman irresistibly want to know him.

Opening the man's ID, Erwin Flesher, that's his name.

Continuing downward, the woman shows a surprised expression, raising her head to gaze at Erwin's face, her eyes full of disbelief.

Erwin knows why the woman shows such an expression, he's encountered such reactions many times along the way.

"People often say I look quite young, I just have a good mindset and keep up with my exercises."

Erwin smiles at the woman, sheepishly scratching his gray-white stubble.

The woman nods in agreement, he's someone whose age is hard to determine, as time has interwoven gray strands into his blond hair, and his face appears aged, marked by the knife scars left by time.

There's not a hint of the aura of aging or death on Erwin; he's full of vitality, his back straight, standing like a warrior ready to throw a punch at any moment.

Especially when Erwin smiles, he doesn't look like an old man of considerable age at all; instead, he's no different from a young man, as if he possesses a magic power that can deceive time.

The woman sincerely hopes that she can look like this when she grows old.

Taking up the stamp, she leaves a red mark on Erwin's ID. Usually, the woman finishes work quickly in less than ten seconds, but this time she deliberately slows down, sketching Erwin's appearance with her peripheral vision.

Erwin seems somewhat downcast, covered in dust, the hem of his coat torn, carrying a heavy suitcase as if he's come from far away, weary and travel-worn.

During the wait, Erwin takes out a small comb to tidy his messy hair a bit, and simply adjusts his attire, trying hard to look somewhat presentable, but no matter how hard he tries, the sense of dilapidation permeates endlessly.

To this, Erwin can only pucker his lips in resignation, for a wanderer like him, presentability is a luxurious word, though Erwin doesn't care too much about such things.

Every day, countless outsiders arrive at Opus, countless faces drift away like sand, forgotten in an instant.

But today, this outsider named Erwin is different. Just a few brief conversations, a few exchanges of glances, and Erwin has left a profound impression in the woman's heart.

No matter how she slows her actions, time continue to pass unrelentingly.

Desperately, the woman raises her head. After all, the information on the ID is too little; she wants to know more about Erwin, but she understands it's impossible. Once she hands the ID back to Erwin, she'll never see him again.

This was their first meeting, and also their last. There are many such people in this world.

As if driven by a sudden impulse, the woman suddenly asks, "What is your job?"

Erwin is puzzled, "Do you still need to ask this?"

The woman suddenly becomes clear-minded, realizing her mistake. She shouldn't trouble a traveler just because of her silly thoughts. Just as she's about to apologize, Erwin says.

"A poet."

Erwin ponders for a moment, as if to confirm that he hasn't used the wrong word, nods to himself, and reaffirms.

"That's right, I'm a poet."

"A poet?"

The woman finds it unbelievable. In this day and age, the term poet is already a distant and unfamiliar one.

"Surprising, isn't it?" Erwin sees through all the woman's hidden thoughts. "Indeed, in this era of rapid development, things from the olden days hold little meaning anymore."

The woman tries to keep Erwin for a few more minutes, even just a few more seconds, to let this splash of color leave a deeper mark in her life.

She asks, "So... are you traveling in search of creative inspiration?"

"Hmm, sort of, but... not entirely."

Erwin suddenly leans forward, his hands on the counter, as if about to reveal a secret, he whispers.

"I'm searching for immortality."

"Immortality?"

The woman is taken aback for a moment, then bursts out laughing, "Is this the romance of a poet?"

Erwin looks very much like a drunk uncle in a bar, talking about outlandish things, yet the woman doesn't dislike it. If possible, she would like to chat with Erwin about these absurd fantasies until the next morning, but she knows it's impossible.

Handing the ID to Erwin, it's time to say goodbye.

The woman says, "Goodbye, Mr. Flesher."

Erwin waves at the woman; he's said farewell to many people along the way and is skilled at leaving.

"By the way, can I read your poetry?"

The woman asks eagerly, but by then, Erwin has already walked quite far. The woman is extremely saddened, blaming herself for forgetting such an important thing, but just then, a distant voice comes from the crowd.

"You will read it."

Chapter 627: Secret Operation

In the dawn's dim light, the steel creation emerged from beyond the horizon.

The train crossed plains and scaled steep ridges along the tracks, like a giant serpent traversing the vast earth, surveying the grandeur of the world, dragging behind it a plume of smoke that gradually dissipated, like a banner merging with the sky.

After a night of traveling, the passengers in the carriage were already feeling weary, leaning on one another in all kinds of sleeping positions. The carriage swayed gently, like a giant cradle soothing the restless hearts of the travelers.

Bologue silently moved through the crowded carriage, pushing open one car door after another. When he reached the spaces between carriages, he would pause for a moment, letting the cool wind brush across his face, dispersing the strange smells from inside the carriage, bringing along a penetrating sense of comfort.

He came to the last carriage of the train. This carriage looked no different from the others, but its door was locked. Only a few people on this train had the key to open this door, and Bologue was one of them.

Turning the lock, Bologue opened the door into the wind and returned to the exclusive carriage of the Field Operations Department.

Compared to the conditions for ordinary passengers, the Field Operations Department's exclusive carriage was nothing short of luxurious—no crowded passengers, no densely packed seats.

The interior of the exclusive carriage was divided into several sections. Near the door was a small lounge, further in were arranged single rooms. Though narrow, there was no room for picky preferences in such an environment; even further back was a small warehouse storing Alchemy Armament.

All the members of the Special Operations Group were on this train, located in this very carriage.

Since they boarded the train yesterday afternoon, this iron serpent did not stop for a moment. Now they had already left Oubos and were heading towards Free Port at full speed.

Silence filled the carriage. Bologue seemed to be the first to awaken, but he suspected others were awake too, like Lebius, only they remained in their small rooms, enjoying the last calm before the storm.

Bologue found a spot to sit down. In this enclosed space, there was really nothing much to do. Picking up the document, he read the report he had reviewed countless times yesterday once again.

"Sorry, this is an emergency action, we don't have much time to prepare."

After meeting Lebius at the train station yesterday, the first words out of Lebius's mouth were an apology.

Everyone said it was fine; that's just how it is with the Field Operations Department. One second you're sleeping at home, and the next you're called up for work. This time, at least Lebius gave them some time to pack.

The team members gathered inside the train station, their bags and baggage piled together like a small travel group.

Bologue didn't bring much with him, just a few changes of clothes that fit into a small bag. Before leaving the Order Bureau, someone from the Logistics Department had come, and they went to great lengths to retrieve the Phantom Dagger. This small dagger only required a pocket to hold.

Palmer brought a bit more luggage; besides clothes, there were some things for entertainment. No one knew how long this mission would last, and Palmer didn't want to lie in bed idly.

The others didn't bring much either, as everyone was familiar with the style of the Field Operations Department. They knew they would receive the most comprehensive support.

Palmer looked up at the huge train station, seeing it as a heart forged from steel, with the extending tracks as the blood vessels, transporting human blood to faraway places with each heartbeat.

"Are we taking the train to our destination?"

Palmer hadn't ridden a train in many years. Usually, his activities were limited to Opus; even when traveling far, he used the Curved Path Gate.

Putting aside the unknown tasks ahead, Palmer had already begun treating this trip as a journey. He actually packed a swimsuit in his luggage.

Geoffrey, dragging a suitcase, answered casually, "Yes."

"It seems this mission really is important."

Bologue noticed something different about Lebius. Unlike before, this time, Lebius was without his cane, as if the physical impairment completely disappeared.

"Indeed it's very important. It's probably the first time we've left Opus since the secret war," Geoffrey said, glancing at Lebius and joked, "Look, he's not even using a cane."

Lebius remained silent. For this mission, he had equipped a support frame on his leg to help him walk like a normal person. Although he couldn't perform intense movements, it was enough for regular activities.

Upon reaching the platform, many passengers were already waiting there,

Bologue cautioned, "We're really mixing in with ordinary passengers like this?"

Taking on this mission meant facing unknown dangers, and unlike Palmer's optimistic view of this as a vacation, Bologue stayed vigilant, like a tiger prowling through dense forests.

The train station was crowded. If an extraordinary conflict broke out, a large-scale casualty among ordinary people was inevitable. Bologue could restrain his power, but opponents likely wouldn't, and might even use this to their advantage, threatening their side.

Onboard the train, Bologue felt even worse. At high speeds, the train could easily be seen as a narrow and confined space. If a conflict broke out, it was likely the entire train would derail, turning into a burning fireball.

"Don't worry. Before we reach Free Port, we won't encounter anything unexpected."

Lebius noticed Bologue's discomfort and reassured him, "The confidentiality level of this mission is very high."

"Before we arrive, let's just consider it a vacation."

Geoffrey patted him on the shoulder. Bologue was dedicated, but sometimes too much so, always tense and making it hard to breathe.

...

Bologue put down the report, feeling the atmosphere in the carriage was a bit stifling. He walked towards the end, passing through the small doors, behind which came the steady sound of breathing, which was so reassuring.

Opening the last door, Bologue appeared at the very end of the train, enclosed by a railing, convenient for passengers to stand and enjoy the view.

Leaning against the railing, the landscape swiftly retreated from his sides, forming a landscape painting in his eyes.

After spending some time reading and discussing with the team members, Bologue had a rough understanding of this mission.

Lebius had disclosed all the details to the team. The tenth group had discovered a trade item in Iris Town called the Primal Object, which was extremely important, prompting the group leader to make the decision to escort it back to the Order Bureau urgently.

Then, as Bologue knew, the tenth group was attacked, and half of the members went missing along with their leader.

To Bologue's shock, apart from the attack on the tenth group, all Order Bureau strongholds within the Narrow Countries were subsequently hit by unknown forces. The outcome varied among the strongholds.

"The opponents aren't aiming to eliminate our presence in the Narrow Countries," Lebius evaluated, "Their goal is clear, just to destroy the Curved Path Gate."

The gates in each stronghold were damaged, severing their connection with the Transfer Station, preventing the Order Bureau from rapidly sending personnel to the Narrow Countries.

Lebius deduced that after the attack, the tenth group should have protected the Primal Object during the assault, and the enemy continued to pursue it. To stop the Primal Object from escaping the Narrow Countries, they used this method to block Order Bureau reinforcements.

It seemed that the tenth group and the Primal Object were safe, yet after the crisis was over, they hadn't proactively contacted the Order Bureau.

No one knew exactly what happened.

While Lebius was struggling with headaches, Bologue arrived with Belphegor's insignia and intelligence on the Zongge Orchestra, leading to the formulation of a temporary operation plan, which then... unfolded.

It was all so intricate, as if a carefully crafted conspiracy, a long-conceived vengeance.

Chapter 628: The Person Without a Past

No matter how much Belphegor claims to be his fan, he cannot hide his obvious ulterior motives.

After the decision from the Decision Room, they confirmed Belphegor's intel that the attackers were indeed the Zongge Orchestra, and they are pursuing the Tenth Group.

Belphegor's involvement troubled Bologue for quite some time. He couldn't understand whether he was being used by the Devil or helped by them.

Fortunately, Bologue soon figured everything out.

He was only temporarily sharing the same interests with the Devil. When their interests contradicted, the devil, who seemed like a friend, would not hesitate to stab him with a dagger.

This was just a cold transaction.

Indeed, just like during the Time Axis Disorder Incident.

Bologue pulled out a coin from his pocket. Strangely, unlike a regular Mammon Coin, the one in his hand seemed specially made. Even after leaving Opus, it still emitted a golden glow.

Interestingly, this Mammon Coin seemed to possess some sort of magic power, no matter what clothes Bologue changed into, as long as he searched his pockets, he could always find it.

As if fearing Bologue would forget it, it constantly hid in his pocket, accompanying him like a shadow.

It sounded quite eerie, but Bologue could barely accept it. After all, things related to the Devil were always like this. After working for so long, Bologue had started to get used to it.

This Mammon Coin had always followed him, and no one had told Bologue what to do, but whenever he picked up this coin, he had a premonition in his heart.

The way to get rid of this Mammon Coin was simple, just let Bologue throw it away. When he personally discarded it, it would completely fade away, rather than endlessly appearing in his pockets.

The Devil never forces anyone. He leaves the choice to oneself.

Bologue fiddled with the Mammon Coin, letting it roll across the back of his fingers, shining like bright gold in the morning light.

The Tyrant had helped him before, but that was also for his own benefit. When the Tyrant no longer needed him, he'd take a stance against him.

The backside of the coin depicted greedy Mammon, while the front side bore the symbol of silver.

This was Bologue's connection with the Tyrant. Bologue had countless urges to throw away the Mammon Coin and sever ties with the Tyrant, but he always gave up.

There was always a voice whispering in his mind.

"Someday you will need him."

Bologue chuckled self-deprecatingly, now more able to sense the Devil's strangeness: like playing with fire, thinking he could control it all, but unknowingly becoming fuel for the flames.

Bologue thought, every debtor must have had such a journey, believing as long as they didn't sacrifice their most precious soul, they could toy with the Devil. But they all eventually ended up in the same fate.

Gripping the Mammon Coin tightly, the metal beauty pressing against his palm, delivering a hidden pain under pressure.

The Iron Whistles scattered among the Narrow Countries hurried to the scene after the incident, investigating the situation. They found traces of battle but discovered numerous corpses without finding signs of the Tenth Group.

Further tracking led the Iron Whistles to roughly infer the Tenth Group's moving direction: heading towards Free Port.

The Zongge Orchestra's attack on bases was not just to hinder reinforcements from the Order Bureau but also to stop the Tenth Group from escaping through other Curved Path Gates.

Under such circumstances, the Tenth Group's choice was only to head south. The battle site was not far from Free Port, and once they reached, they could return to Oubos through shipping.

There were shadows of the Devils behind this incident. On one hand, it was the actions of the Joyous Desire Witch. On the other hand, it was Belphegor's revenge, aiming to retaliate against the Joyous Desire Witch for the corruption of the Unfettered Poetry Society.

When Devils were involved in this event, Rupert's Tail was the most suitable action group for the task. Depending on the debtors' sensitivity to Devils, Bologue and others were deployed here.

Bologue unlocked the latch on the fence, pushed it open, and sat down at the gap in the fence, his legs swinging in mid-air.

The car door behind was open, Aimou emerged, "Looks like someone beat us to it."

Bologue turned around. Aimou yawned forcefully, appearing sleepy, his hair messily spiked like a fluffy cat.

Aimou stepped forward, leaned on the fence, and looked at Bologue, "What, daydreaming?"

"Sort of," Bologue said, "The scenery along the way is quite nice, perfect for dazing off."

Bologue tucked away the Mammon Coin, forgetting all these damned troubles.

Bologue has always had an inner sense of confidence. He didn't think it was arrogance, but after countless hardships, he now possessed an iron-clad heart.

He absolutely believed in himself, trusting he wouldn't get lost in the temptations of the Devil, he would harness this power until the victory over the Devils was determined.

After a brief uplift in mood, Bologue would start to doubt himself, even though he didn't think it was arrogant. But this unaware stance, was in itself a great arrogance, akin to an irreversible paradox.

Thoughts thus became heavy, trapped in a dead cycle.

Bologue sighed and admired the scenery along the way, "I actually feel like I'm on vacation now."

The train glided across the lush green fields, and Bologue could see the white sheep and faintly hear their bleating.

Aimou said, "Didn't we just visit the Wind Source Highlands? Doesn't that count as a trip?"

As soon as she said this, Aimou remembered Bologue's experience at Wind Source Highlands. Thinking carefully, it indeed didn't count as a trip; instead, it was like overtime, without the extra pay.

"It's different. Passing through the Curved Path Gate, I was suddenly a thousand miles away, as if the Wind Source Highlands were right next to the Order Bureau. It didn't feel like going on a trip at all; it was more like buying a cup of coffee at the roadside."

Bologue thought deeply and came up with a term, "Without a sense of distance, there's no delight upon arrival."

Aimou nodded in agreement. The sunlight grew brighter, making it hard to keep her eyes open. She squinted hard, "Yeah, watching the familiar city slowly fade below the horizon gives you a real feeling of leaving."

Bologue gazed into the distance, just as Aimou described. At this moment, Bologue truly felt he'd left Oubos, the city where he had spent sixty-seven years.

Sixty-seven years.

Compared to the grand timeline of human history, sixty-seven years seemed fleeting, like a blink to an Undead like Serey. But when viewed through the scope of an individual's life, it's often one's entire existence.

The lifetimes of countless people, countless lifetimes spent on this land.

"Gone, without a trace," Bologue said, looking at the scenery with a helpless expression, a tinge more loneliness in his eyes.

Aimou asked curiously, "What's the matter?"

"You might not believe this," Bologue pointed to the vast landscape, "but I've been here before."

"During the Rage of the Scorched Earth?"

Aimou knew of Bologue's military adventures. Each time she heard them, she remarked that Bologue's stories could be turned into a novel and make a fortune. Bologue would reply that the Order Bureau forbade its Field Staff from writing memoirs. Even if one wrote a memoir, it had to be kept within the Bureau.

"Yes, back then, this place didn't look at all like this. Now, all traces of the past have disappeared, as if what I experienced was a mere illusion."

Bologue sighed. The demarcation of the Narrow Countries only appeared after the Fall of the Holy City. At that time, people often called this vast land the Conflict Zone, where the Kagader Empire and the Rhine Alliance fought fiercely.

As a soldier, Bologue had personally measured the vastness of the battlefield and witnessed the death of each person.

"If only I had a map, I could be your historical tour guide and explain the course of the war," Bologue joked. "There aren't many veterans like me who've experienced it firsthand nowadays."

Aimou was silent for a few seconds and couldn't help but say, "Is this the mindset of youth? It's wonderful."

"What's the matter?"

"Look at you, Bologue, if we go by actual age, you're already an old man. But I always forget that; you are no different than the young."

Aimou believed that as long as you always remained vigorous, time couldn't harm you.

"Who knows?"

Bologue continued to gaze into the distance. After a long pause, he suddenly spoke.

"I looked just like this when I left home."

Bologue flashed a carefree smile, swinging his legs vigorously.

"Just like this, sitting at the tail of the train, swinging my feet, thinking this is just an ordinary war. I thought it might end before I even got to the front lines."

Bologue rambled on.

"I'd earn a lot of money, use my military record to get into a good university and study for a few years..."

Bologue fell silent. Now, in hindsight, his desires at that time seemed so humble and small.

Aimou was filled with surprise, carefully asking, "Are you talking about your past?"

"Yes, why?"

Aimou's expression was somewhat strange, eyes displaying a thinking progress bar, "Since I've known you, you've never spoken of your life before the military."

It wasn't just Aimou. Many who knew Bologue only knew him from the start of his military career, the beginning of Bologue's nightmare.

The tales before the nightmare were rarely mentioned by Bologue, and few knew them.

"You... are like someone without a past."

"How can that be," Bologue shook his head, "everyone has their own past; no one appeared out of thin air."

Bologue gazed into the distance. After a long pause, he suddenly asked.

"Want to hear it?"