

48 Hours 581

Chapter 581 The Prettiest Fireworks In the World

The cherry blossom trees had shed their flowers, leaving behind only dried and yellow leaves. With the gentle morning breeze, leaves rained down from the tree like a golden shower.

Mr. Okita raised his cheeks and took a deep breath, savoring the taste of nostalgia showered upon him by the ecstatic environment. He opened his eyes, telling Zhang Heng, "My sensei is the leader of Tennen Rishin-ryū, and his name is Kondo Shūsuke. When he was nineteen, he acquired the Mekyo Kaiden. After that, he came to Kyoto with his Kondo Isami. Both of them joined the Shinsengumi at the same time. We participated in the assassination of the former director Serizawa Kami, Hikujiro Uchiyama, and the subsequent Ikedaya Operation. Other than that, we've completed many major and minor missions too. I don't remember how many people I killed, but my swordsmanship got getting better and better. Six months ago in Gion, we fought side by side. But if you treat me the same, I'm afraid you will lose the battle.."

Okita Soki paused, "...I had nothing to do when I was sick. Each day, I could only think about all kinds of nonsense to relieve the pain. Among those things were thoughts about my swordsmanship. I almost re-enacted all the previous battles I had been through, and I looked for ways to overcome my weaknesses and improve my skills. It took a long time for me to recuperate. So I'm not lying. I am indeed in the best state of mind and body."

"It just so happens that I have been busy improving myself recently," replied Zhang Heng with a nod. "It seems we can verify each other's gains in this friendly match."

"Indeed."

Okita Soki said no more, raised the wooden katana in his hand and made a move. Instantly, his whole temperament changed. Without the dread that plagued him, Okita Soki was radiating with life force and vitality. Nobody would have ever thought he was seriously ill just moments ago. If Kirino Toshiaki was like a tiger from the mountains, the current Okita Soki was like the bright moon hanging in the dark night.

He tossed his shadow into the river, and it looked like it was reachable.

"Be careful, Mr. Abe." Okita Soki placed the wooden katana at his side, and at the same time, he began to move. He was as light as a butterfly that flew amongst the flowers, dashed toward Zhang Heng in a blink of an eye. The only thing that was faster than him was the wooden katana in his hand.

Zhang Heng, on the other hand, remained still and did nothing about the incoming attack. However, his eyes never stopped following Soki's hands. When the wooden katana struck, Zhang Heng quickly caught the katana in a steady move.

But the next moment, Zhang Heng let out a sigh, and Okita Soki's wooden katana disappeared from his vision. A second later, it reappeared again, and it landed accurately on the back of Zhang Heng's sword.

With Zhang Heng's sword pinned down, Okita Soki did not waste this rare opportunity and stabbed his opponent's chest with all his might. Zhang Heng still managed to remain calm in this dangerous

situation—the time he spent on the ship during the Black Sail quest helped him survive the attack. When the wooden katana struck at him, Zhang Heng turned sideways and dodged the attack.

This was just the beginning.

Okita Soki took the opportunity and bludgeoned Zhang Heng non-stop like his life depended on it. Every strike that he landed was better than the last. The fallen leaves on the ground whipped up each time he swung the wooden katana, like an orchestra perfectly synced and composed.

Zhang Heng knew that Okita Soki was not lying earlier. There were indeed significant improvements in his skills compared to when he met him at Gion that night. If Kirino Toshiaki stood before him now, it was likely that he would not be able to survive more than 20 moves, considering his horrible physical condition at the moment.

Zhang Heng was very curious about how this top samurai would turn out if he did not die so young. What could he achieve afterward? Unfortunately, no one would know the answer. Thank goodness, though, two other people were able to witness the last dance of this peerless master at the end of his life.

Akane Koyama held her breath from the first moment Zhang Heng and Okita Soki fought. Since she was a katana practitioner, nothing in this world could be more exciting than the battle brewing before her.

Zhang Heng and Okita Soki were perhaps the strongest swordsmen at that time. This friendly battle that they had could be considered as the battle of the era. Though they were slugging it out in her small courtyard, it was a breathtaking sight to her. It wasn't until years later that Akane Koyama became a master. Whenever she recalled this battle, she knew she had learned a lot from it.

After the battle at Gion, Zhang Heng had almost forgotten what it felt like to be pressured by others during a fight.

Could this be the gap between different talents?

While he was challenging the dojos in Kyoto, Okita Soki caught up with his skills secretly. No one knew what kind of epiphany he gained when his illness tormented him. Now, the two were standing on the same line again. The most enjoyable thing in this world was to compete with someone as good as you.

Without expressing themselves with words, Zhang Heng and Okita Soki could feel each other's thoughts. Soki's eyes lit up like stars in the night sky, and the corners of his mouth curved upwards, revealing the long-lost innocent, hearty smile. Meanwhile, Zhang Heng closed his eyes, clearly recalling the cultivation mantra Akane Koyama told him earlier. And he thought it was useless. As of now, Zhang Heng entered his zone. Although his eyes were closed, his other four senses had become unprecedentedly sharp and sensitive. Okita Soki's movements were predicted, and his attacks were all blocked by Zhang Heng. Unbeknownst to her, tears fell from Akane Koyama's eyes. After witnessing the battle, the most moving scene she had ever witnessed, she saw that both sides had a common goal of pursuing what they deemed to be beautiful. She could see that Zhang Heng and Okita Soki were giving it their very all. It was especially true for Okita Soki. Like a moth flying toward the flames of a candle, he couldn't stop himself, fighting with every last labored breath he had. He fought even if it meant certain death.

Zhang Heng had also forgotten that he was seeking a breakthrough in his swordsmanship. He was so focused on the battle he did not even hear the system notifications. All he could think of was to defend against Okita Soki's next attack. His sweat started to evaporate, turning into a steamy cloud as the intense battle raged on. However, a few seconds later, his powerful momentum disappeared without any warning. The heavens and earth returned to silence again, leaving only a vast expanse of land, cleansed, as if there was nothing. It was at that time; Zhang Heng knew the traces of Okita Soki in this world would remain in this world forever. When he opened his eyes, he saw Akane Koyama was crying.

Chapter 582 Present

After the friendly match with Okita Soki, Zhang Heng's Lv.3 swordsmanship had finally broken through to Lv.4. To him, this was like stepping into a new realm. The promotion to each major level was a qualitative leap, not to mention LV4, which was in itself a very rare achievement for anyone. After the upgrade, he could feel that his five senses had been considerably enhanced. Coupled with previous insight and combat experience accumulated by challenging various dojos, and the foundation built in Black Sail, Zhang Heng finally came up with his sect.

To commemorate this battle with Okita Soki, Zhang Heng decided to name the new sect Tendou-ryu. He also gained a new skill called Mind's Eye, allowing him to keep fighting even when his vision was impaired.

With the newfound talents, perhaps he could even fill in if there was a job opening for the Daredevil in the future. He pondered about it as he rubbed his chin. He could also feel that his Mind's Eye had room for further improvement. Perhaps its ultimate goal in the future was to remain completely unaffected even with all five senses blocked.

If that was the case, his sixth sense would probably need to be improved to an incredible level.

This might sound supernatural; a master, the likes of him, could usually sense impending threats. It was instrumental in preventing sneak attacks. However, if Zhang Heng were to rely on his sixth sense to fight, he might have to spend a lot longer honing that skill. He was in no hurry, though. His time in this dungeon was coming to an end, his swordsmanship had been upgraded as he wished, and he had found two legendary katana as well—even if he wanted a higher quality sword, he would not know where to look for it.

So what about the Kusanagi no Tsurugi, one of the three Divine Weapons?

Well, the sword was extraordinarily reputable but was mostly used as a ritual tool. Besides, it was ancient, and questionable materials had been used in its forging. This meant it might be unsuitable for actual combat. Instead of being stored in the Kyoto Imperial Palace, it was currently in Atsuta Jungu, and there was no way Zhang Heng could get his hands on it even if he wanted to.

It was fair to say that the Divine Five Swords were the best swords a player could get their hands on in this dungeon, and although Scarlet previously speculated that there were better weapons here, she had no idea how to find them. Zhang Heng had no intention to force it either. He had already done everything he could. It was simply fated that he could not find them.

Next, he had to solve a dilemma. According to the rules of the dungeon, he could only bring one weapon out. He could either choose to grab the Juzurmaru or the Kiku-ichimonji.

Undoubtedly, it was a tough choice to make.

Zhang Heng speculated that these two katana had to be Grade-C weapons. As for their respective specialties, they could only be identified after an appraisal. As of now, he knew that the Juzumaru had extremely high durability, and the rosary entangled around its hilt was likely used to ward off evil spirits.

The Kiku-ichimonji, meanwhile, was Okita Soki's favorite katana. It was lighter but sharper than the Juzumaru and could easily cut a falling leaf into two. Soki's excellent skills allowed him to fully utilize the katana. With Zhang Heng's current swordsmanship, this katana would increase his attack speed by 30%.

These two swords had their own specialties, and it was making him a little hard to decide. Just as he was hesitating, the quest came to its end.

After that, the Battle of Toba Fushimi broke out as recorded in history. When the nation's political situation became more and more unfavorable, Okubo Toshimichi and Saigo Takamori decided to embark on a journey to destroy Tobaku. In January that year, the shogunate was defeated several times, ushering in a new era.

Those people immersed in joy today had no idea what fate awaited them in the future. Per the agreement with Okita Soki, Zhang Heng used the connections he built in Tobaku Sect to meet Kido Takayoshi. The latter promised that if Kondo Isami was willing to surrender and stopped making the new government his enemy, he would spare his life. However, Isami had to publicly declare that he was dead, and he had to go back to his hometown and live his life out as a peasant.

Zhang Heng knew Kondo Isami was not going to accept a deal like this. Kido Takayoshi, too knew that Kondo Isami would not agree to the deal. However, Zhang Heng had fulfilled the promise he made to Okita Soki, and that was to find a way for Kondo Isami to live. However, he would not help Kondo Isami decide anything because everyone ultimately had their own destiny.

After doing these things, the next step was to wait for the day of parting.

The Cherry Blossom in the yard finally lost all its leaves. Although new shoots would grow in the coming year, Zhang Heng could no longer wait for that day to come. Today, he sat in the Koyama Dojo's courtyard, watching a few samurai practice their swordsmanship while eating grilled fish and pickled radishes.

Soon afterward, Akane Koyama walked out of the main room after ending a class. She wiped the sweat from her forehead, took a bowl of red bean soup handed by Zhang Heng. She asked as she took a sip, "Have you booked the tickets?"

"Yes. It's tomorrow afternoon."

Zhang Heng smiled. He told her that he had something to do overseas and that he had to go back there again. And the return date was uncertain as well.

Now the Koyama Dojo was on the right track. The era of the samurai was over. Sometime after that, the new government would form the Metropolitan Police Department. According to history, the department trained its officers in different sects and eventually came up with their own-Keisatsu-ryu. After that, they taught the sword technique to others.

And Zhang Heng managed to alter history by a little. Through his efforts, the little-known sect, Koyama Myoshin-Ryū, was now inducted among Japan's top ten sects. Later, the Koyama Dojo was also employed by the Metropolitan Police Department as a training ground for its members. In this way, even in the Meiji era, Akane Koyama's dojo would still get to grow.

Akane Koyama bit her lip. She had witnessed all those things that Zhang Heng had done for Koyama Dojo during this period. However, it is difficult for her to repay him. She could only silently enjoy the benefits brought by him, and to her, this was unacceptable. After a while, she broke her silence. "Weren't you collecting swords earlier?"

"Oh. I stopped doing that after you reminded me," chuckled Zhang Heng.

"My father had a katana too, but it is not legendary. I don't know who made it," Akane Koyama said. "I know it's incomparable to the katana you have, but take it as a parting gift."

"If that's the case, I will gladly accept it." Zhang Heng nodded. Although he could not bring this katana out of this dungeon, he accepted Akane Koyama's kind gesture. He reached out and took the sword from her, then drew it out of its scabbard and took a look. As expected, it was ordinary and looked to be less than a hundred years old. Though it was well kept, it wasn't as hard as the Juzumaru, and neither was it as sharp as the Kiku-ichimonji. Its blade seemed dull, and there were no inscriptions left by the swordsmith.

However, Zhang Heng still accepted the katana because he did not want to disappoint Akane Koyama. He got up and bowed to her.

"Thank you for taking good care of me during this time."

Akane Koyama tried to lift her head, not to let the tears fall out of her eyes. She then whispered, "I will keep the courtyard for you forever. Come back if you have time."

Chapter 583 Katana Appraisal

Until the last day, Zhang Heng still failed to decide which katana to bring back to the real world. After thinking for a long time, he decided it would be better to consult a professional. So, he brought his Kiku-ichimonji, Juzumaru, and the unknown katana given by Akane Koyama to Kyoto's most famous sword house. He had been here to admire their katana before, and he also told the shopkeeper to reserve all the famous katana for him, so the manager and shopkeeper knew who he was.

When they saw him entering the shop, smiles instantly appeared on their faces. "Abe-sama, we don't have any new katana today. What brings you here?"

Zhang Heng handily gave the little monk five cents to open the door, causing the latter to grin almost to the back of his head.

"Ah, I am not here to buy katana today. I want to look for someone to appraise a few katana."

The shop manager and the shopkeeper looked at each other and laughed.

"What's wrong?" Zhang Heng asked. "It's a coincidence that you are here today. The boss is usually not in the store, and I don't know why he came here early today, but this is an excellent opportunity! He knows all kinds of swords in the world. From the works of famous swordsmiths to the weapons made by

ordinary blacksmiths, he can identify their origin with a glance!" "Is he that good?" Zhang Heng was a little surprised.

"If you have any questions about a katana or sword, just ask him. Of course, you have to make sure that your blade is good enough to capture his attention."

"Don't worry about that. Please lead me to him."

"Come with me." The store manager took Zhang Heng to a tea room behind the katana house.

A thin old man could be seen making tea there.

"This guest here hopes you can appraise his katana for him." The shop manager bowed at the thin man.

"Thank you," he replied, nodding in thanks. The shop manager then exited the house. The old man pointed to the tatami on the ground. When Zhang Heng saw it, he bowed and sat down. During the Tokyo Drift quest, he had spent some time in Japan. At that time, etiquette was not as important, and he could sit as he pleased.

Since Zhang Heng was in a different era, he realized that he had to learn the traditional Japanese sitting style. The toe joints were stretched as far as possible, the instep and calves were placed on a flat surface, where the heel and toes were used as support. It was uncomfortable, to say the least, and it was said that this sitting posture resembled corporal punishment in China.

However, according to the history of China, it seemed like no one sat like that anymore.

The boss did not talk about helping Zhang Heng to appraise his katana. Fortunately, Zhang Heng was not in a hurry. Since there was still half a day left before the quest came to an end, he just sat there and watched the old man make tea.

The Japanese tea ceremony was divided along two main lines-matcha and sencha. In fact, both originated from China, where matcha was from the Tang Dynasty, and sencha was from the Ming and Qing dynasties. When they were passed down to Japan, they were further developed and improved. It was said that the earliest tea seeds were brought back to Japan by those who studied in China during the Nara era.

Sen-no-Rikyū was a master, and his Wakei Seijaku had a great influence on the later generations.

The boss had obviously studied the quintessence of Wakei Seijaku. He lit the charcoal and boiled the water in one go. Then, he warmed the bowl, poured the hand-ground tea powder into the bowl, added some hot water, and stirred the tea with a chasen until bubbles started to form. Intricate and graceful, it was not unlike an art performance. Finally, the tea was poured into two bowls. This was matcha.

Zhang Heng took one of the boss's bowls and pointed at its pattern to show his gratitude.

He then took a sip but couldn't taste the difference.

"You are very patient," the boss showed a smile on his skinny face as if he could see right through Zhang Heng's mind. He then shook his head, "Let's talk about the katana."

Zhang Heng took out the first katana and handed it to the boss.

“Juzumaru.” As expected, the boss only glanced at it, going on, “...Heian Era, made by Aoe Tsuneji. The blade is two feet and five inches in length. The rosary around it belonged to the former owner, Master Nichiren. This was a famous katana that belonged to a Buddhist temple. Unfortunately, it fell into the hands of an executioner. It caused the sword to become hostile. To eliminate its hostility, you have to place it at a temple for some time.”

“You are truly good with katana.” Zhang Heng then handed him the second sword.

“This is the Kiku-ichimonji. You have many good katana,” the boss remarked, then stroked the blade as if it was a fine vase. “Did you see the quenching marks on it? They are deeper than the ones found on ordinary katana. This technique is called Ichimonji. The Kiku-ichimonji was the masterpiece of the Ichimonji sect. And its maker was from the Kamakura period. His name is Ichi, and he named it Monji. The katana is two feet and four point two inches long. Its most famous owner is Okita Souji. This famous sword has finally found its destiny. Unfortunately, its owner had a short life. If you listen carefully, you can still hear its wailing. A passionate person paired with a passionate katana was nothing more than love.” After listening to the boss’s comments, Zhang Heng fell into silence. After a while, he raised his head. “What I’d like to ask next is which of these two are more suitable for me.”

The boss did not answer him immediately. Instead, he said, “Don’t you still have one more? Why don’t you take it out?”

“That one was just a gift from a friend. Although it is of great significance to me, I’m afraid it is not good enough for you to appraise,” lamented Zhang Heng.

“I decide if the katana is worthy of my time, not you. Do you still want me to appraise it?”

“As you wish.” Zhang Heng finally handed him the ordinary tachi that Akane Koyama gave him.

“Well, this tachi is so-so. The one who cast the blade is so-so, and the original owner is so-so too. This tachi doesn’t even have a name, and there are no inscriptions on it. Maybe the one who made it felt that it was an embarrassment. I can’t find its origins in books anyway. It is definitely worse than the katana I have in my shop.”

Zhang Heng did not know what to think. He had told the boss that the Tachi was ordinary, but the old man insisted on appraising it. When he finally got it, he couldn’t stop criticizing it. It was as if he had nothing better to do.

“Anyway, this Tachi was given to me by a friend.” Zhang Heng stretched out his hand, attempting to take it back.

However, the boss did not immediately let it go. He said, “In that case, choose this one.” “Hmm?”

“I said, just choose this one. Juzumaru is Master Nichiren’s katana, and Kiku-ichimonji belonged to Okita Soki. Both of them had crafted their signature on the katana. Hence, these are theirs.”

Zhang Heng seemed to be moved by his words.

A katana is only famous because of its owner. It doesn’t matter if it doesn’t have a name. You can give it one. It doesn’t matter if it doesn’t have a history. Just write the history yourself. Besides, you have invested your feelings into this piece. This is your katana.”

The boss was like a demon, incessantly tempting Zhang Heng to take this katana. “You don’t want me to bring these two famous katana out of this dungeon, right?” Zhang Heng somewhat knew the boss’ true identity. So, he decided that he would be honest with him.

The boss took a sip of his tea and said with a smile, “This is your choice. I’m only responsible for the suggestions. Don’t regret it after you make up your mind.”

“After you have said so much, you can’t bury the fact that this katana is weaker than the other two.”

“You know very well that there is nothing perfect in this world. Katana are like people. We all have our sad moments. Some many emperors and generals suffered from losses. The most important thing is that they had help in their most difficult times.”

“So... You are saying that I should be the one who makes this katana famous?”

“Hehe!” The boss laughed, and all the divine aura emanating from him when making tea was lost. “The choice is yours. Maybe this katana will help you during your most difficult time?”

Chapter 584 Bakumatsu Kyoto (End)

Zhang Heng returned from the Bakumatsu Kyoto quest three days ago. When he received the result of the item identification, he knew that he had been fooled.

[Name: Common Sword]

(Grade: F)

(Usage: Blade Bone (only one), fruit of the katana shop’s owner in his early days. The maker searched extensively for surplus materials from famed swords, employing tenacious ambition to forge the unparalleled Blade Bone. However, the quality of the materials themselves was poor, and its casting method very ordinary. But as his first completed product, it is pretty good.) The description meant that the person who forged the sword used leftover materials from famous swords and ambitiously combined them. Unfortunately, the final product was of extremely low quality.

Zhang Heng expected this to happen. No matter how the boss vaunted about the sword, its workmanship and materials used were something that couldn’t be changed, and it was never mentioned in the history books. In every way, it was inferior to the two other swords, and when the boss justified the sword with the ‘young men should go and make history’ excuse, Zhang Heng turned a deaf ear.

Yet, he eventually decided to buy it because from his long experience in the games—the boss who would only appear at the end of the quest should be on the same level as Einstein in Apollo Training Camp, and Arthur Conan Doyle in Deductive Reasoning.

The guy was buried rather deep in the quest neither Scarlett nor her friends had met him before. Zhang Heng assumed that it had to be the katana shop’s owner because he set off some trigger. Zhang Heng had three swords on him. The battle to obtain the Juzumaru was the fiercest—it spilled from the tea house to the street, and at the end of it, he had to fight Kirino Toshiaki. The battle for the Kiku-ichimonji was more demanding in terms of swordsmanship—defeating Okita Soji, probably the best swordsman of the Bakumatsu period and one determined to wear himself out, was no easy feat either.

But if you thought about it, it was the third sword, its acquisition of which did not seem to require much effort was the most difficult to obtain.

Including the extra time he had due to the bug, it took Zhang Heng nine months to assist the ailing Koyama dojo back to life and become known throughout Kyoto. This would have been an impossible undertaking for the other players who only had thirty days to complete the quest.

Based on previous patterns, most of the game items were directly correlated with difficulty, especially hidden items—the reason why Zhang Heng decided to bet on the sword.

However, it turned out to be a dud.

The bartender lady seemed to be gloating. She was there when Zhang Heng completed the exchange with Scarlet. Generally speaking, game items that allowed access to special quests were quite valuable. Even if Zhang Heng did not use them himself, he could sell them for a good price and earn many points. In every way, it was way more powerful than an F-grade item. This was a massive loss for him.

After all, once upon a time, he had two C-grade items—similar to the Mikazuki Munechika—yet he chose this ‘Ordinary Sword’ over them. All he could do now was accept his losses.

Zhang Heng counted the points he had accumulated so far. After the Deductive Reasoning quest, he had around 1200 points. Later on, because he was involved in the battle between the Arc of Light and the Union, he bought a sniper rifle and a flash bullet that cost him 50 points. Right now, he had around 1100 points left.

When the bartender finished exulting in his misfortune, Zhang Heng asked, “Remember you told me that you knew a blacksmith that forges weapons for the gods?” “Mhmm. What about it?” The bartender raised an eyebrow at him, looking intrigued. Then she pointed at the ‘Ordinary Sword’ and said, “Don’t tell me you’re thinking of recasting this thing?”

“Now I finally understand what the guy meant when he said—someone great helped him to get out of a tough situation,” sighed Zhang Heng.

After the disappointment subsided, Zhang Heng reconsidered all possibilities. Suppose the owner of the katana shop bore no malice when he recommended the sword. In that case, there could be only one explanation left—the man obviously knew nothing about Zhang Heng. However, he did know that Zhang Heng had the means to recast the sword and activate the Blade Bone feature concealed within.

That also implied that the shop owner and the swordsmith the bartender knew were not the same people.

“You better think this through. No one knows what this so-called Blade Bone’s characteristic actually is. That guy I know charges a hefty price for his service. What’s more, this sword is only a Grade-F item. Why invest so much in ending up with a D or even just an E-grade item? Your losses would be even greater then. Sometimes, nipping your losses at the bud may be the wiser move,” the bartender warned.

“This sword is given to me by a friend, and it contains her emotions. The guy was right; this is my sword,” said Zhang Heng. “Which is why I’ve made the decision. We’ll see how it performs after it has been recast. Also, can you ask him if I could pay using game items?”

Zhang Heng might not have many points on hand, and after the battle between the Arc of Light and the Union, he had collected quite a few game items that weren't the least practical. On top of that, he received a few more items when he killed the players' team to save Meinan. Right now, he had so many game items that it was almost excessive.

There was always a limit to the items he was allowed to bring into quests. The remaining items in his possession were hard to be put to fair use, and it would be great if he could use them to pay for the recast. "That guy does have an interest in strange materials," said the bartender. "It wouldn't hurt to ask..."

Theits X had stringent blade-control regulations. Zhang Heng was not interested in carrying around an F-grade sword, so he simply deposited it with the bartender.

After that, Zhang Heng gave himself some time off and temporarily stayed away from that strange world, returning to his original position as a college student.

In the following week, he stayed away from the players' forum, attended lectures on time, and played computer games with his roommate Wei Jiangyang and the others. He never missed his daily training, of course. Above all that, Zhang Heng also downloaded Fate/Grand Order* and made it just in time for Honno-ji's Rerun. Zhang Heng hit level 648 twice, but even after he took out his Lucky Rabbit's Foot, there was still no sign of Okita Soji.

Perhaps their encounter at the dungeon had exhausted whatever fate that bounded them.

When Chen Huadong erupted in excited laughter, proclaiming loudly, "Miss Okita is mine!"

Zhang Heng was reminded of the boy with a shy smile in Kiyomizu Temple and the brilliant cherry blossoms that day.

Translator's note: Fate/Accel Zero Order: an online, free-to-play Japanese mobile game

Chapter 585 This Is the Answer I'd Like To Hear

"Mister, is your mom, my master?"

Chen Huadong had been getting more and more bored recently. Ever since he broke up with Xu Jing, he had returned to the embrace of the virtual world. He called this a healing process, where he buried his head in FGO, Warship Girls, and Azur Lane nonstop for days and nights. Everyone was impressed by how strong his liver was. As if that wasn't enough, he also binged watch four harems and two yuri series. Even though his day was full of activities, he didn't forget to wander around the dormitory. Whenever he saw someone, he would ask if the person was his master. The obsessive behavior caused even Ma Wei not to dare to show up outside of his dormitory anymore.

This afternoon, Chen Huadong started his daily patrol again. As he walked, he stopped suddenly and stared at Wei Jiangyang, who was browsing for sneakers in front of his computer. He then fell into deep thought.

"What's wrong... are you so obsessed with my beauty you failed to look away?" Wei Jiangyang panicked when he realized that Chen Huadong was staring at him.

However, Chen Huadong let out a long sigh when he heard what Wei Jiangyang said. "Old Wei, why do you think this world is so unfair? You are not more handsome than me, and you're not richer than Zhang Heng. Other than the two of them, Ma Wei is also far more mature than you. Why is it that you are the only one with a girlfriend in our dormitory?"

"...because I'm not playing three mobile games at the same time?" Wei Jiangyang raised his eyebrows. "Zhang Heng doesn't play mobile games that much as well. Besides, his rotten luck is making him say goodbye to all the gacha games," replied Chen Huadong with a shake of his head.

"You have to know that Zhang Heng wasn't actively searching for a girlfriend, and I'm pretty sure he will find one if he puts some effort into it. As for you, you can't even find one even if you work hard for her. Now that's is the fundamental difference between you and him." Wei Jiangyang kindly reminded, "A couple of days ago, a girl from the next class asked for Zhang Heng's WeChat. And he declined her request without any hesitation."

"...Old Wei, do you really need to shoot me in the head again after my heart is broken?" Chen Huadong complained. "Actually, you are not that bad..." Wei Jiangyang realized that Chen Huadong had recently gone through a heartbreak, so he stopped teasing him and started comforting him instead.

"Tell me five best things about me now. Quick! One minute. Go!" Chen Huadong was not going to let Wei Jiangyang off the hook that easily. Now, he was dead serious.

"If you fail to say it, it means you don't love me."

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Wei Jiangyang was speechless.

"Why do you ask such stupid questions like my girlfriend?"

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Zhang Heng put down the "Finnish Grammar" in his hand. "You are not too bad yourself. Although you are not that handsome, I can say you look above average. You are pretty meticulous, you don't have any bad habits, and you are funny too. Often, when you play League of Legends, you carry your teammates to victory."

"See that. That's the answer that I'm looking for!" Chen Huadong's sorrow turned into joy when he heard what Zhang Heng said to him. Immediately, he put on an ear-to-ear smile.

"But... you are always playing games in the dorm. No one could discover you even if you had all those good qualities. I remember you set up a club when you started your freshman year. And you joined the movie club as well. Why haven't you gone there recently?" "Tiger Shark is an online club. We do everything via the internet, like sharing games and anime clips. Besides, there are no girls in the club too. Counting on Tiger Shark to find a girlfriend for me is the same as counting on the Mongolian Navy to regain Hawaii. As for the movie club..." Chen Huadong sighed, "It's even more meaningless. All the seniors there are arrogant and disrespectful. They are there to get a girlfriend as well, and I'm afraid if I stay there, I will become one of them too."

“You post on the internet every day to look for uncensored anime. I didn’t know you possessed such a high-level thinking process.”

“Those two things are unrelated!” Chen Huadong said in a huff. “Relying on their advantage as senior to bully others is wrong! When they find out that a girl has a boyfriend, they will figure out a way to split them up. I’m not like them.”

“Oh? Who are those bastards who would do something so unethical?”

“Forget it; let’s not talk about them,” replied Chen Huadong with an eager wave of the hand.

“Come on. Then, no one can save you anymore. You refuse to socialize even after our lengthy advice. You will keep feeling sorry for yourself in the dorm alone,” harrumphed Wei Jiangyang.

Chen Huadong himself felt how hard the loneliness had hit him. He put his hands behind his back. Standing under the clothes hangers on the balcony, he let out a long sigh.

Zhang Heng thought for a while and said, “Two days ago, Asuka Hayase told me that she has a female junior of hers who likes anime had just arrived in China and wants to find like-minded Chinese friends to practice her Chinese. Would you like to give it a try?”

“What the hell?! Why are you so cruel to me?! I just want to find a girlfriend. I don’t want to develop an unforgettable long-distance relationship and contribute to the friendship between China and Japan!”

“Then let me ask Xiao Wu, who stays at the opposite dormitory. He seems to be an ACG fan, too. He is also the vice president of Tiger Shark. I think he can go well with Asuka Hayase’s female junior.”

“Don’t, don’t, don’t!” Chen Huadong became anxious when he heard Zhang Heng’s suggestion, “...Xiao Wu, he... he, he has someone he likes. I’ll do it. I will consider it as making a new friend. Anyway, I have always wanted to be friends with a real Japanese girl.”

“Hasn’t Xiao Wu been single for some time? When did he get a crush... and why do you sound so awkward,” Wei Jiangyang raised his head and asked curiously.

“I will inform Asuka Hayase about it,” Zhang Heng said, “Don’t forget your promise.”

“I will not let that happen. From now on, I am willing to become a bridge to build a better friendship between the two countries,” Chen Huadong proclaimed confidently.

After hearing the good news, he finally regained his vigor. He was so happy that he decided to stop playing his mobile games. Instead, he went to the library to learn Japanese, and Zhang Heng even recommended him two introductory textbooks.

“This guy finally decided to do something right. Although he didn’t talk about it, I can see that he took a big blow from that breakup with Xu Jing. It would be a great opportunity to come out of it, and he could even learn Japanese.” Wei Jiangyang looked at Chen Huadong’s back as he walked out of the door. He said, “We are not like you. Our language talent is not as good as you. Not only have you achieve the sixth grade faster and 700 points, but you have also learned Japanese quietly. And now you are starting to learn Finnish. Give us a break, man.”

Zhang Heng hummed casually and sent a message to Asuka Hayase to tell her about it. He then swiped through his contact list and saw Fan Meinan, whom he had no spoken to for some time. He hesitated

but still decided not to send her any messages since she told him that she was fine. That was why he did not want to ask the same question again.

Then, Zhang Heng put his cell phone away and picked up the “Finnish Grammar” again.

Chapter 586 Riddle

A peaceful week passed quickly.

Zhang Heng was flipping through a book about photographic composition in the library this afternoon. He then received a call from Shen Xixi.

“Is it convenient to talk now?”

“Wait a minute.”

Zhang Heng got up, left the borrowing area, walked into the safe passage, and glanced around. There were only a few freshmen discussing assignments around him, and no one even noticed when he walked past.

Picking up the phone, he asked, “What’s the matter?”

“I remember you telling me before that you know how to drive?”

“Yeah.”

Zhang Heng knew Shen Xixi wasn’t talking about whether he had a driving license, but she spoke of driving skills.

“Can you please help me with something?” Shen Xixi asked, “Heard about the news that was circulating in the forum recently?”

“Sorry, I haven’t been on the forum much this week.”

“Oh, if that’s the case, you should take a look at the forum news first. After that, if you want to talk, you can come to the Time Sculpting restaurant in Food Alley to look for me.”

“Sounds good.”

Zhang Heng hung up the phone, opened his laptop, plugged in the USB flash drive that allowed him to hide his IP address, logged into the player’s forum, and started browsing the most popular posts. He did not need to search long, though. After a glance, he instantly knew what Shen Xixi wanted to discuss with him.

The most exciting news circulating the forum was the Sphinx. Unlike Moresby and Zavilcha that Zhang Heng had encountered before, the Sphinx was the mythical creature that everyone had heard of. It originated from Egyptian mythology, but most of its famous tales came from Greek mythology. According to legends, Sphinx would squat on the cliff near Thebes city, intercepting bystanders and asking them to solve a riddle “What animal walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three at night?”

Whoever failed to solve the riddle would get eaten by the Sphinx. Until one day, Oedipus passed by and solved the riddle. The Sphinx was so ashamed of itself that it jumped to its death.

Like all Greek myths, the story was the kind filled with wisdom. Discounting the fact that Sphinx jumped to its death after Oedipus solved the riddle, each mythology also described the Sphinx as a monster with a lion's torso, a woman's face, and had wings on its back. Since it had a pair of wings, it could not jump off the cliff to kill itself.

The post about the Sphinx's spotting was first uploaded by a player named Goldbach. He said he was a high school teacher. One night, while he was on the way home after work, he saw a creature akin to a large hunting dog springing out from the side of the road. Its appearance uncannily similar to what the myths and legends described the Sphinx looked like. There, it stood beside a garbage bin. Then, what happened after that played out exactly like the myth.

The monster made Goldbach solve a riddle. If the answer were correct, he would let Goldbach walk away, but punishment was in store if he gave the wrong answer.

Goldbach felt nervous suddenly. As a player, he quickly realized that he had encountered a supernatural incident that would most likely cost him his life. Although the Sphinx did not mention that it would take his life, Goldbach knew from the myth about the fate of those who failed to solve the riddle.

It scared Goldbach to death. He lived in a relatively rural settlement, and there were not many pedestrians on the road. He was not the kind of player who specialized in combat either. All he could do was bite the bullet and start listening to the riddle that the Sphinx had for him. Fortunately, the riddle was as bad as it was recorded in the myth.

"The upper and lower limbs are all hands, sometimes it crawls, and sometimes it walks. It walks like a person but crawls like a dog guess the animal. Remember, you only have one minute and three chances to guess the right answer!"

Goldbach was so nervous his mind instantly became blank. After a while, he managed to calm himself down and came up with an answer. "Monkey... is it a monkey?"

"Congratulations, that's right!" the Sphinx replied in a robotic voice. It then retreated into the bushes and disappeared, as if it had never appeared in the first place.

Considering the relatively large difference in combat power between the two parties, Goldbach did not dare ask the Sphinx why it did not kill itself after he solved the riddle. After the Sphinx left, Goldbach felt like he had woken up from a terrible dream. Terrified by his ordeal and worried that the monster might follow him home, he did not dare return to his residence. Instead, he went straight to the game checkpoint and spent the night there. His wife and daughter thought he must be having an affair. Unfortunately, he could not tell them the truth either.

After that, he wrote a long post and posted it on the forum. The whole thing looked like a made-up story; hence no one believed in him in the beginning. Some people commented on his post.

[My brother, are you from uc?]

[Are you trying to create fake news?]

It was not until more and more victims surfaced that it became the most popular post in the forum.

The second victim was not that lucky. He was walking his dog early in the morning, and as he strolled to a driveway, his dog barked suddenly. It refused to go any further. Although the player reacted quickly, he still failed to avoid the suspected Sphinx.

“It’s not too old. It has a thick beard and is neither big nor small. The only thing that it knows is to call out to its mother. Guess the animal.”

“What the hell?!”

The second victim almost fell to his feet from the immense shock and terror he was experiencing “The answer is wrong! You have two more chances.”

“I just used up an attempt?”

“The answer is wrong! You have one more chance.”

The second victim did not dare speak freely again this time. After a while, he came up with an answer, “Is it a cat?”

“Wrong answer.” Following that, the Sphinx charged at the second victim. Just when the latter thought he was about to die, the creature swung its paws and scratched his arm. It then jumped onto the driveway, and Teddy’s aggressive barking disappeared after jumping over the wall.

The second victim quickly rushed to the hospital immediately and had a doctor check on him. The results showed no abnormality, and after a shot of rabies vaccine, he headed home to rest. As of now, he remained in good physical condition. The mild fever he had was a normal side effect after vaccination. He would need to continue to go to the hospital to finish the remaining four injections. A large number of players criticized him to the ends of the earth.

[Brother, the answer is sheep. How can you get it wrong? And you even used up all your three chances.]

(Since when did the Sphinx become so lovely? All it did was scratch you, then run away after you failed to solve the riddle?)

(Where is your dog? Didn’t it save you during that critical time?)

(My friend. While you expected Teddy to save you, Teddy was expecting you to save him.)

Chapter 587 Sphinx

The circumstance of the third victim differed from the first two. He had a short temper. He did not say a word when he came across the Sphinx, charging at it with his short knife instead. Unfortunately, the Sphinx managed to dodge the attack, swiftly charging at the third victim and leaving behind three claw marks on his face.

Just like the unfortunate few who failed to solve the riddle, the Sphinx dropped the same punishment on the player who attempted to kill it when its life was threatened. Fortunately, it did not take the opportunity to kill the third victim. After it punished the third victim, the Sphinx quickly ran away.

Hence, the problem with the Sphinx had become the forum’s hottest topic.

It was said that the Sphinx did the same thing to ordinary people as well. Most, however, treated it as an urban legend, and some people even laughed at their unfortunate encounters. As the second victim, the scratches on the third victim were also identified as common dog bites. They could only admit that they were unlucky and get themselves a shot of a rabies vaccine.

Zhang Heng had a rough understanding of the current situation. Now, he knew why Shen Xixi was looking for him. After the battle with Arc of Light, the union was officially dissolved. However, Shen Xixi had not stopped what she had been doing. Although the Sphinx' incident was not something too severe, it disrupted the lives of ordinary people. Shen Xixi wanted to make this problem go away.

However, without having the union to support her, she severely lacked the workforce needed—the reason why she was looking for someone that could drive well. From the information she gathered, it seemed that the creature had lightning speed and moved extremely fast.

It was almost impossible for anyone with two legs to catch up with it. This case didn't seem as dangerous as his previous endeavors. As the driver, Zhang Heng did not even need to participate in the battle. Hence he didn't refuse Shen Xixi.

Turning off his computer, he headed to the restaurant Shen Xixi mentioned.

This restaurant looked like one that an internet influencer would open. The owner had spent a great deal of money on the interior, where each corner was meticulously decorated to the point it felt artisanal. During its peak, the market saw a massive boom of cafes with similar concepts. Too much of a similar thing, and the continual rise of operating costs, caused café's like this to become more unsustainable. The ambitious ventures soon began to suffer from significant losses, forcing many of them to shut their doors.

There were not too many customers in the café that Zhang Heng went to. He saw Li Bai when he entered the establishment, sitting relaxed at the table in the middle. He enjoyed a glass of juice, and when he saw Zhang Heng, he immediately stood up and greeted him enthusiastically. Zhang Heng then pointed to Li Bai's hair, "Why did you dye it red?"

"I've been watching Slam Dunk recently. Sakuragi Hanamichi's hair is red. Rabbit told me that I'm as stupid as Sakuragi, so I might as well go and dye my hair red. How does it look? Am I handsome, having this hair color?" Li Bai stroked his hair happily.

"How should I put it... it looks nostalgic." Li Bai's red hair reminded Zhang Heng of the Zangai Family when he was a child.

After a brief greeting, Li Bai led Zhang Heng to a private box.

As soon as the door was opened, the unmistakable smell of smoke filled the atmosphere. In addition to Shen Xixi and Rabbit, there were three men and two women. Two were chain smokers, ignoring the no smoking policy in public places and making the private box look like a deity's wonderland. There were at least a dozen cigarette butts in the ashtray in front of him.

The flat-headed man raised his head and glanced at Zhang Heng, "Who do you think you are? How dare you make us wait for you."

Before Zhang Heng could answer him, he said impatiently, snapped at Shen Xixi standing beside him.

“Okay, everyone is here. Let’s start.”

Shen Xixi wanted to apologize to Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng, however, wasn’t bothered. He found a stool and sat down.

Li Bai then closed the door. Shen Xixi went into the topic of the day, “Everyone here knows a thing or two about the news circulating on the Internet. What we are dealing with here is probably the Sphinx of Greek myths. Everyone knows the story of the Sphinx. Oedipus solved its riddle and caused it to commit suicide by jumping off the cliff. Unfortunately, this rule does not apply to the Sphinx that the players and ordinary people encounter. The Sphinx’s riddles are supposed to be easy to solve. Even if we guess the right answer, it would just leave. That’s it.”

Shen Xixi paused and looked around. “But the good news is that this Sphinx is not as strong as what the myths and legends described it to be. It is powerful enough to lock down the entire city. Its size should be close to a Caucasian Shepherd Dog. Its combat power is similar to Caucasian Shepherd Dog as well. Scratching is Sphinx’s primary attack. Since it has a body of a lion, its limbs are mighty. And it is supposed to have a pair of wings as well. However, no one has spotted it flying. To be cautious, we have to assume that its wings work.”

Shen Xixi turned on the projector, and the city map was projected on the wall.

“I marked the locations where the three victims were attacked, and I also interviewed regular people who have posted their encounters with the Sphinx on the Internet before. From here, we can triangulate its hunting ground.”

Shen Xixi drew a few red circles on the map and connected them with a straight line, which happened to be a triangular-shaped area outside the Fourth Ring Road.

“This place is not small.” A woman with a choker on her neck stubbed out her cigarette and said.

u,

“Yes, this is also the reason why I want to work with everyone here.” Shen Xixi said, “According to my previous strength analysis of it, we have to eliminate this creature with brute force. When we carry out the plan, we need to stay at a distance to get to our allies in one minute. The moment the Sphinx picks on someone, one of us has to immediately inform the rest. After that, just delay for a minute and wait for your other teammates to arrive. A fair reminder. No matter how retarded the riddle sounds, do not give the correct answer otherwise, it will disappear immediately.”

“Since our target’s weakness is unknown for now, we have prepared a variety of weapons for tonight’s operation. That includes stun guns, anesthesia guns, gasoline, water guns, fishing nets, two crossbows, and swords. You are free to bring your own weapons if you so, please. As for clothes... now, although the weather has started to become warmer, I strongly recommend that you choose clothes that cover your whole body. If you don’t have any, come to me to pick up a set of canvas work garments.”

“No need to be so long-winded. We don’t need others to teach us how to fight.”

The flat-headed man was getting impatient. "Simon." Shen Xixi looked at Zhang Heng again, "You keep the car running. If everything goes well, you don't have to do anything tonight. But if that thing escapes our encirclement, you will have to go after it. But you don't need to be too nervous. So far, it's not very destructive. If we let it escape, we go after it again."

Zhang Heng nodded.

Chapter 588 I'd Better Wear My Seatbelt

It took Shen Xixi less than ten minutes to get everything set up. After arranging to meet in the evening, the guy wearing a flattop haircut left in a hurry, clearly uninterested in acquainting himself with Zhang Heng, who was only a temporary teammate. After he left, Rabbit gave Li Bai a nudge, and the two went together, leaving Zhang Heng and Shen Xixi alone in the cubicle.

The latter was packing the projector. "It's beneficial that you could come. Don't mind 1801. He's a surgeon at a hospital and has several surgeries a day. He's swamped, so he's always in a rush." "You don't have to explain anything to me," Zhang Heng answered. "Don't worry. I'm just here to help, not give you trouble."

"Thanks. I don't want the both of you to become enemies over this issue," said Shen Xixi. "1810 and his team are quite well-known among independent player groups. They are a very combat effective team, but they had a fallout with Arc of Light and are one of the few groups who didn't leave the union. Oh, by the way, where's your team? I don't think I've ever met your teammates before."

"I don't have one. I've always played solo," Zhang Heng answered plainly.

"As in on your own?" Shen Xixi's eyebrows rose a notch. Since players were often subjected to strange and alien environments in quests, most preferred to act collectively. Of course, disputes were inevitable where people are involved, and players did leave their teams for various reasons. Nonetheless, most were only temporary-very few players actually played perpetual solo games. Seeing that Zhang Heng had no intention of elaborating, Shen Xixi refrained from asking more. "You can always come to me if there are any problems, or you can consider joining our team for the time being. We happen to be short of a driver, now that Huang Yu has left our group."

"I'll think about it," said Zhang Heng.

There was still some time before the operation. So, Zhang Heng went to the library and flipped through two riddle books to prepare himself for their opponent. He was there until nine when Shen Xixi sent him a text. Zhang Heng left the library and came to the east gate where a BMW X3 was parked with its emergency beacons turned on.

It was drizzling, but Zhang Heng came prepared. He pulled over his hoodie and walked to the driver's seat. When he opened the door, Shen Xixi waved at him from the passenger seat.

"Wow, our Fujiwara Takumi is here." Rabbit poked her head out of the back-seat window and asked while chewing on a piece of gum, "I forgot to ask you earlier-how many years have you been driving?"

"I just got my driver's license last month," Zhang Heng answered.

"Then, I'd better wear my seatbelt."

Rabbit disappeared into the car.

Fortunately for them, Zhang Heng's driving was steady. Nothing happened on the road either—there were no close-calls and no panic-braking in the middle of the road. Satisfied and relieved, Rabbit leaned back and relaxed for the rest of the ride.

After about forty minutes, the X3 arrived at the location. 1810 and three other members of his team were already waiting.

Like before, 1810 wasted no time at all. Upon their arrival, he simply nodded at Shen Xixi, saying, "Let's get to work."

Shen Xixi distributed walkie-talkies to everyone. After that, they picked their own weapons, then headed to their respective posts as planned to hunt the Sphinx-or more precisely, wait to be hunted by the Sphinx.

Zhang Heng remained in the car, ready to step in at any time. Even though the location was a little out of the way, people were still walking on the streets since it was still early. The next hour and a half went by pretty uneventfully save for the voices booming over the walkie-talkie every three minutes.

As he was sitting in the car, he received a text from the bartender lady informing him that the swordsmith was willing to recast his "Ordinary Sword." But because Zhan Heng did not have the casting materials, an additional cost was also charged, which brought the final tally to a whopping 4,000 game points. Sadly, Zhang Heng could not enjoy the twenty percent member discount because it was a third-party service.

But there was also good news. Besides game points, the swordsmith also accepted game items as payment. However, items handed over would be valued at twenty percent below the market price.

Having considered the offer, Zhang Heng agreed to proceed with the transaction. Besides the fact that he did not have enough points for the recast, he also had a whole stash of game items that were difficult to sell through normal channels. While the war between Arc of Light and the union had ceased, the hunt for the mysterious sniper from that night was still ongoing

The other teams aside, Zhang Heng killed the three Arc of Light elites. This wasn't something Arc would let slide so easily, and as long as they had some sense, they would definitely be keeping an eye on Shen Xixi. After all, Zhang Heng prepared well and left hardly any clues that might pinpoint to him at the scene.

But since his involvement that night, he had become closer to Shen Xixi, and by now, Arc of Light was probably already combing through Shen Xixi's social circle. Fortunately, he rarely interacted with her in school, so Arc probably wouldn't find him suspicious.

But because he had used swords, guns, and arrows in previous battles, Zhang Heng's only self-defense tonight was the Infinite Blocks. If everything went as well as Shen Xixi said, his driving skill might not even need to be employed. That, of course, would be the best outcome.

Zhang Heng returned the bartender's text, telling her that he had some things to take care of and would be bringing the items to her for evaluation once he was done.

After the message was sent, Zhang Heng turned on the radio.

Sitting around like that and waiting was tedious, especially in such a small space. But because he had to be ready to make a move, Zhang Heng stayed in the car and kept the engine running. Compared to the others, however, he was in a considerably good situation. Wandering around in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and full-body armor in weather like this proved extremely uncomfortable, not to mention having to be constantly on guard against a creature that could appear at any moment. "I haven't seen anything unusual so far. I'm going to buy some drinks from the vending machine. It's so hot, I'm dying," Rabbit complained.

She walked to the vending machine, picked a bottle of Coke, and selected the payment method. She had reached for her phone and was looking up when she was suddenly given the shock of her life. Even though she was mentally prepared for tonight, seeing a woman's head attached to the body of a lion in the middle of the night was enough to spook even the bravest of hearts.

Nonetheless, Rabbit was able to pull herself together and listen to the thing on top of the vending machine say, "Wrapped with red cloth on the outside, and white cloth on the inside. Open it and look carefully. There are small wooden combs in a row. Guess the fruit."

Chapter 589 Escape

Rabbit almost screamed when she heard the riddle. It was too simple. But she still tried her best to resist the temptation to answer the correct answer. She then whispered into the intercom, "It's with me."

"Wrong answer, you have two more chances."

Rabbit was relieved when she saw the Sphinx's reaction, concerned that it might have discovered their plan to eliminate it tonight and that it would definitely make a run. But now, it seemed that the Sphinx followed some behavioral pattern, just like an artificial intelligence being—it would not do anything to Rabbit before she answered the riddle correctly or until the time ran out.

"Roger that. Who is the closest to Rabbit?" Shen Xixi's asked through the walkie-talkie. Shen Xixi's steady hand in carrying out the operation gave Rabbit peace of mind.

"Me! I will be there soon." said the woman wearing a choker. Zhang Heng finally knew her code name—Black Swan. "I'll be there soon, too, don't be afraid!" answered Li Bai with a hint of anxiety.

"Idiot! I'm not afraid of it at all." Rabbit blushed and defended herself when she heard Li Bai's reply.

But it was then that the Sphinx's emotionless voice could be heard again. "Wrong answer. You have one more chance."

Rabbit instantly shut her mouth and stopped talking. About forty seconds later, Black Swan rushed to Rabbit's side, raised the anesthesia gun in her hand, aimed at the Sphinx, and asked, "How long do you have?"

Rabbit rolled her eyes, gesturing to Black Swan with her fingers that she had sixteen seconds left, before quickly drawing a fifteen. According to the third victim's description, the Sphinx would start to retaliate if the player took the initiative to attack it. If they were going to battle the Sphinx, they had to be damn

sure that they outnumbered it. Since there were still fifteen seconds left, Black Swan did not mind waiting a little longer to see if anyone else could come to them.

The two were very nervous at that moment, especially Black Swan. She was now pointing her tranquilizer gun at the Sphinx, not knowing if it would feel threatened, attack her in advance, or run away.

The fifteen-second wait seemed like fifteen hours.

Fortunately, Sphinx's mind seemed to be focused on the riddle, and it turned a blind eye to the tranquilizer gun. It was still squatting quietly on the vending machine, not even looking at Black Swan.

About three seconds later, Li Bai finally arrived on the other side of the street, running like a cheetah while gritting his teeth. Blue veins bulged on his forehead. It seemed like he was not the second closest person to Rabbit, but he still ran faster than the others. His red hair gave him the look of a superhero inbound to rescue Rabbit.

Considering the calculation error, Rabbit did not dare wait any longer. Immediately, she gave an OK gesture to Black Swan, and the latter pulled the trigger! The tranquilizer dart flew out of the muzzle and landed on the Sphinx accurately.

The dart's drug was powerful enough to stun an elephant—but not the Sphinx, who showed no response. It took a quick look at Black Swan, then charged towards Rabbit without warning. Nevertheless, she was prepared for such a scenario, swiftly ducking and rolling on the ground and successfully avoiding the Sphinx's pounce. And at the same time, she drew out a saber to defend herself. Unfortunately, she only managed to block a single hit from the Sphinx, and was sent flying away.

Fortunately, Li Bai had rushed to where they were. He then shouted to Rabbit, telling her what he was about to do. Swiftly, she rolled away from the Sphinx. In the blink of an eye, a fishing net was tossed, subsequently landing on top of the Sphinx.

Seeing the creature trapped in the fishnet, Li Bai was delighted. "Let's hold it down together!" However, before he could finish, the Sphinx exerted a burst of great strength, dragged the fishnet with it, and continued its advance at Rabbit.

Caught unaware by the monster's brute might, Li Bai staggered and fell on one knee. However, he did not let go of the net, tightly holding on to it for dear life. As a result, he was dragged three meters away, and the friction almost tore his pants.

"What the hell is this thing? Why is this yellow doggo so powerful?!"

"That's not a yellow dog. It's a Sphinx! It will help if you read more. Don't embarrass yourself," smirked Black Swan, taking the opportunity to fire another shot. Just like the previous shot, the second tranquilizer did little effect to slow the Sphinx. Black Swan threw away the tranquilizer gun in her hand as she exclaimed into the walkie-talkie. "Be advised! The Sphinx is highly resistant to tranquilizer darts. We need more support!" After that, she helped Li Bai grab the fishing net. Although the two were not strong enough to stop the Sphinx from moving forward, they somewhat managed to slow it down.

In the third victim's case, there was actually a question nobody had figured out the answer to. When the victim took the initiative to start the fight, did the Sphinx target the person who created the fight or

failed to solve the riddle? For the third victim, he was the one that started the fight, then was unable to solve the riddle. Naturally, the Sphinx would attack him instantly.

Although Black Swan attacked the Sphinx first, it ignored her and continued to go after Rabbit, seemingly intent on going after her.

Rabbit was so scared that she quickly shouted the right answer, "Mandarin orange! The answer is mandarin orange."

Unfortunately, one minute had passed since the Sphinx asked her the riddle. Hence, it did not stop its chase. Fortunately, 1810 was finally here. The flat-headed man snorted coldly and tossed the scalpel in his hand. He was aiming for the Sphinx's head.

The outcome surprised everyone.

1810's stainless steel medical scalpel landed on the Sphinx's head and bounced off.

"Why is the Sphinx's head so hard?!" 1810 was taken aback.

"Is it immune to physical attacks? I'm afraid our situation has just gotten more complicated now," Black Swan frowned.

Fortunately, the Sphinx was now completely entangled by the fishing net. With the addition of 1810, the three of them finally managed to surpass the Sphinx in strength, temporarily restricting the creature's movements and getting Rabbit out of danger. However, it did not last long. Black Swan noticed that the Sphinx's claws were out, ready to attack them.

The Sphinx appeared to have finally realized that things weren't too looking good for it. Giving up on the rabbit hunt, for now, it began getting rid of its restraints. It managed to claw a small hole on the net and squeezed out half of its body after a while.

"What should I do? I don't want to be scratched!" When Rabbit saw that the Sphinx had almost regained its freedom, she almost cried out loud.

"Change of plan. Let's help Rabbit get out of danger first." Shen Xixi's voice came from the walkie-talkie. She'd been unable to get to them because she was too far away. The two allies with crossbows that arrived afterward failed to cause any damage to the Sphinx as well.

Chapter 590 Working Together

A minute and a half had passed from the time Rabbit and Sphinx began to fight each other until the latter broke free of the fishing net. During this time, her other allies started to arrive one after another.

Zhang Heng's responsibility in this mission was relatively easy, where he was only needed when the Sphinx began to run from them. No matter how perfect the plan was, it had to be adjusted according to the current situation. When the tranquilizer darts were rendered useless against the Sphinx, Black Swan quickly requested support. By that time, Zhang Heng had already shifted gears from P to D.

He put the pedal to the metal—the X3 let out a roar and sped towards Rabbit.

When Shen Xixi told everyone that there was a change of plan, she asked Zhang Heng to immediately take Rabbit to a safe place. Zhang Heng spotted Li Bai, 1810, and the others fighting the Sphinx under a street lamp not far away.

In the battle's first round, everyone quickly came to realize the Sphinx's remarkable strength—it was immune to tranquilizer darts and physical damage, making it a very tricky subject to deal with. Then, as the battle prolonged, they discovered that the Sphinx wasn't as mighty as was described in the myths. Its moves were predictable and straightforward—with its claws its only weapon, the creature seemed to follow a particular attack pattern as well.

It might be hard to dodge it when attacking it for the first time, but as long as its attack pattern was studied, most of its advances could easily be avoided. The more troublesome thing to deal with was its agility. Gingerly darting on its paws among the crowd, it was a challenge to keep up with the creature's extraordinary dexterity.

If it was smart enough to give up chasing Rabbit and adopt a strategy of destroying them one by one according to the battlefield situation, it would have maimed Shen Xixi and her allies. However, this Sphinx was determined to punish Rabbit, adamant on soldering on it until its goal was achieved.

Rabbit had just run from behind Li Bai to 1810's back. The two helped her to block two heavy blows from the Sphinx, and their arms were numb after that. Hence, they could not get into another fight immediately. Before Rabbit could even catch her breath, she had to run for her life again. She wanted to run to Black Swan, but the latter hurriedly declined. "Don't choose me. I'm too weak to block its attack!"

Thus, Rabbit had to run to somebody else. The other ally was ready with his crossbow. However, the Sphinx pulled a trick on them this time. It pretended to pounce at the ally with a crossbow, but ended up lowering its body, ran past the guy in front of it, and sprang from Rabbit's back.

In this critical moment, Rabbit sought the last resort to save her life. She spat out the bubble gum in her mouth, whereby it expanded to the point of blocking the Sphinx's vision. When it scratched the massive with its paws, its surroundings were suddenly engulfed by a cloud of white dust like tearing a bag of white flour.

Rabbit took the opportunity and began to run from the Sphinx. Somewhere, deep down inside, she knew there was no way she could outrun it.

Fortunately, an X3 stopped in front of her at the next moment!

"Get in the car."

These four simple words were gospel to Rabbit.

In fact, there was no need for Zhang Heng to speak— Rabbit had already tugged the door's handle and jumped in. "Go fast! Go fast! We need to escape while it's trapped in the smoke!"

However, before she could finish her sentence, she saw a silhouette rushing towards her. The dust had no effect on it at all. Rabbit opened her eyes wide and watched the Sphinx leap towards the windshield.

Before anyone could react, it drew further apart from the X3 again. Zhang Heng tried to stay as calm as he could in the perilous situation. Since there was no time to turn the car around, he shifted to “R” while stepping on the gas. The SUV then accelerated backward and shook off the Sphinx!

Nevertheless, it was only a temporary solution. After the Sphinx fell to the ground, it ran towards the car. Zhang Heng estimated that it could reach a speed of 80km/h. It was indeed a creature that possessed monstrous abilities.

“What should we do?” Rabbit asked nervously as she looked at the Sphinx, who hadn’t given up on the chase.

“It’s okay. Sit tight,” replied Zhang Heng, observing the situation behind him through the rearview mirror. He saw an intersection not far away, and he slammed the brakes in advance, flicking the steering wheel counterclockwise, pulling the vehicle into a drift.

Zhang Heng hadn’t done something like this for a long time. Other than the fact that he had just obtained his driver’s license, it was also because he would usually abide by traffic rules and would never show off his skills. As long as it was not an emergency, he always kept within the speed limits. There was no reason to cause unnecessary trouble to other drivers and himself, and after all, everyone only had 12 points.

The X3 went sideways, drawing an elegant arc as it slid smoothly to another road. Such precise control of the car managed to impress a usually stoic Rabbit. “Wow! So you really are a master driver!”

Before Zhang Heng could reply, Shen Xixi asked over the radio again, “Rabbit, are you okay?”

“I’m okay. Simon picked me up in the car. Sister Xixi, you weren’t here to witness Brother Simon’s driving skills! His is much better than Huang Yu, who only knows how to brag all day long.” She then asked Zhang Heng curiously, “Is that trick drifting? I have seen it in the comics before.”

Zhang Heng nodded with a hum.

With the gas pedal all the way to the floor, the X3, and the Sphinx. Zhang Heng began to pull apart. This gave him time to turn the car around, putting it back in its proper direction. Now, it would be more difficult for the Sphinx to catch up with them.

But afterward, Zhang Heng did not rush to get rid of the Sphinx. Instead, he turned on the intercom and said to Shen Xixi.

“Do you have a stun gun?”

“Yes, why? Do you have any plans?” “Let’s work together. I will bring Sphinx back to its original place in five minutes. Can you think of a way to hit it?”

“There are people on our side who are good with firearms. Although the Sphinx can move pretty fast, I think we can land a successful hit on it if we can ambush it ahead of time...” Shen Xixi paused for a while. “...but the tranquilizer gun and crossbow are useless against it. And scalpels fail to penetrate its body as well. What makes you think the stun gun will work? Have you discovered something useful?”

“It’s just an immature guess.” Zhang Heng did not give a proper answer right away, “I guess we will know later. You guys brought some gasoline as well, right? Might as well try attacking it with fire too.”

“Okay. This gives us to have seven minutes to prepare,” replied Shen Xixi.

The two finalized the next course of action in a few words, and Zhang Heng slowed down a bit to ensure that the Sphinx could keep up. He then began to lead the creature on a tour around the city while Shen Xixi prepared everything