

Am I A God 391

Chapter 391: Interrogation and Search

Black Panther had barely punctuated his sentence when they were interrupted by a deafening explosion.

A whirlwind of shadows had torpedoed through the wall, reducing it to crumbs and dust. The tornado of shadow spikes closed in on them, growing larger as it got nearer.

Ishida's voice came from within the black mass.

"You little rats are really beginning to piss me off."

Black Panther knew they had to flee from the incoming onslaught.

He gripped Zhao Xue's shoulder, ready to go. However, he found that he could not teleport.

There was no brother near enough for him to teleport to.

This was the unfortunate limitation of his power. He could only teleport within a 10-meter radius of a brother (whom he had to first karate chop in the back). If he was any further than that, he would be unable to activate the skill.

Black Panther gallantly stepped in front of Zhao Xue, blocking her from the shadows.

"Go now."

In the next moment, he was thrown off his feet and into a corner.

This was not a doing of the shadows. Instead, the force had come from behind him.

He watched as Zhao Xue waved a hand at a large office table. With another wave, it was lifted off the ground and hurled towards the shadow spikes, slowing them down.

She continued throwing whatever she could reach towards the shadows, among them more tables, safe deposit boxes, and computers.

The spikes pierced through each of them mercilessly.

While Zhao Xue could not hurt the shadows, she could keep them at bay.

It was obvious that the tireless training paid off. Her strength and speed far surpassed that of a normal person's. In fact, she might even be stronger than Zhao Yao.

Now that the Sphinx had leveled up, Zhao Xue would no doubt outdo the Butcher in another month or two.

This was why she could keep throwing heavy items across the room, creating a barrier between the shadows and herself.

However, even if she could go on all night, she would soon run out of things to chuck.

They had to leave.

"Let's go!" Zhao Xue hissed, gripping Black Panther's arm.

She pulled him along as they raced out of the room.

Black Panther was in shock. They were moving so quickly that the surroundings had dissolved into shapeless blobs of color.

"You're fast!" he exclaimed.

He had no idea how someone so dainty could possess such great power.

The shadow mass erupted into a roar.

More spikes peeled themselves from it, piercing through the cloud of furniture that blocked their way and heading straight for Zhao Xue and Black Panther.

The gap between them grew smaller and smaller.

Then, the duo vanished.

They had finally managed to enter the radius of a nearby brother.

The black mass let out another roar, this one brimming with unadulterated rage.

The little rats had escaped again, leaving behind a flurry of destroyed tables, computers, and printers.

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At Zhao Yao's house, the debt collectors were kneeling on the floor.

They had just given an honest account of what led them here.

Zhao Yao listened to their story intently, scratching the bottom of his chin out of habit.

"This doesn't make sense," he said, "I have never borrowed money from your platform before. I have no need for it."

The men started rambling nervously under his cold glance.

"Please, we're not lying! Everything we told you was listed in the information handed to us."

Roly Poly leaped into Zhao Yao's arms.

He said, “Zhao Yao, this must be a misunderstanding. Maybe the person who owes them money has the same name as you.”

Matcha shook his head sagely. “Even if they had the same name, they can’t possibly have the same address or appearance.”

Roly Poly gulped. He was clutching at straws now. “Well...Maybe...Perhaps they got the address wrong?”

“That’s too much of a coincidence, don’t you think?” Matcha said, “Unless...”

“Unless someone framed Zhao Yao!” Roly Poly interrupted loudly.

He was sweating buckets by now.

“Maybe someone stole Zhao Yao’s identity to borrow money from the app! Maybe that horrible thief squandered it on online games, fried chicken, and even on the ladies...”

The poor cat was experiencing a bout of word vomit. He was terrified. The only way to vent his fear was to keep talking.

He fell silent when Zhao Yao got onto his feet.

“That’s possible.”

He turned to the men, “Do you know when the money was borrowed? Do you have the person’s contact details?”

Every hair on Roly Poly’s body stood on its end in response.

“This information is stored in the office. We don’t have it with us,” one of the men answered.

Roly Poly heaved a sigh of relief when Zhao Yao suggested, “Then we’ll go to your office right now.”

The cat choked on his breath.

“It is despicable that someone would use my good name to do such a thing,” Zhao Yao continued darkly.

He was radiating a lethal aura that seemed to cause the temperature in the living room to dip. The cats and debt collectors around him start shivering involuntarily.

“When I find that person, I will tear him limb from limb...”

Roly Poly’s legs gave way and he flopped onto the floor.

“Then gauge his eyeballs...”

Roly Poly mustered all that remained of his strength to get back up. He was shaking visibly, which caught Dust Ball’s attention.

“Roly Poly, why has your hair turned white?” she asked, eyes widened in shock.

“Cut his tongue...”

Pee had begun to pool around Roly Poly’s paws.

“And chop him into a million pieces!”

Roly Poly placed both paws on his heart, which was thumping really hard against his chest, and fainted.

“Hm? Roly Poly, are you alright?”

Zhao Yao squatted next to the unconscious cat, gently probing him.

“Why have you fainted? I wanted to take you with me to catch that the identity thief, but perhaps you should stay home and rest.”

Roly Poly’s eyes flew open.

“No!” he exclaimed, “We cannot let such scumbags off easily! Zhao Yao, I want to go with you!”

A few minutes later, the debt collectors were ushered into Zhao Yao’s car. Roly Poly sat by his owner’s feet, using his power to keep the Panamera invisible as they raced towards the city.

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The violent clicking and clacking of a computer keyboard echoed from the money lending app’s IT department.

That would have been normal if not for the fact that the engineers were passed out on the floor.

Noodle’s head appeared from behind the department’s office entrance. He scanned the empty corridor, keeping a careful lookout for intruders.

Naturally, the person he was keeping watch for was Xiao Yu, whom was the source of the noise.

It was impossible to tell that the person hunched over the computer was her though. She was dressed entirely in black. A black stocking was pulled over her head, contorting her facial features completely.

Fish Ball was secured to the top of her head like a furry hat. His limbs had been bound together, paws facing the front, producing a mighty beam of light that enabled Xiao Yu to see in the dark.

The look on her face was so focused and severe that Fish Ball had not dared to make a sound.

However, he was getting really uncomfortable.

“Nekomata,” he said softly, “Could you help me speak to Xiao Yu? Actually, I...”

“Quit meowing. It’s affecting the brightness,” Xiao Yu interrupted coldly, “Starting today, you’re nothing more than a flashlight.”

Fish Ball clamped his jaw together immediately and nodded.

He could not speak, but he could still communicate through other means.

He tried to catch Nekomata’s eye.

“Supercats should help other supercats, don’t you think?” he said telepathically, “Won’t you help me talk some sense to Xiao Yu?”

Chapter 392: Mass Destruction and a Chance Meeting

Nekomata let out a low chuckle. He was currently in spirit form, hovering a couple of meters above the ground, observing everything beneath him.

Ever since Xiao Yu found out that Fish Ball had used her identity to borrow money, she stopped treating him as a pet. His status had been reduced to nothing more than a breathing flashlight.

Xiao Yu pursed her lips when another ruckus could be heard.

“First, the sprinklers come on. Then, the entire building shakes. Now, it’s something else. There’s no peace in this place.”

She was in an understandably bad mood.

“What kind of stupid company agrees to loan money to an underaged girl? What kind of corrupt business is this?” she whined, slamming the keyboard.

“Not the C drive. Not the D drive. Where could the loan records be?!”

Xiao Yu’s understanding of systems was typical of a 12-year-old’s, which was to say that she knew close to nothing at all. Servers and databases were alien concepts that were unheard of.

Naturally, she was unable to find her profile and remove the loans made in her name.

She looked away from the screen and towards the illuminated server room. An idea sprouted in her head.

“I can just destroy all the computers here. Then my records will be gone too.”

It made so much sense to her that she did not hesitate to put it into action.

Thick, black smoke surrounded her as she lifted into the air. Her shirt billowed like a sail in the wind.

Her face had turned a pallid shade of white. Her eyes cast an eerie glow as they turned to the computer desk. It started shaking violently and it was not long before the desks surrounding it began vibrating as well.

One computer flew towards a wall and was instantly smashed to smithereens. Two more met the same fate. Then another.

“I hope this isn’t illegal. Zhao Yao said that even the government has apostles. They wouldn’t be sent after me, would they?” she pondered briefly.

In the midst of Xiao Yu’s mass destruction, Noodle began barking.

He raced towards her.

“Xiao Yu! Someone’s coming!”

Barking was not a language she was fluent in, but the husky's panicked behavior spoke volumes. There was trouble coming.

Xiao Yu got to work immediately. She levitated both Noodle and Fish Ball, raising them into the air so that they had their backs pressed against the ceiling.

"Oh no, who could it be?" she thought anxiously.

Her question was answered when two figures darted into the office at lightning speed.

Xiao Yu's eyes grew wide as marbles. "They move quickly. Really quickly."

Now that the two figures were standing still, she could start to make out their appearance. She had no clue who the Black Panther was, but she recognized Zhao Xue right away. They were relatives after all.

Xiao Yu grinned as she descended from the ceiling, wondering if her niece owed money as well.

"Zhao Xue," she called out as she reached eye level, "What are you doing here?"

"Ah!!!"

Black Panther and Zhao Xue let out a terrified scream, the former's slightly shriller than the latter's.

Xiao Yu's sudden appearance was shocking, but her physical appearance was just downright frightening. Waves of black smoke continued to billow around her. Her skin looked completely bloodless. Worse, that darn stocking was still on her face.

Xiao Yu rolled her eyes, then whipped the stocking off with one quick pull.

"It's me," she announced.

While she was recognizable now, she was not any less frightening.

Her face was as blanched as the rest of her body and there was an eerie glow dancing in her eyes.

Black Panther took one look at her and collapsed on the floor.

He had fainted.

Zhao Xue was still screaming. She threw a punch at the ghost, not holding any of her strength back. It caused visible ripples in the air that simply went through Xiao Yu's body, hitting the tables and chairs behind her instead. The furniture flew against the wall and broke into pieces.

Xiao Yu let out a heavy sigh. She turned to Zhao Xue and looked at her seriously.

"Xue, take a good look at me. It's your aunt, Xiao Yu."

Zhao Xue allowed herself one glance at the horrible apparition. She blinked a few times and her furrowed brows relaxed.

"You're...you're Aunt Xiao Yu? You've died? What has this company done to you?! Look at that vengeful aura radiating off you! You must have died a horrific death!"

Xiao Yu refrained from rolling her eyes once more.

"I'm not dead!" she exclaimed, "This is a superpower. I'm sure you're familiar with them because what you did just now was far from normal. You have powers too, right?"

The girls had barely begun chatting when Ishida caught up. Countless shadow spikes pelted against the door, blowing it up.

"Little rats, I've got you n- Ah!!!"

His eyes landed immediately on Xiao Yu, whom was still floating a few inches off the ground, looking very much like a ghost.

A frightened shriek erupted from the shadows before they vanished.

“And who’s that?” Xiao Yu asked, quirking an eyebrow.

Zhao Xue let out a pained laugh. “He works for the P2P platform. He’s a very powerful apostle.”

She then launched into the story of how they ended up here.

Xiao Yu listened to it intently, nodding vehemently when Zhao Xue was done.

“This company is evil. Destroying their computers is really an act of justice, don’t you agree?” she asked.

“I guess?” Zhao Xue responded uncertainly, “Whatever it is, we’ve got to leave now. That shadow man is not easy to deal with. We should go when he still believes that he saw a ghost.”

Unfortunately, Ishida came to his senses a lot more quickly than she expected.

He had fled instinctively. He had never seen a ghost before after all.

However, as he moved further away from the IT department, he realized that it was a lot more likely that what he saw was a superpower, not the supernatural.

He jumped to a shadow that was just by the entrance, eavesdropping on the girls’ conversation.

He knew it was time to strike when Zhao Xue proposed that they leave.

He was swift. He leaped from the outside to the shadow cast by an office table, the one behind a computer, by the corner of the desk, then finally to Zhao Xue and Black Panther’s shadows.

With each jump, he closed the distance between them and raised new armies of spikes, darkening the ceiling with their presence.

Zhao Xue’s first thought was to drag the two of them by the collar and run. However, it seemed that her aunt had other ideas.

Xiao Yu looked at the shadow spikes intently, determination shining in her eyes. Wordlessly, she worked with Nekomata to conjure shapeless poltergeists. They rushed forward and lassoed the spikes tightly, crushing them into bits.

Nekomata's poltergeists were capable of wrecking some serious havoc. They were strong enough to twist metal into a braid, so destroying mere shadows was not much of an issue.

The barrage of spikes was broken into pieces when they got too close, as if an invisible shield was protecting them.

Unfortunately, the fun had barely begun for Ishida.

The room was brimming with shadows, both big and small. Every time he sprung to a new one, he could harness its darkness to create more shadow spikes.

While in spirit mode, Xiao Yu was incorporeal, so the spikes could not hurt her. They went right through her.

Unfortunately, both Zhao Xue and Black Panther were very much solid and vulnerable, so she had to continue protecting them with her poltergeists.

At the same time, she wanted to fight back. She directed some of her poltergeists to obliterate the furniture that cast the shadow Ishida was in. While destroying the source also destroyed the shadow, that did not inflict any damage on the apostle.

Panic was starting to claw up Zhao Xue and Black Panther's throats.

They were cornered.

Xiao Yu could crush the spikes, but she could not stop Ishida from inching closer to them.

With each leap, he got one step nearer to his targets. It was only a matter of time before he infiltrated the shadows on their bodies.

By now, Black Panther had woken. However, without any of his bros within range, he was helpless.

Spikes were emerging from the shadows beneath their chins, necks, and even the sleeves of their shirts. Xiao Yu was destroying them as quickly as she could, but some still managed to nick Zhao Xue and Black Panther, slicing their skin.

“Darn it. As long as there’s a shadow, he can reach it.”

That was an accurate assessment.

It was also why Ishida’s skill was so powerful. There was no place in the world that did not have shadows. Even in the middle of the day, when the sun shines overhead, shadows creep are cast from a person’s back, wrists, and even underarms.

“Shadows...”

“Shadows...”

“Shadows...”

Xiao Yu was thinking hard. Zhao Xue and Black Panther were in serious danger and it was up to her to save them.

As she repeated the word, an idea popped into her head.

A bright idea at that, both literally and metaphorically.

She raised both hands to her head and lifted Fish Ball into the air.

Chapter 393: Light and Shadow

Ishida stared at the girl.

She had lifted a cat into the air as if it was baby Simba in The Lion King.

He had no clue what she was up to.

The answer was provided shortly when a flood of light burst from the cat's body.

Hallelujah!

You could almost hear the sweet sounds of angels singing in the background as the darkened room was illuminated instantly, driving the shadows away. The shadow spikes that hovered in the air dissolved into dust.

"Bakayaro," Ishida hissed under his breath.

He sent the remaining spikes in the direction of the little rats.

"Did you think that light is enough to stop me?"

To their surprise, the spikes did not ram into them. Instead, they made a sudden left turn and headed for the desks and chairs that were strewn around the office. The spikes scooped them into the air and formed a wall of furniture that blocked Fish Ball's light.

Once again, the room descended into darkness. This time, however, the blinding light bounced off the surface of the furniture, casting ten times more shadows around the room than before.

"The stronger the light, the stronger the shadow!" Ishida's laughed maniacally, "Light and shadow are two sides of the same coin. You've just sealed your own fate."

Xiao Yu chuckled darkly at his words. She pulled Fish Ball's glued limbs apart, setting him free from the awful glass cement.

The cat got up on his hind legs in one swift motion. He raised one paw to the ceiling and stuck one towards the ground, hips popped like John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever.

Fish Ball meowed at the shadows. It meant, “Who gave you permission to slight the power of the sun, bastard?”

With that, he amped up the power.

Fish Ball’s entire body lit up like a disco ball, sending flashing lights spinning around the room in a flurry.

Now that the light source was moving, the shadows started moving as well. They shifted from one location to another rapidly. One moment, they would be on the ceiling. The next, they would be on the floor. Then, they would be somewhere in the middle.

Ishida was right. Light and shadow were two sides of the same coin. When the light changed, the shadow had to too.

That meant that he was in for a rough time.

Since Ishida was submerged in a shadow, he was sent flying around the room as the lights danced across it. He was flung from one place to another mercilessly, as if he was on the world’s most intense and least fun roller coaster.

The integrity of shadow spikes was affected as well. They drew their strength from their source shadows, which kept changing positions and sometimes disappeared altogether. It did not take long for the spikes to fall apart.

Ishida was falling apart as well, at least emotionally. He was being tossed across so quickly that he was left disoriented and unbelievably nauseous.

The vomit that emerged from one of the shadows was a testament to that.

“Stop! Stop right now!” he yelled.

Xiao Yu held onto Fish Ball and shouted, “Do not stop! Go brighter, faster!”

Fish Ball chuckled self-indulgently. He looked very pleased with himself at the moment, a far cry from the pathetic figure he cut just minutes ago.

“That was just the sampler,” Fish Ball said, “Now, it’s time for him to have a taste of my Ultimate Light of Divinity and Justice!”

There was a hum in the air as Fish Ball seemed to explode with light that flitted and darted across the office with alarming alacrity. It would dim, brighten, and change directions dozens of times each second, causing the room to spin.

It caused a headache for anyone watching and meant a lot worse for Ishida.

His was being teleported from one shadow to another dozens of times in a second. It was too much for his body and mind to handle. He was getting dangerously disoriented and was starting to lose his grip on reality.

It felt very much like being a sock in a washing machine that spun at the speed of light.

Ishida threw himself out of the shadows. He collapsed onto the floor, where he started vomiting down his front.

The puking only stopped when Zhao Xue rushed forward and struck him in the head.

He fell into his own pool of vomit, unconscious.

Zhao Xue shot him a look of disgust.

Black Panther stopped next to her, studying Ishida curiously.

“So this is the guy who has been trying to kill us? Why don’t we just finish him now?” he suggested, pulling a small knife from his pocket.

Fish Ball had stopped emitting light by now. He was clearly exhausted. He had collapsed on his belly on top of Xiao Yu’s head.

“I can’t anymore. I’ve run out of power.”

He nudged his face against Xiao Yu’s lovingly.

“Xiao Yu, Xiao Yu,” he meowed, “I’ve been useful, haven’t I? Nekomata, help me talk to her.”

Nekomata had the ability to communicate with a person telepathically.

However, he did not want to put his power to use right now. Instead of asking for mercy on Fish Ball’s behalf, he simply smiled at him and said, “Hang in there. Xiao Yu is still pretty furious with you right now. Be a well-behaved and sturdy flashlight and she will forgive you one day.”

“Fine,” Fish Ball grumbled.

He let out a deep sigh, then willed himself to remain positive. With a determined nod, he held onto Xiao Yu’s head and let out two beams of light from his eyes, morphing into her personal flashlight once more.

Xiao Yu stopped next to Ishida’s unmoving body and kicked him.

“This guy is trouble. Even if we tie him up, he’ll be able to jump into a shadow and escape.”

As the trio deliberated over what they should do next, their surroundings started to change. The temperature was dipping. It was a steady drop that did not stop. It reached the point that when Zhao Xue exhaled, her breath came out as a white fog.

“Wait, something’s happening.”

Black Panther wrapped his arms around his body. “It’s gotten a lot colder.”

Their conversation was interrupted by the pitter patter of footsteps from a distance. All of them turned their heads towards the sound. They could make out the large figure of a man hurtling towards them clumsily.

Meng Hao let out a yelp of pain as he tripped and crashed into the ground.

He was in beast mode. Even though that meant that he was far stronger, swifter, and sturdier than any human, perhaps even Zhao Xue, he was severely injured. Blood stains marred his body. The exposed skin on his arms and back were bruised.

He lifted his head and looked into Zhao Xue's eyes.

His lips trembled as he spoke, "Run...run now!"

Zhao Xue had seen what Meng Hao looked like as a half-beast before. She recognized him and immediately helped him up.

"Meng Hao, what happened?"

He just shook his head. "Just go, quickly! He's coming!"

"Who's coming?" Zhao Xue asked, "Don't be afraid, Meng Hao. We've defeated the shadow man. We're powerful. We can protect ourselves."

She had hoped to comfort him, but he was not listening.

"Not shadows. It's the devil. He's coming for us. You've got to go," he repeated.

He tried to push her away.

Xiao Yu pursed her lips. "This guy's a bit of a wuss."

The moment she said that, more footsteps could be heard echoing from the darkness. The temperature in the room seemed to have dropped again. Black Panther shivered from the cold.

Meng Hao was trying to wring Zhao Xue's hands off now.

“He’s coming. The devil is coming! Go! You have to go!”

She blinked at him but did not make a move.

This angered him.

“You will regret it. All of you! He’ll kill each and every one of you!”

“Shut up,” Xiao Yu said, waving a hand in the air.

She used her phantom power to clamp his lips together.

Then, she turned her head to the source of the footsteps.

“It’s coming.”

As the sounds grew louder, the lights in the room seemed to dim and dull. Each thump caused a lightbulb in the ceiling to shatter and the room eventually descended into darkness once more.

Soon, the only light came from Fish Ball.

Chapter 394: Spirits

One year ago, a month after the awakening.

Tokyo, Japan.

Late night.

Matsuo’s eyelids fluttered open.

He wanted very much to go back to sleep, but his bladder could not be put on hold much longer. He sat up begrudgingly, then swung his legs to the floor.

As he got to his feet, he heard muffled, rapid footsteps from outside the room.

His eyes snapped wide open in alarm. He reached for the baseball bat that he kept by his bedside.

The bat was a staple in his room. Matsuo worked in a casino, so he had his share of unfortunate encounters with vengeful gamblers.

It served as a precaution for times like this.

He lived alone in the apartment, so the footsteps were a dead giveaway that there was an intruder. He was not sure if it was a gambler or a burglar, but he had to deal with it either way.

Matsuo tightened his grip on the baseball bat. He felt a lot less vulnerable with it in his hand. He tiptoed across the room and placed his ear against the door.

He listened.

The patter of footsteps would crescendo, then grow dull, before becoming louder again. It was as if someone was running laps in his living room, which was odd.

Who would break into his house for a little indoor jogging?

He was pulled out of his thoughts when the footsteps came to an abrupt stop.

The entire apartment had become dead silent.

Matsuo gulped. His throat was dry.

He was on edge. The air was thick with tension. The person outside had stopped moving and he did not know why.

He took a few deep breaths.

He intended to open the door just a little. He just needed a small gap that he could peek through to see what was happening.

Matsuo put his hand on the doorknob and turned.

He did so soundlessly.

He did a quick scan of the dark living room.

“No one...”

His gaze was sweeping through the living room again when a pair of bloodshot eyes appeared suddenly through the gap, staring right at him.

Matsuo let out a frightened shout and slammed the door shut.

He was still holding onto the baseball bat, but his hands were shaking so violently that he was about to drop it.

He just witnessed a real-life jump scare and it terrified him, but he recovered quickly. He was part of the Yakuza after all. He had balls of steel.

“A**hole! I’m going to kill you!” he cried, swinging the door open and charging into the living room.

He was ready to fight whoever was there, but what he saw caused the bat to slip from his fingers and crash onto the ground.

There was a young man in his room. He was doing warm-up exercises in sportswear.

Matsuo knew this man. He knew that he had lost quite a bit of money in the casino, which was why he threw himself off a building three days ago.

“What’s going on?”

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The darkness was spreading and it was frightening.

You could almost hear everyone’s heart begin to race.

As the footsteps grew closer, the room grew darker.

There was something sinister in the air.

Zhao Xue could feel countless eyes fixed on herself and her friends.

Then, the whispers began. The first few were difficult to detect, but the voices got louder and louder, talking rapidly at the same time and over each other.

Black Panther strained his ears to make out what they were saying, but he could not catch a thing. He gulped.

Every hair on Zhao Xue’s skin was standing on its end. Her diligent training had strengthened her in every way. She did not only grow physically stronger, her intuition was much more refined as well.

This was why she could sense the evil that was lurking in the darkness. It felt almost palpable, like a sharp blade that was dancing across her skin, ready to make a deep cut whenever it wanted to.

Soon, the entire office had become pitch black.

The only source of light was from Fish Ball.

“This does not feel right. It does not feel right at all,” Xiao Yu said.

Her expression was severe.

“I can feel immense energy from the darkness. They are coming.”

Zhao Xue turned to her. “They?”

Her attention was snapped back to a corner in the room, where it looked like something was churning within the dark.

A young man emerged. He walked towards them with quick and lithe steps.

He stopped when he spotted Ishida, whom was still passed out on the floor. He stared at his unconscious figure for a moment, then shook his head gravely.

“Useless.”

He turned his gaze to Zhao Xue, Black Panther, then Xiao Yu. There was surprise in his face when his eyes landed on the little girl.

“Oh? I never knew there were apostles like this.”

He then looked right at Nekomata.

“Ah, seems like the power belongs to this cat.”

Nekomata was shaken.

In spirit form, he was incorporeal. He could not be seen or touched. In fact, no one had ever seen him in this form before.

How could the man standing before him be able to do so?

Meng Hao’s response to the man was far more dramatic than anyone else’s. His entire body had begun to tremble. His eyes were shining with fear.

The man let out a sigh. “I really don’t want to do this, so why does everyone force me to resort to it? Why does each and every one of you yearn to be a hero?”

As he spoke, the evil in the darkness started to stir. It was growing stronger and Zhao Xue was having a hard time curbing her instinctive need to attack him.

She was terrified. Her pupils had contracted into pinpoints when she looked at him. However, deep in her gut, she knew she had to stop him.

Zhao Xue took a step forward and planted her foot deep into the ground, rupturing the cement beneath her. She used that force to propel herself towards the man at lightning speed.

She threw a punch in his face.

Zhao Xue could deliver punches that smashed concrete walls into pieces.

However, even though she had thrown all her energy into this one, it could not reach the man.

Her mouth opened in horror when she saw what was keeping her away from him.

Countless black figures had appeared in front of the man, protecting him.

She struck again with her other first. It was stopped by another team of black figures.

“Watch out!” Zhao Xue heard Xiao Yu called out, “Those are spirits!”

At the same time, Xiao Yu used all the phantom energy that she could muster to grip the mysterious young man, squeezing him.

More dark figures appeared. They surrounded the man, trying to block him from harm’s way.

Xiao Yu turned them into dust before sending a blast of energy straight at the man.

His body started to crack from the impact. Within seconds, the ripped pieces floated into the air and dissolved into nothing.

Soon, however, another figure emerged from the darkness, taking the place of the young man.

This time, it was a teenager. He was still wearing his school uniform. A look of annoyance crossed his face.

“Why must you resist?” he asked.

Xiao Yu, Zhao Xue, and Nekomata launched attacks on him at the same time.

The teenage boy did not flinch. He remained rooted to the spot while legions of spirits sprung from the ground and stood in front of him, deflecting the attack.

Fish Ball released a flood of light in an attempt to drive the darkness away.

It did not work.

There was no way he would have known that the darkness they saw was not real. It was conjured in their minds. It was but an illusion.

The teenager laughed at Xiao Yu and Zhao Xue’s dogged determination in taking him down.

“That’s quite a show you’ve put together,” he said mockingly, “Unfortunately, it’s time for curtain call.”

He raised a hand and snapped his fingers.

The room began to echo with the wails and moans of a thousand voices.

Xiao Yu found herself momentarily paralyzed as a cloud of grey gas left her body and traveled toward the teenager. When it reached him, it began swirling and molding into the shape of a person.

As the swirling sped up, the shape gradually became more defined. Eventually, it took on the appearance of Xiao Yu.

More clouds of grey were shooting towards the teenager. They too took on the appearance of different people, forming a barricade of ghostly spirits.

It was a sight to behold in the worst way imaginable.

They looked like an army of the undead.

A collective shiver shook Xiao Yu, Nekomata, Fish Ball, Noodle, Zhao Xue, and Black Panther. There was a prickle behind the back of their necks.

The teenage boy smiled indulgently. "It's over."

In an instant, thousands of the spirits swooped down on the gang, swallowing them whole.

Chapter 395: Combine Forces

Tokyo, Japan.

One week after Matsuo's supernatural encounter.

Matsuo shuffled to his bedroom door at five in the morning. He opened it to reveal the legion of spirits that saturated his living room.

Some of them, like his first ever visitor, were doing warm-up exercises. Some were watching TV. A few were playing video games. There was even one rummaging through the refrigerator for something to eat.

Matsuo gulped.

This was the first weekend after the incident.

In the past week, spirits of the gamblers he met at work have begun taking residence in his home.

Matsuo was not taking this particularly well.

His eyes were bloodshot. There were dark purple circles underneath them. They stood out against his sickly pale skin.

His new housemates had made it impossible for him to sleep well.

Matsuo stared at the spirits that were moving around his living room, acting as if they owned the place.

“What do you want from me?!” he shouted, “I’ve given you incense offerings! I’ve sent money to your families! What more do you want? Yes, I won your money, but it’s not like I forced you to gamble! It was your darn choice!”

He punctuated his exclamation with a roar of frustration. However, loud as it was, none of the spirits turned their heads or showed any indication that they heard him.

Matsuo fell to his knees. He started crying.

“What does all this mean?”

“What must I do for you to leave me alone?”

Meow.

Before he could sink even deeper in despair, an orange tabby had appeared before him. It rubbed the top of its head against the hem of Matsuo’s trousers.

“Mo?”

A small smile spread across Matsuo’s lips as he petted the cat.

“Are you hungry? I’ll fix you up with some nice cat food.”

*

A tsunami of spirits crashed into them.

Individually, the spirits were not much of a threat. They could be shattered fairly easily.

Collectively, however, they were a force to be reckoned with. Xiao Yu, Zhao Xue, and Black Panther worked together to fight them back, but they found themselves drowning in the endless waves of spirits.

Zhao Xue and Black Panther were beginning to find it difficult to breathe.

Xiao Yu and Nekomata kept hurling surges of specter energy at the spirits. It would burn holes in their congregation, but those cavities were filled up quickly with new spirits.

It felt as if the souls of the undead were bent on dragging them to hell.

The spirits were drawing unbearably closer.

One of them reached out and wrapped his hand around Zhao Xue’s wrist. She turned and punched him, instantly breaking him into pieces.

Soon, however, a second spirit held onto her, followed by a third. They held onto her shoulder, her calf, and anything they could get their waxen hands on.

Noodle barked. He bit one of the spirits that was clinging to Zhao Xue’s leg and that turned him into a target as well. Within seconds, dozens of other spirits surrounded him and he disappeared from view.

Fish Ball continued to shine like a lighthouse in the misty waters. However, the light was useless at repelling the spirits. It was only a matter of time before he too was swallowed.

The spirits kept coming. They clutched onto every part of Zhao Xue's body and covered her eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. They weighed her down, like rocks in the pockets of a drowning woman.

Her movements became sluggish. Each action took an extraordinary amount of effort to do. She could even feel her body grow colder.

"Am I...Am I dying?"

Just as the spirits were about to completely overwhelm them, a powerful blast of energy erupted from Xiao Yu. It spread out across the room at an alarming rate, wiping out every spirit that it came in contact with.

Even Nekomata, Noodle, Zhao Xue, and Black Panther collapsed onto the ground when it reached them.

They were out cold.

Xiao Yu let out a sob.

That was one of the most terrifying experiences she had ever had in her life. She reached into her shirt pocket for the choker and stared at it.

"Thank God this thing works."

This was, of course, the illusory choker that Zhao Yao had given her. Elizabeth's delusive power to rob the five senses was sealed into it.

This power worked on all forms of life, spirits included. Zhao Yao had conned the troublemaking one from the Xiao Mansion into the extradimensional belly with this same method. At that time, he had not even mastered control of all five senses.

Now, his power had evolved into something a lot more powerful. The choker contained that very power, which was why the spirits had all but dissipated and her teammates were still unconscious.

Xiao Yu made no move to rouse them. Her top priority was to find the apostle whom had been controlling that army of spirits.

She used her specter powers to levitate every chair and table in the office, but there was no one in sight.

“The spirits are wiped out, which means that the apostle must have been hit too. But where is he..?”

Xiao Yu furrowed her brows. She had no choice but to retract the power of the illusory choker and shake her teammates awake. They had to get the hell out of here before their mysterious enemy came back.

She had just witnessed first-hand the immense amount of power this apostle held. Even with Nekomata’s skill, she could never conjure real spirits, much less the thousands that the enemy had controlled.

The enemy was impossible to beat.

This thought reminded Xiao Yu of the opponent they had won. She turned her head and her gaze landed on the now empty space that Ishida had occupied.

He was gone.

“Rescued? That must have happened before I used the choker. This spells trouble...”

*

“How did she relinquish my control of the spirits? What sort of power is that?”

The apparition of a teenage girl was standing on a balcony, musing about what had just happened. She looked down at Ishida, who was lying by her feet.

“At least I got this idiot out.”

She kicked him a few times and only stopped when he began to stir.

The moment he regained consciousness, he activated his power and dived straight into the nearest shadow.

The spirit gave him a look.

“Calm down. I’m not the enemy,” she said, “I’m here to help. If you want to complete Matsuo’s mission and see your two adorable assistants, we’re going to have to work together.”

“What have you done to Onitsuka and Sato?” Ishida asked quietly.

She gave him a full-bodied shrug. “Nothing. At least for now. I need you to do a little experiment for me. I need you to test if that pesky little girl’s powers affect you.”

“And why would I do that?”

The teenager sighed. “Why won’t any of you listen to me? Must I turn you into ghosts before you cooperate?”

Ishida’s mouth fell open as three figures materialized in the air. At first, they were just faceless outlines. However, they soon took on the appearance of Sato, Onitsuka, and Ishida.

“Speaking of, I’ve got to thank you for accepting my money.”

The tremor in Ishida’s voice could not be concealed. “What the hell do you want?”

“I don’t want anything at all, really. You were the one who left me with no choice. Your people brought a spy into the picture. We’ve got no other way out.”

*

Xiao Yu and the gang were racing down the endless flights of stairs in the building.

More accurately, Xiao Yu and Nekomata were flying down the stairs. Their feet never touched the ground. They were dragging Fish Ball and Noodle closely behind them with their powers.

Zhao Xue was carrying Black Panther on her back. She was sprinting like a contestant in a 100m race.

“Why are we running?” she shouted.

“I have a very bad feeling about what’s coming for us,” Xiao Yu replied, “If the shadow apostle and spirit apostle combined forces, I’m afraid...”

Xiao Yu had knocked out everyone at the scene by robbing their five senses. However, the spirit apostle had not been one of them. It meant that he was not physically in the office, but controlling the spirit army from a distance.

This meant that they could not hurt him or her.

Also, Xiao Yu has no clue if the choker worked on Ishida when he was hidden in a shadow. If it did not and the two apostles attacked them at the same time, they would be done for.

Just as the thought crossed her mind, countless shadow spikes appeared before them.

Her worst fear had come true.

Chapter 396: Predicament

“He’s won again.”

“See, I told you he was going to win!”

“Let’s hear it one more time for the God of Gamblers!”

Matsuo smirked as the crowd went wild. They cheered and applauded for him and lauded him as a genius. They had no clue that he was getting help from a few friends.

Ghostly figures gathered around the betting table, gliding from left to right. They were Matsuo's spies. They made sure he knew the exact cards that were dealt to each of his opponents.

"It's no big deal," Matsuo shrugged.

As always, the trip to the casino was fruitful. He returned to his new home, a swanky mansion, with a literal bag of cash. He walked through the doors happily, not sparing a second glance at the dozens of spirits that darted around the place.

He was neither fearful or surprised by their presence.

Matsuo turned back when he heard a few rapid knocks on the door. He looked through the peephole and whatever he saw made him smile.

He swung the door open.

One by one, men whom he had gambled with entered his abode. They had all lost to him and owed him a sizeable amount of money.

They looked pretty much the same as they did in the casino, except they were clearly not human anymore. They looked like the spirits that roamed his house. Their faces were waxen and bloodless. Green smoke obscured the lower half of their bodies. They had no feet in sight.

After they had all entered the house, a quiet meow filled the air.

Matsuo squatted next to Mo and scratched the back of its ears. He then scooped it into his arms and headed to the kitchen.

Mo looked at up him eagerly. Matsuo looked down at the cat, a strange grin plastered on his face.

"Momo, why don't we make a bet? Tell me, which of these three bowls has cat food?"

*

The sudden reemergence of shadow spikes made Xiao Yu skid to a stop. She grabbed Fish Ball and he immediately lit up the stairway, driving the spikes back into the darkness.

Unfortunately, this time, the shadows were not their only enemy.

Countless spirits had begun to manifest as well. They all shared the same pallid complexion, creepy grin, and a spine-chilling look of desire in their eyes. They quickly closed in on the gang.

Xiao Yu held onto the choker. She hesitated for a beat before activating it.

In an instant, the spirits dissipated and disappeared from view. Her teammates were knocked out cold once again as well.

However, the shadows that filled the room were still morphing and growing. Xiao Yu could hear her heart hammering in her ears as a new batch of spikes rose from the darkness and shot right at Fish Ball.

“Darn it.”

Xiao Yu’s worst fear had come true. The choker’s power worked on all forms of life in all states and stages. That included spirits and ghosts. However, when Ishida merged into one with the shadows, he no longer had a life form. He was part of an inanimate object and thus, remained unaffected.

Xiao Yu was in quite the predicament. If she used the choker to drive the spirits away, Fish Ball would be knocked out too. Without Fish Ball’s light, the shadow spikes could attack. For her cat to regain consciousness and illuminate the room, she would have to deactivate the choker, but then the spirits could come back and attack them.

In the end, she was left with no choice but to repeatedly turn the choker’s powers on and off. When the spirits got too close, she would activate it and knock everyone out. Then, when the shadow spikes rained on them, she would switch it off and wake Fish Ball.

It was the only solution she could think of, but it was not a good one.

The spirits were starting to regroup and gang up on them faster and faster. It was as if they knew what she was up to. They knew that she would turn it off. She would dive straight back into action the moment that happened.

Xiao Yu felt like she was in the eye of a storm. Things might be barely okay now, but she knew that the winds will pick up and it will all spin out of control very, very soon.

Black Panther yelled from across the stairway, “Guys, look at that!”

The gang followed his gaze and met the sight of Zhao Xue’s spirit hightailing towards them.

Xiao Yu paled. “These are not normal spirits. They’re not really ghosts. What exactly is this apostle’s power?”

Outside, innumerable wisps of grey smoke were darting from all corners of the city towards the office building. As they got closer, the smoke would be molded into the shape of human figures. They looked very much like the spirits that were attacking Xiao Yu.

There were more than enough of them to engulf the gang and bury them alive.

However, only a trickle of them was sent into the building at any one time. This was not a mistake. It was done on purpose.

The spirits were not meant to destroy Xiao Yu, Zhao Xue, and Black Panther. They were supposed to exhaust them.

*

Fatty gaped at the sight of the spirits swooping about overhead.

He was one of the apostle officers who worked closely with Lin Chen and Inspector Ho. He gulped as he spotted more and more ghostly figures crowding around the building.

The nature of the spirits was similar to that of Nekomata and Xiao Yu's. They could switch between corporeal and incorporeal states. For them to make physical contact with any object at all, they would have to take on a material form. In turn, they could be touched and hurt as well.

“Jesus. That fella had been in there for just minutes. How did he end up stirring so much s**t so quickly?”

By now, the streets that sat on the circumference of the building had all been blocked. Ten police cars were parked by the entrance. The SWAT squad hurried out of them and moved quickly to surround all entrances and exits. Each officer was wearing a ballistic vest. Some donned full riot gear. They all held a weapon in hand. Snipers were situated on the roof of surrounding high-rises. Helicopters were rattling above the scene.

The fat apostle officer was named Xiao Cong. He had been tailing Onitsuka and Sato with his colleague, Ice, when they found out the duo had attacked Meng Hao and his friends.

They had expected them to return to their hideout, but they led them to this peer-to-peer lending platform's office instead.

Inspector Ho had instructed Xiao Cong and Ice to remain there and stake out. He believed that there might be bigger fish to catch and he was right. Unfortunately, the fish turned out to be a bit too big and slippery. A series of strange events unfurled, each more insane than the previous.

They found themselves at a loss on how to stay on top of the situation.

By the time the SWAT team and apostle officers arrived at the scene, spirits were already clinging onto more than half the building.

Regular explosions could be heard coming from inside, which undoubtedly meant that something serious was going down.

Inspector Ho studied the building, brows furrowed. “What's happening right now?”

Lin Chen responded immediately. “The Japanese apostles are in there. I don't think this is entirely their doing though. Every window has been shut, so we can't see inside. Every time one of us tries to enter the building, one of those spirits would attack. All networks in the building are down as well, so we have no clue what exactly is going on.”

“Are there any hostages?”

“According to security records, at least 20 people have entered the building. Not one of them have made it out.”

*

“A traffic jam now? What?”

Zhao Yao slowed the Panamera as he approached a red light. A quick glance at the GPS showed him that every road heading to the office building was jammed.

A wisp of smoke emerged from his body and soared out of the car, heading straight to the same place he was going to.

No one in the car saw this.

Zhao Yao looked in the rearview mirror. There were cars getting closer to him. If the traffic ahead was as awful as the GPS indicated, it would be dangerous for the Panamera to remain invisible. It would be a matter of time before someone crashed into him.

“Thankfully it’s not that much further.”

He parked the car and got out with the debt collectors. He then turned invisible and swallowed the car into the extradimensional belly.

The deflective field was then turned on, binding them together in a protective bubble.

The debt collectors screamed in terror as Zhao Yao dragged them along the shortcut to the office, which involved leaping from roof to roof.

Zhao Yao skidded to a halt when he saw the officers, police cars, and helicopters that surrounded the building. His mouth fell open when he saw the spirits that circled it.

“Zhao Yao, what’s going on?” Even Roly Poly was in shock.

“Well, as the saying goes, money can make ghosts turn millstones 1 .”

Chapter 397: Up the Stairs

“Here.”

“This one.”

“It should be here this time.”

A sheen of cold sweat was on Matsuo’s forehead. He studied the cat. It had managed to correctly identify the bowl that contained food every single time.

He jumped. “Momo, did you just laugh at me?”

The ginger cat looked up at him innocently.

Matsuo let out a ragged sigh of relief.

“Silly me. Cats don’t smile. We’re done for tonight. Let’s continue playing tomorrow.”

The next day, he won every game he tried his hand at. Winning had become the norm and it no longer excited him like it used to.

At night, he played the same guessing game with Momo. It was supposed to be fun, but it did not feel fun. In fact, being with Momo made the hairs on the back of his neck stand.

Matsuo swore that he could see Momo smiling at him from the corner of his eyes. However, every time he tried to take a closer look, the cat’s expression was blank.

He fell into a fitful sleep. He stirred when his body sunk deeper into the mattress. It felt like there was a weight on him and it was pushing him down.

Matsuo's eyes snapped open to meet a pair of bright green eyes staring right back. There was a crinkle in the corner of the eyes, as if its owner was grinning from ear to ear.

He let out a terrified scream.

Meow~

"Momo? What are you doing in my room?" Matsuo stammered, "Did I forget to shut the door?"

That was but the first of a series of frightening events.

Shortly after, when Matsuo was bathing, he spotted the same pair of green eyes in the gap between the shower curtain and the tiled wall.

The once aquaphobic Momo had actually ventured into the bathroom to peep on him.

The cat did not turn away or hide when Matsuo saw it. Instead, it continued to stare, lips parted in a sinister smile. For some reason, it reminded him of the creepy 80-year-old grannies in horror movies.

"Momo!" Matsuo cried, "You're not allowed in here! Get out!"

That night, he checked if the door was locked multiple times before he headed to bed.

Unfortunately, that was not a good enough deterrence. Weird s**t kept happening.

His slumber was disturbed when the sound of children laughing reached his ears. The giggles were so clear and felt too close.

His eyes snapped open.

Once again, a familiar pair of bright, green eyes looked into his. Beneath it was a wide, open mouth that was raised in the corners. No sound came from it, but it looked like it should emit raucous laughter.

“Ah!” Matsuo screamed, flinging Momo off his body and across the room.

He saw Momo streak out of the door. He shut it with a loud bang.

Panting, Matsuo turned around and propped his back against the door.

His eyes landed on the orange cat that was sprawled across his bed, staring at him, mouth open in silent laughter.

*

A deep groove was etched between Zhao Yao’s knitted eyebrows.

He studied the building before him, which was swarming with spirits.

“You guys stay here.”

With that, he snapped his fingers and robbed the debt collector of their senses. They instantly fell into a heap on the ground, completely unconscious.

He sent a telepathic message to his cats, “Activate supercat armor.”

His call was answered quickly. One by one, his team of supercats emerged from his mouth. The last item to appear was a long, black robe.

Zhao Yao draped it over his shoulders in one swift motion.

The cats scrambled to their rightful positions in seconds. Once Roly Poly made Zhao Yao’s head invisible, he took one leap and flew straight to the building’s entrance.

He landed gracefully, but the impact of his arrival was far from elegant. The ground beneath his feet cracked from the collision, creating a resounding boom.

There was an echo of clicks as every SWAT officer cocked their weapon and pointed it at him.

Zhao Yao did not even throw a glance their way. His eyes were firmly set on the building that was in front of him.

“I’m going in to take a look,” he announced, “Stay outside and do not do anything stupid.”

Inspector Ho motioned for his team to stand down.

He shouted at the Headless Horseman, “Do you know what’s happening in there?”

“Nope,” Zhao Yao replied, popping the ‘p’ at the end of the word.

He charged towards the front door, breaking it down with ease. A swarm of spirits tried to smother him, but they were reduced to dust before they could even reach him.

Within seconds, the Headless Horseman had turned a corner and disappeared from view.

“Who is that?” an officer asked Inspector Ho, “Is it okay for us to just let him in without question?”

The inspector looked up at the legion of spirits that circled the office. He rubbed the top of his bald head thoughtfully.

“If he can’t solve this, no one can.”

*

The spirit of the teenage girl shut her eyes.

She was still up on the balcony. Even here, she could access what her spirit army was seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. She could even control their actions and make them behave as she wished.

Everything that had gone down in the office building was her handiwork.

Xiao Yu and her friends were being cornered into defeat. It was just a matter of time before they were destroyed.

The building was surrounded by law enforcement, but that did not pose too much of an issue. They could not stop her from leaving even if they wanted to. Anyone with a healthy respect for and fear of death would not dare enter the building either.

However...

“Huh?” she tilted her head, puzzled.

She cut from the point of view of one spirit to another, trying to get a better glimpse of the man in black that had broken into the building.

She laughed, “Seems like there are some who do not fear death.”

She smiled coldly as she commanded a large horde of spirits to attack the Headless Horseman. She knew this was what he called from snippets of the SWAT team’s conversation.

It did not take long for him to wipe the smug smile off her face.

The Horseman did not panic as the spirits closed in on him. In fact, he seemed to ignore them completely. He focused on racing up the stairs at an unbelievable pace.

Not one spirit could get closer than five meters from him. The ones that reached that small radius would instantly dissolve without a trace.

Her eyes narrowed. “He doesn’t even have to do anything to destroy them. How is this possible?”

She knew she had to up her game.

A dozen spirits emerged from the sea of ghostly figures. They looked different. They looked a lot more concrete and solid than their incorporeal counterparts. Their eyes were shining with an eerie green light.

They headed straight for the Headless Horseman.

Some of the spirits in her legion had superpowers. Since she could command them to use their powers as if they were just another limb.

The special dozen launched themselves at the Headless Horseman, each initiating their powers. There were flashes of fire, lightning bolts, force fields, arrows, and all sorts of other things hurled his way.

This time, she finally got the Horseman's attention.

He did not seem worried or afraid. Instead, he simply stopped moving to stare at the incoming assault.

"Oh?" he muttered.

In the next moment, the collision happened.

A profusion of powers hit the Headless Horseman, but he remained rooted on the spot, unaffected and unfazed. It was as if he was a black hole and he was swallowing all the powers whole.

They could not inflict any damage on him at all.

In response, he raised his right fist and threw a punch in the direction of the dozen. The force of the punch sliced through every power that was still coming his way and reached the spirits, banishing them in an instant.

Having hit its targets, the remaining energy splintered in all directions, destroying every wall that stood in its path. It was completely spent when a truck-sized hole was made in one of the building's exterior walls.

A cacophony of cement and plaster rained onto the ground.

The teenager did not look pleased at all.

She sent the spirits to call for Ishida.

“Leave the two girls. We’ve got bigger problems on our hands.”

Tokyo.

Matsuo entered a deserted alley.

He looked like crap. All the color had drained from his face, leaving him with a creepily waxy skin texture. The bags under his eyes were so heavy they touched the top of his cheeks. He looked like he was on the verge of a mental breakdown.

He set his pet carrier on the ground.

Momo was inside.

He considered unzipping it and letting the cat out, but thought better of it.

“Momo, be good and stay here, alright? I’m sure you’ll be adopted in no time,” he said to the bag.

Then, he left.

The following days felt like a reprieve. It was like the sun had finally peeked through the clouds that had darkened his life with despair.

Without Momo's eyes trained on him every night, he could finally sleep in peace. Even the spirits that hung out around his house had vanished. Their disappearance meant that his windfall had come to an end, but that was alright. He had won enough. All he wanted now was to lead an ordinary life.

Unfortunately, that was not what fate had in store for him.

One night, he was awakened by loud meowing. His first thought was that it must have been the stray cats in his neighborhood.

That was quickly dispelled because the meows grew steadily louder. In a matter of seconds, it sounded like they were coming from inside the bedroom.

Matsuo shot out of bed and switched on the lights. He circled his room, but there was no ginger cat in sight.

He shook his head. "My mind must be playing tricks on me."

He slumped onto the edge of his bed. The open drawer by his bedside caught his eye. He did not remember leaving it agape like this.

When he leaned in for a closer look, a pair of bright, green eyes appeared in the gap.

Matsuo screamed. He yanked open the drawer, but there was no cat inside.

His could hear his heart hammering in his ears.

He swallowed hard. "My eyes must be playing tricks on me."

He relaxed on the bed, stretching his arms across the quilt. He felt his fingers graze something.

It was cat litter.

He should have thrown away every cat-related item in his home.

*

The teenage girl was still on the roof, much like a puppet master controlling her little spirit marionettes. She could see everything that was happening in the office building vicariously through them.

First, she commanded Ishida to deal with the Headless Horseman. Then, she sent Ishida's spirit after Xiao Yu and friends.

Ishida's spirit was not as powerful as the real deal. However, it was enough to keep Xiao Yu under its thumb, especially when it was assisted by a legion of spirits.

This meant that she could focus all her energy and attention on the Headless Horseman. Ishida was currently leading an army of the undead to close in on him.

"This Headless Horseman has some kind of impenetrable protection around him. Physical attacks are of no use. Ishida's shadows, however, might be our way to reach him. There's no way his defences can grasp a shadow."

"I'll have to cover Ishida so that can reach any part of his body. His back, neck, chin, and even the shadow cast in his mouth are all prime spots for attack."

She wasted no time in putting this into action.

At first, the plan was executed smoothly. The flurry of spirits obscured Ishida from view. While the Horseman was busy waving them away, Ishida managed to sneak into a shadow latched onto the small of his body.

He wanted to get closer, but the absence of a head greatly reduced the possible surface area for shadows to grow.

"This looks like some kind of invisibility charm," the teenager said coldly, "Where you are is good enough. Do it now. Kill him."

A dozen spikes started to peel from the shadows on his back. They crawled along his skin, trying to climb their way up the Horseman's neck.

The spikes moved furtively, but there was no way they could escape Zhao Yao's notice. He had the power of perception of five supercats after all.

Before they could strike, he took a small step back and vanished.

Ishida and his shadows disappeared as well.

"Ishida? Ishida, where are you?" the girl called out in Japanese, using her spirit army as a communication medium.

There was no response.

"Damn it! What kind of power was that? How could they have disappeared together?"

The next moment, the Headless Horseman had crossed the threshold of his dimension doorway. To the girl, it looked like he materialized from thin air.

Ishida was still nowhere in sight.

*

In the extradimensional belly, Ishida had curled up into a ball in a corner.

He was doused in the shadows cast by the team of supercats that surrounded him.

There was a look of despair in his eyes.

He did not realize that he was trembling.

*

"Goddammit!" the girl cursed, brows knitted, "You are forcing me to do this!"

Another horde of the undead soared through the night sky, breaking the building's glass windows to get to the Headless Horseman.

A simple wave from his hand was enough to vaporize the spirits, revealing the bond that they had been carrying. They fell to the ground and exploded one by one, blowing up everything in the way.

As if the damage done was not enough, more droves of kamikaze spirits entered the landing, raining more bombs on the Horseman.

The teenager's spirit cackled at the sight.

"You are going to die!" she laughed, "This is the ultimate combination of technology and superpowers. There's no way you can escape me now!"

There was no way she could have foreseen what would happen next.

Columns of golden light rushed to the sky, like a bridge to heaven. Now that Zhao Yao had upgraded the deflective field, it could span an impressive 30-meter radius. By activating a power-up card on top of that, its reach extended to an astonishing 300-meter radius.

The building was bathed in a golden glow. The girl gawked as two giant palms of gold appeared. They closed in on her kamikaze squad, scooping the bombs into their palms. Then, they clenched into fists.

Loud rumbling emerged from the giant hands. It was clear that the bombs had started detonating inside them. Flashes of light would peek through the gaps between the huge fingers, but they would dissipate as quickly as they appeared. There was no sign that the hands would crack or dissolve. Not a single finger would budge.

The teenage girl's mouth hung wide open. "How...how can this be?"

She was not the only one in a state of shock.

Inspector Ho, Lin Chen, and the rest of the apostle officers and SWAT team stared up at the golden halo that enveloped the building.

The inspector's gaze traveled to the giant palms.

"This rascal...He's gotten stronger again," he muttered under his breath.

The Headless Horseman looked up. He was only halfway up the building. He estimated that there were at least 12 more stories to cover.

He cast Roly Poly's power, vanishing the floors, walls, and ceilings of each level one by one.

Within seconds, he had a clear view of everything that was happening within the building. He could see everything, from Xiao Yu's heated battle against the spirits, to the teenage girl's spirit hiding on the roof, and even Black Panther's unconscious buddies.

"Now this is much better," Zhao Yao nodded to himself.

The fact that every surface in the building had suddenly become invisible stopped everyone in their tracks.

Xiao Yu and Zhao Xue's arms fell to their sides, mouths wide open. They glanced around nervously and their eyes landed on the dazzling golden light that cloaked the building.

They then looked down in unison to see the Headless Horseman eight floors beneath them.

Zhao Xue's eyes widened. She thought, "This power...this outfit...is Guang Yu here?"

Xiao Yu let out a sigh. She thought, "Zhao Yao's here too? And kicking up quite the fuss too. He must have borrowed truckloads of money."

Zhao Yao spotted the wave of spirits that surrounded his sister and auntie. He flung his wrist in their direction, sending the eye of the golden glow towards them. With the light fixed on them, the spirits disbanded and vanished.

Once that was settled, the teenage girl felt the Horseman's turn to her. He might be headless, but she had the unnerving feeling that he was locking eyes with her.

"This is your doing, isn't it?"

The Horseman raised both hands towards the girl, then pulled them apart, as if he wanted to rip something in two.

A flash of golden light appeared, followed by a tremendous explosion.

The Horseman had tunneled a hole that spanned 12 floors, creating a channel between him and the spirit of the teenage girl.

Chapter 399: No Way Out

Matsuo trudged to the front door and fasten the dozens of locks latched on it. Then, he diligently bolted the locks on the windows, kitchen door, living room door, and finally, his bedroom door.

He climbed into bed and looked up at the ceiling.

All the lights in the room were left switched on. They illuminated his bloodshot eyes and the dark circles hanging heavily beneath them. Even with the lights turned off, you could see how awful he looked.

Every crack and gap that was in the bedroom had been stuffed with newspaper or tissue paper. Even so, Matsuo felt that a pair of green eyes would appear.

Exhausted, he eventually fell into an uneasy sleep.

He woke when he heard a crisp voice calling for him.

"Matsuo, come play with me."

“Matsuo, can you hear me?”

“Matsuo, let’s play one more round, shall we?”

Matsuo fought to lift his heavy eyelids.

“Who’s there? Who’s calling me?” he murmured.

When he finally opened his eyes, he made out Momo’s figure in front of him, rubbing the top of its head against him.

“Momo? Why are you here again?”

“Matsuo, I’m here to play with you,” the ginger cat smiled, eyes sparkling with joy, “Matsuo, you finally understand what I’m saying!”

“I...I understand you?” Matsuo spoke slowly, brows knitted together.

He lifted his head and looked at his reflection in the mirror.

The image staring back was a nightmarish version of himself. His face was pallid and waxy, eyes glowing with a faint, green glimmer. The corners of his lips were turned up in a mocking smile.

Matsuo jumped backward in fear. He thought his back would hit the wall, but he fell through it and landed on the street instead.

He looked down at his body.

“I...I’ve become a ghost?”

He heard a door open. He turned his head towards it the sound. A man had swung open the room door. Exhaustion marred his facial features. The bags under his eyes were so swollen they looked like bruises.

“Why? Why does he get to be alive while I have to be a ghost?”

There was a ferocity in his expression. The green glow in his eyes grew brighter. He edged forward, looking through a crack in the wall to spy on the Matsuo that was still in the house.

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The Headless Horseman pulled both arms outwards and backwards, hurtling himself up 12 floors, eyes locked on the spirit of the teenage girl on the roof.

“S**t!” she cursed, quickly beckoning the last of the spirits towards her.

They formed a wall of protection around her.

She was fast, but the Headless Horseman was faster. Before anyone could see what he was doing, he had appeared next to the girl.

“Gotcha!”

She blanched visibly as the spirits lunged at the Horseman.

“There’s no point fighting me,” he smiled.

He raised a hand and stretched five fingers, then clawed at the air. In an instant, a spark of golden light appeared and expanded, bursting the spirits that were coming his way.

He turned to face the spirit of the teenage girl. There was an invisible force that blossomed around him.

He cut to Elizabeth’s power.

“Deprive all five senses.”

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“Ishida is unreachable.”

“The kamikaze spirits have been destroyed.”

“The little girl and her friends have been saved.”

“All hostages have been rescued.”

“All spirits are gone.”

“Invisibility, teleportation, force fields, telekinesis, superhuman reflexes and a heck of a ton of experience in superpower combat.”

“He can probably cause more damage than a missile, can’t he?”

“He is a monster.”

Matsuo shook his head gravely, watching the battle unfold below.”

“I’m glad I’m up here in the sky. If he gets his hands on me, he’ll probably crush me to bits.”

He was hovering hundreds of meters above ground, a human figure floating in the ink black sky. He had been up here all along, right from when the first attack against Xiao Yu and Zhao Xue began.

He was not just a spectator. He was the mastermind. Every spirit and every assail was his single-handed doing. Even the spirit of the teenage girl was his puppet. He had lost control of her when two red specks of light appeared in the empty space where the Horseman’s head should have been.

Matsuo’s head was spinning. Since the Horseman’s appearance, he had been coming up with ways to defeat him. Unfortunately, none of his attempts had worked.

He knew now that the gap between himself and his opponent was far too large. There was no way to beat him tonight.

Matsuo sighed, "It's over."

He could not help the disappointment that bubbled in his chest. He had worked very hard to get to where he was today, but that was all going down the drain.

"But that's alright. A lot of people still owe me money. As long as I'm still alive, I'll have countless of chances to try again. Till next time, Headless Horseman."

As Matsuo began to glide away, a series of explosions sounded from the ground. Each boom was louder than the one before.

His eyes widened as he looked below. "What?"

A long and thin black shadow was charging rapidly towards him, like a flash of dark lightning.

"It's the Horseman" Matsuo was beginning to panic for the first time, "How did he know I was here?"

Zhao Yao had expected that the real teenage girl would appear after her spirit form had been robbed of her senses. When that did not happen, he suspected that she was not the apostle behind this mess.

He squinted his eyes and began studying the surroundings carefully. Armed with superhuman vision, he could see the black spot that hovered above them far away.

Zhao Yao fetched up Sphinx cat from the belly. The muscular cat raised him easily, as if he was lifting an onion, not a human being 20 times his size. Then, he catapulted him into the sky like a cannonball.

"Goddammit," Matsuo seethed.

He quickly dodged the incoming Horseman, whom zoomed past him into the dark of the night.

Matsuo was just about to heave a sigh of relief when a column of golden light cut through the sky and coiled around him.

“Dematerialize!” Matsuo commanded, instantly reducing his tactile form to an incorporeal one.

He would not be able to touch or be touched now. He would be unable to use his other powers in this state, but he would be safe from all physical attacks, including the beam of light that had held him in place.

Matsuo slid through its grasp easily, falling towards the ground.

He let out the sigh that was caught in his throat. The distance between himself and the Horseman grew greater and greater.

“See you next time, Headless Horseman,” he smirked.

He was still falling, but that did not worry him. He was not going to hit the ground and go splat. Instead, he would enter the underworld, where no human would be able to catch him.

His gloating came to an abrupt end when time came to a standstill.

Zhao Yao planted both feet firmly on the golden beam that Ares had created. He used it like a bridge to get to the place where he had caught Matsuo.

He stood at that spot and used his hands to measure the distance.

“He probably went that way,” he concluded.

Zhao Yao redeemed the ghastly cat princess dress, then placed three dimension doorways in the path that his opponent should be on.

When time resumed again, Matsuo was still in the process of falling towards the ground. He was still gloating over his escape from the clutches of the Horseman.

The smug smile was wiped off his face when everything went pitch black for a moment. When he could see again, he found that he had entered a strange dimension.

Chapter 400: Bring Them Away!

When time resumed, Zhao Yao had already tossed Matsuo into the extradimensional belly. Zhao Yao reached his arm forward as Ares's deflective field grabbed hold of him before hurling their bodies towards the night sky.

After just a few seconds, Zhao Yao's timefreeze cooldown had already expired. Once again, the world came to a standstill. Zhao Yao then sprinted along the surface of the golden deflective field as he returned to his original position.

He then erected an extradimensional belly gate right behind Ares's position.

Zhao Yao glanced down at the frozen world before initiating his super-regeneration. While the entire world was at a complete halt, Zhao Yao took a step forward before plunging headfirst into this static world.

Bam! Zhao Yao's body nosedived into the ground before crashing against the concrete floor. In a split second, every bone in his body was shattered to pieces as parts of his remnants exploded into the surroundings. All that was left was the blood stain on the ground.

However, this scene only lasted for a split second. Immediately after the collision, his hyper-regeneration abilities had already taken effect. The muscles and bones began to merge together as his body formed piece by piece, bone by bone. Simultaneously, Zhao Yao reveled in this inexplicable sensation

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"Oh," Zhao Yao went back to his feet with his jaws completely slack, "This feels incredible!" An intense desire to jump down from a next skyscraper swept over him. However, he managed to suppress his burning desire and focused his mind on the mission. He then responded by absorbing the blood-stained concrete into his belly.

Using deflective field, a makeshift golden bridge emerged, spanning from Zhao Yao's position to the rooftop. Zhao Yao sprinted down this stupendous bridge before stopping right in front of Sphinx Cat as he prepared to absorb him back to the belly.

The moment time resumed, Ares and the remaining supercats which were hurled into the air had already disappeared into the extradimensional belly gate. Similarly, Zhao Yao had also thrown Sphinx Cat into it. Zhao Yao's eyes swept across the mess he had created and heaved a long sigh of despair before disappearing into his belly.

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Matsuo had to be on his toes the moment he entered this strange place. Even though he knew that nothing in this world could possibly injure or even hurt him if he remained in spirit form, he simply couldn't put his mind to rest.

He started by scrutinizing his surroundings. The place was huge and brightly lit. Its ceiling was at least two to three meters tall and it could easily accommodate five football fields.

Suddenly, he noticed a familiar figure at the corner of his eyes. Ishida was kneeling on the ground with his palms firmly clasped together as he continued to apologize relentlessly to a bunch of cats.

He had never seen Ishida behaved in this manner. His entire body was pressed against the ground in the uniquely Japanese kowtow position. With tears welled up in his eyes, Ishida screamed, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry for creating so much trouble for all of you!"

This shouting led to a chorus of meows amongst the cats themselves. Obviously, Ishida was clueless as to what they were discussing. He could only pray to his God as sweat and tears streamed down his cheeks.

Airplane took a step forward and asked, "What are we supposed to do? Both Zhao Yao and Ares aren't here today. How should we deal with this Japanese?"

Because of the activation of supercat armor, Roly Poly, Ares, and a few other supercats were not there when Ishida arrived inside the belly.

A glimmer of excitement flashed across Matsuo's eyes as he witnessed this unique occurrence unfolding right in front of him, "So many cats? Are all of them supercats?" Matsuo's chest rose and fell with rapid breaths as he imagined the fortune awaiting him should he capture all of them.

Meanwhile, Ares, Sphinx Cat, Zhao Yao and the rest had also returned to the extradimensional belly after Zhao Yao's second time freeze. In reality, only a few seconds had passed since Matsuo's arrival.

Because of supercat armor, all of the supercats which just returned were concealed by Roly Poly's power of invisibility. Only Zhao Yao was visible to the naked eye.

Matsuo swept his head around before muttering to himself, "This guy is also here? I guess this space is somehow connected to his ability as well." A tinge of jealousy flashed across his eyes as his body trembled with envy, "Is this the reason why he is able to simultaneously wield so many power? Is it because of all the cats here?"

"Hmph, I guess today is your unlucky day. The worst mistake to commit is to bring me into this place. I will use my power and rob you of every single one of your ability! From today onwards, I'll be the ruler of this place, the ruler of all these cats!"

Zhao Yao's eyes swept across the belly nonchalantly before he randomly screamed into a corner, "Hey, you're inside here, aren't you? Aren't you intending to reveal yourself?"

Matsuo's lips curled into a sinister smile as he thought to himself, "Reveal myself? Do you take me for an idiot? I'm going to examine and study all of your secrets in here!"

"Troublesome a*shole," Honestly, Zhao Yao wasn't too bothered by this bothersome fella. He could at most maintain his power for 24 hours. By then, his power would evaporate to thin air and he would have no choice but to reveal his body.

Meanwhile, Ishida burst into more tears as he finally saw a human figure. Those were actually tears of joy. He couldn't even be bothered that Zhao Yao was his enemy as he sprinted towards him before plunging into another Japanese kowtow, "I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry for causing so much trouble for you and your friends!"

...

Following Zhao Yao and the supercats disappearance, the majestic golden bridge which spanned across the night sky had also vanished. The once transparent building had once again regained its usual appearance.

Zhao Xue sprinted to the edge of the building and looked into the distant sky. Sadness tore at her chest as she breathed a sigh of despair, “Isn’t that ...”

“The headless horseman.” Meng Hao, who had originally given up all hope had suddenly gotten back to his feet and appeared right next to Zhao Xue. His expression was unusually solemn as he mumbled, “I have never expected him to appear here. He is truly my arch-nemesis.”

“Oh? It really is the headless horseman?” Zhao Xue had completely ignored the second half of Meng Hao’s message as excitement raced through her, “It really is her! Is she here to save us?”

Xiao Yu’s expression contorted into a grimace as she answered, “In my opinion, your so-called ‘headless horseman’ simply owes this company a huge sum of money. His plan was to default on his payment. However, this went a bit out of hand and he had no choice but to kill the boss of the company.”

Somehow, Zhao Xue managed to filter out all the negative connotations of that message as she looked towards Xiao Yu and asked, “Aunt Xiao Yu, do you know the headless horseman? You sound like you’re pretty close to the headless horseman?”

Xiao Yu was trying her best to suppress her laughter as she answered, “I guess we’re pretty close. Actually, both of you know each other as well.”

Those words caught Zhao Xue by surprise as she responded, “Huh, how do you even know about my relationship with the headless horseman?”

Xiao Yu was similarly startled by Zhao Xue’s response. A sudden realization dawned on her, “Shouldn’t they know about each other’s apostle identity since they’re siblings? Maybe I should just confirm by saying Zhao Yao’s name?” However, her eyes darted towards the two suspicious characters – Meng Hao and Black Panther- and chose not to verify using Zhao Yao’s actual name.

Hence, Xiao Yu replied with a nod of her head and the most ambiguous answer, “Of course.”

Zhao Xue let out a gasp before throwing her hand over her mouth, “So both of you actually know each other?”

Xiao Yu nodded her head and concluded, “I guess she’s referring to the fact that we know each other’s real-life identities.”

A slight hesitation flashed across Zhao Xue’s face before she finally opened her mouth, “Has the headless horseman ever mentioned my name?”

A frown crept up Xiao Yu’s face as she slid Zhao Xue a weird glare, “I don’t think so.”

“Is that the case?” Sadness clouded Zhao Xue’s features as she pried, “Not even once?”

Black Panther decided to join the discussion as he exclaimed, “Both of you know my master as well? I can’t believe that the headless horseman has saved my life twice already! The headless horseman is truly the most righteous person I’ve ever met in my life! I truly owe my life to the headless horseman!”

Xiao Yu never expected so many people to have encountered the headless horseman.

Suddenly, the widely-discussed headless horseman had re-appeared in front of everyone. Zhao Yao only came back because he realized that both his aunt and sister were still stranded on the rooftop. They would end up in the hands of the government if he left them there. Hence, he left the two Japanese in the belly temporarily before coming to their rescue ...