

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

- Chapter 1: F177 District (1)

Chapter 1: F177 District (1)

Chapter 1 – F177 District (1)

©A Dead Bird at the Beginning.©

As the sun was setting, the sky suddenly erupted into a thunderstorm. The horizon still held half of the sun, with the scorching heat waves meeting the lightning that pierced the sky. However, the lightning vanished in an instant, leaving behind a trail of smoke-white mist. The rain descended swiftly, creating a dazzling and torrential “sun shower” spectacle.

This rain came without any warning but was quite timely, instantly dispelling the sultriness and oppression brought by days of high temperatures.

“The Weather Mimicry System... How many times has it been this year?”

In the rain-covered city, some elderly individuals with white hair looked up at the sky, murmuring thoughtfully.

New Asia Alliance, an island in the eastern region.

Amid lush mountains and forests, a black umbrella moved quickly in the rain.

The person holding the umbrella had an obscured face, and behind them was a protruding section of a long and thin package. The black non-slip fabric had been soaked, dripping water continuously. Despite the rough and uneven mountain path, this person moved effortlessly, agile like a hawk soaring up and down.

Upon reaching halfway up the mountain, the umbrella tilted, revealing a fair and charming face.

The young girl's dark eyes were lowered as she peered through the wet rain curtain, looking down the mountain from a distance. Perhaps due to the rain, the animals in the mountains had returned to their nests, creating an

unusually desolate atmosphere. The only commotion came from the port on the opposite side.

This was an isolated island with a mountain facing the sea, surrounded by a complex network of transportation routes. At regular intervals, various large transport ships sailed across the sea in an orderly fashion. The sky was dominated by public airways controlled by the Alliance, with state-of-the-art airships shuttling amidst them. The dazzling shapes of these airships, adorned with neon signal lights of different colors, created a mesmerizing and dreamy illusion, especially in the hazy rain.

However, if one were to cast their gaze towards the depths of the ground: clusters of crowded and affordable housing, the air tainted with the salty smell of the sea, faces of people coming and going, fatigued and numb, all acted like a splash of cold water, instantly sobering anyone up.

This place wasn't a paradise, and it couldn't even be called a city.

The prosperity of the sky was accelerating the decay on the ground. The budding nobility of the new civilization looked on coldly at the struggles of the ruins of the old civilization. The stark contradiction between the two led to District 177 consistently receiving an "F" grade in the Alliance's comprehensive development evaluations.

F177 District, a forsaken land unworthy even of its name.

Because it couldn't catch up with the "Glorious Thirty Years" of rapid technological advancement in the history of the New Asia Alliance, missing out on the opportunity of economic boom, District 177, relying solely on the export of marine products, gradually became the most barren digital city within the Alliance—an underdeveloped area that could be counted on fingers.

After leaving the mountain range, the rain suddenly stopped, as if entering a melancholic barrier. The distinct salty air of District 177 struck her face.

The young girl closed her umbrella and carefully shook off the rainwater. After passing through a checkpoint, she continued forward.

Nearby at the dock, a respected local sailor was smoking with a troubled expression.

Beside him, a young woman anxiously tugged at his sleeve. “Old Cheng, my husband Abing has been out to sea for almost half a month. Nothing bad will happen, right?”

The sailor furrowed his brows and blew out a long smoke ring. “The Alliance requested a local guide this time, and Bing has been out to sea since he was eleven or twelve. He’s the most experienced here. Don’t worry too much, nothing will happen.”

The woman still wasn’t reassured. “But my eyelids have been twitching these past two days, and my heart’s not at ease.”

With a resentful tone, she pulled the man’s sleeve. “This job was introduced by you. You said the so-called foreign research team studying ocean currents offered good money for minimal work. It was easy money for a quick trip. It was because of that, that Abing agreed. You can’t just ignore whether he lives or dies!”

The sailor was being pulled and his face showed his frustration. He mumbled, “Wait a bit longer. The seas have been restless lately. If we don’t get any news in a couple of days, I’ll send someone out to search.”

Catching a glimpse of the young girl approaching, the sailor halted his words, and a gentle smile appeared on his weathered face. “Looks like Girl Ke is back.”

Song Ke respectfully greeted, “Grandpa Cheng.”

Old Cheng smiled as he looked her over. “Why are you all sweaty? Tired today?”

Song Ke obediently shook her head, a small smile playing on her lips.

When she smiled, a shallow dimple appeared on her cheek, making her look particularly cute.

The woman beside them turned her head, shooting a harsh glare at Song Ke, her eyes filled with lingering anger.

Song Ke was always sensitive to the emotions of others. With a single glance, she instantly retracted her smile, and the dimple vanished in an instant.

She nodded politely at Old Cheng and remained silent.

The woman was known as Aunt Qing, a refugee who had come to District 177 years ago. She had always looked down on the indigenous people like Song Ke. Song Ke felt that both she and her chubby son were a little mean. Maybe because she herself didn't talk much, whenever they met, Aunt Qing would always make snide remarks in a sarcastic manner. Her husband, Bing, was a local resident and a straightforward and honest person. He had worked in Old Cheng's transportation team, and he had even given Song Ke some candy when she was a child.

During this period, many research teams had come to District 177 to study various things, such as meteorology, ocean currents, and reportedly even microbial communities. Bing, experienced and willing to endure hardships, was happy to work as a guide for them to earn some extra money. But who would have thought... he had gone missing?

As Song Ke thought about Bing's disappearance at sea, she walked forward in silence. Passing by a fishing boat that was unloading its catch, several young men in black waders with rolled-up sleeves were busy on board.

"Sss—Ouch!" Someone suddenly exclaimed as they cast a net.

"What happened, Xiao Liu? Why the big fuss?" a person nearby immediately asked with concern.

"Bad luck, I got bitten by a fish."

"Are you kidding? A few mullets could bite you? Just trying to be lazy, huh?"

"No, really! It was the fish! If you don't believe me, take a look!"

The person called "Xiao Liu" was met with ridicule from his companions. His face turned bright red, and he pulled off his gloves with a grimace, showing them the deep gash on his hand.

Song Ke had excellent eyesight. Following the sound, she saw from a distance that his palm was bloody and torn, the wound deep. Those who often did manual labor on the docks were accustomed to getting injured, so it wasn't taken too seriously. They continued to laugh and joke around.

“Oh, wow, this little guy’s quite fierce. He might fetch a good price,” someone said.

“Xiao Liu, come here and identify which fish did it. I’ll stew it for you to vent your anger!”

Even Xiao Liu, who was injured, didn’t seem to care much. After wiping off the bloodstains casually, he put his gloves back on. “This fish had some strength today, it was stronger than me. Pulling in the net wasn’t easy.”

Song Ke withdrew her gaze and spun around on her tiptoes, turning back in the direction of home.

The lively scene behind her grew increasingly distant, and her figure gradually faded away, leaving her with a sense of unbelonging loneliness.

After a few steps, she belatedly looked up at the sky.

The fishing ban had just lifted, and autumn was approaching in a few days. However, the scorching sun above showed no mercy, blazing on the horizon, radiating heat as if it wanted to turn everything in the world into ashes.

Song Ke was drenched in sweat, her head throbbing from the relentless sun. She felt like a lump of poor-quality cream, on the verge of melting at any moment.

She sluggishly opened her umbrella again, this time to shield herself from the sun.

The searing sensation around her eyes forced her to squint.

This summer was just too hot.

Twenty minutes later, Song Ke, drenched in sweat, navigated her way through the crowded and narrow cheap housing and stopped in front of a dilapidated small house.

This was her home.

She used her key to unlock the door, but right before entering, she hesitated, dawdling for a long time.

Seeing that there was no movement for a long time, Song Ke persistently shifted a little to the side, peeking into her neighbor's home.

Why was Aming so quiet today?

Aming was a chatty magpie. They had a special bond, and his chatter was several times faster than hers. He greeted Song Ke every morning and evening without fail.

It was like the eunuchs in the history books of the old civilization who stood by the palace door with their arms crossed over their chest, observing the movements of their master at all times.

When Song Ke ventured out in the darkness of the night, it hummed secretively "Go for it, Song Ke! Hang in there, Song Ke!"

When Song Ke returned, completely exhausted, in the pitch-black darkness, Aming flapped its wings and exclaimed, "Got beaten again today! Beaten again!"

Aming, who usually liked to show off, what was up with it today?

Song Ke went around to the base of the neighbor's wall, took a couple of steps back, crouched, gathered her strength, and with a swift movement, leaped onto the top of the wall. Then, she adeptly opened the sparse fence, peered inside, and softly called her friend, "Aming, Ming!"

Aming had its back turned to Song Ke, lying low in its bamboo-made magpie cage. It appeared sluggish and weary. When it heard her voice, it took a good while to lift its head, laboriously flapping its wings to move closer. Its orange beak lightly pecked at her palm as a greeting.

Song Ke glanced at the empty food trough. Although Aming was usually free-range, the neighbor grandmother fed it daily, so it shouldn't be hungry. Was it throwing a fit because there was no food today?

She hopped down from the wall, patted her knees, and slipped through her own front gate. She picked a string of dark and lustrous grapes from the green vines in the courtyard, swiftly turned back to the wall, and tossed it gently down, saying, "Aming, eat, eat something tasty."

After just a while, Aming looked even more listless. It remained curled up in the corner against the wall, not moving at all, not even lifting its head.

Song Ke grew anxious, prodding its head with the grapevine. Unexpectedly, Aming suddenly threw its neck back and let out a miserable scream, the hoarse ending note sounding particularly piercing.

Startled, Song Ke refrained from further antics, holding the grapes in place, waiting anxiously for a while. Eventually, she confirmed that Aming truly didn't want to pay her any mind. Dejectedly, she returned to her own home.

...

Once inside, Song Ke eagerly unwrapped the package on her back, laying it out on the table. The long item inside slowly revealed itself—it was an ancient Tang sword passed down from the era of the old civilization, a chilling and fierce weapon.

Song Ke's eyes widened in awe as she touched the hilt of the sword, her hands reluctant to let it go.

After admiring it, she retrieved a thick sketchbook from under the table, meticulously copying the details. Whenever she found a weapon she liked, Song Ke would painstakingly draw it, creating a detailed representation for future enjoyment. However, her preferences were varied and numerous, causing the book to grow thicker with each passing day.

In the new era of civilization, the majority of cold weapons had lost their practical value, becoming relics and archaeological items.

Song Ke was an anomaly. She wasn't interested in the new types of weapons that the Alliance had been promoting for the past few years; she was only fascinated by the old civilization's blades. This sword was her master's recent acquisition, and she had only been permitted to borrow it after winning against her fellow disciples. She would have even considered sleeping with it if her master hadn't strictly prohibited it before she left the mountain!

As for her master, he was the reason why she commuted twenty kilometers back and forth every day before dawn and in the dark.

Song Ke had an extraordinary talent. Since she was a child, she exhibited astonishing physical strength and immense destructive power leading her grandfather to decide she should learn martial arts.

She followed her grandfather for several years, wandering around, until they finally found a centuries-old martial arts training hall in Yue Mountain (E166 District). There, she found a historical martial arts training hall, led by Master Zhang Ting, who later became her benevolent master. It was rumored that he was a descendant of some lost grand martial lineage, which gave him significant prestige.

Yue Mountain belonged to an ecological landscape area and wasn't suitable for habitation. After considering the situation, her grandfather settled her down in the nearby notorious District F177, known for its "dirty and disorderly" conditions. Since then, they never moved again.

After thirty minutes of meticulous drawing, Song Ke stretched lazily and got up from the floor.

The room was empty, except for a few large, standardized pieces of furniture, making it look bare. She walked into the kitchen, made herself a big bowl of plain noodles, sprinkled them with fresh green scallions, and even indulgently fried two sunny-side-up eggs.

Once the noodles were ready, Song Ke carried the bowl, larger than her face, back to the living room.

Taking a bite of noodles, glancing at the Tang sword on the table, taking another big bite, and then reluctantly looking back at the sketchbook—indeed, it was a great appetite enhancer.

Song Ke was an orphan her grandfather had taken in. She had no parents or siblings, truly on her own.

A few years ago, her grandfather, her only companion, had passed away. She learned to live alone. Due to her inability to handle social interactions, she gradually descended to a point where the only company she had was a magpie from the neighbor's house.

However, she didn't really care about the fact that no one talked to her, as she wasn't much of a talker herself.

Because she had a stutter—she was born with it.

After finishing the noodles and cleaning the dishes, Song Ke sat back down on the floor and took out the old light screen left behind by her grandfather to start reading.

This light screen was a task her grandfather had assigned her before he passed away. She was supposed to study for at least an hour every day.

Due to certain circumstances, she dropped out of high school without completing her education. However, in this era of rapid development of the new civilization, the outside world was constantly changing. Her grandfather worried that she might grow up to be illiterate and unable to keep up with the times, so he had already set strict rules for her to study every day. At the very least, her level of education shouldn't fall too far behind others.

After going through various options, Song Ke selected a book titled "Particle Physics Advanced Microbiology" from a corner of the cracked screen. With a dejected look, she started reading.

The motion-sensitive lamp above her head emitted a warm yellow light, making her feel drowsy.

Song Ke tended to get sleepy while reading, and it was particularly intense today. Her eyelids felt like they were glued together, and her upper and lower eyelids started fighting.

Perhaps it was due to eating too much, and she felt weak. Her limbs were numb and lacked any sensation due to sleepiness.

"Bang!"

Suddenly, a loud crash echoed in her ears.

Startled by the noise, Song Ke's head hit the floor as she tumbled over, and it took her a while to sit up sluggishly, holding her head.

Realizing that something was amiss as she touched her head, she contemplated the situation. After all, her head wasn't made of iron; how could it make such a loud noise?

Song Ke lifted her eyelids and looked around in confusion.

She saw a huge hole smashed in her window, and the floor was covered in shattered glass. The damp, chilly night wind blew in from outside, making her shiver as her pores involuntarily stood on end.

Was it hail outside?

Without any care for the light screen that had long since gone into sleep mode, Song Ke quickly stood up to investigate.

A blurry black figure was rolling on the windowsill, convulsing uncontrollably.

Song Ke raised her guard, cautiously approaching—

The black magpie was trembling stiffly, its wings twitching involuntarily. Most of its smooth feathers had fallen off, revealing the mottled skin underneath. Its black-bean-like pupils seemed to be covered by a hazy gray-white film, staring intently ahead with a dark, gloomy look.

It opened its beak, emitting a hoarse cry that seemed both a plea for help from Song Ke and a menacing low growl. Strangely, its opened mouth revealed two rows of uneven, jagged teeth, smeared with viscous black bloodstains.

It was Aming!

Song Ke's grip on the windowsill tightened suddenly.

Before she could fully process the situation, the magpie convulsed violently for a few moments, then its head drooped down, becoming still.