

Doomsday 121

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 121: Life-and-Death Marathon (12)

Quick, quick! Catch her!

Xu Xing hid inside an empty garbage bin, peeking out with half his head, observing discreetly.

Across the street, seven or eight brazen refugees were looting a large supermarket without any restraint. Shopping carts and shelves were violently knocked down. After ransacking, they poured a large barrel of cooking oil onto the ground, lit it with a lighter, and instantly, flames shot up into the sky.

Shortly after they left with their loot, a holographic projection appeared above the supermarket.

“Check-in point!” Xu Xing’s eyes lit up. His inner self danced a disco. He actually ran into it—what luck, Xu Xiaoxing!

He released frost, wrapping himself from head to toe, and dashed into the supermarket. This time the check-in point was near the ceiling. Xu Xing found the nearest warehouse-style shelf and struggled to climb up.

The temperature inside was too high; the ice melted quickly. Xu Xing’s little face turned red from the heat, his curly hair drooping down as sweat streamed down his face. He reached out, wiped his face, and tremblingly climbed to the top of the shelf, trying to reach the terminal. Unfortunately, he was just a little short. He tiptoed and pushed desperately with his fingertips, finally getting a bit closer.

Xu Xing stomped his foot in frustration. He had never felt so short with his 130cm height (growing 3cm taller this new year). If it were Su Cha... No, not even Su Cha. If it were Lu Xiaoyu, Fang Zhixu, Lin Youyou, or his sister, any of them could easily reach it.

Hmph, only that person in the wheelchair couldn’t reach it.

Xu Xing pouted and sent a message in the group chat: "Check-in point, hurry up!"

At that moment, V587 members were busy defending for Song Ke, and no one paid attention to the slight reminder in the group chat.

Xu Xing pressed the receiver he had just hidden to mute and raised his voice, "Hey?" "Hello?" "Moshi moshi?"

As soon as the earpiece opened, Lin Youyou's vigorous and fierce scolding immediately came through, calling him "old scoundrel," "shameless," demanding him to "kneel and slap his face." It left Xu Xing stunned.

After a while, only Su Cha quietly replied, "Share your location."

Only the two of them were still working at the moment.

Xu Xing sat cross-legged on the shelf, nodding vigorously while listening to the scolding battle. His movements were too exaggerated, and he accidentally burned half of his buttocks. With a "sizzle," he jumped up and shifted his position.

Shortly after, Su Cha arrived at the supermarket, pouring a basin of cold water over Xu Xing's head. His agile figure rushed in like a gust of wind.

"Where's the check-in point?" Su Cha asked.

Xu Xing pointed casually, still muttering, "Bad guy! Stinky old man!" continuously. "It's there."

Su Cha asked again, "Where?"

Xu Xing replied, "Right there..."

But the fire seal had long disappeared.

Xu Xing was dumbfounded.

Oh no, he was too absorbed in Lin Youyou's scolding that he didn't notice the check-in point had moved!

Su Cha looked at him silently.

Xu Xing blinked innocently back at him.

The surroundings crackled and burst with fire, leaving the supermarket completely charred.

"Let's go," Su Cha lifted the short Xu Xing off the shelf, casually holding him with his arm. "Need some ice."

The cold water splashed earlier had evaporated completely, and the scorching flames were licking Su Cha's skin.

"Ah..." Forced into an ice-making machine, Xu Xing lifted his buttocks and swung his two little legs, knowing he was in the wrong. He obediently released his ability. Both of them were enveloped in a tight layer of frost and hurriedly dashed out of the supermarket.

As they ran onto the street, the five members of V587 arrived following the location.

"Xiao Xing! Where's the check-in point?" Song Ke asked enthusiastically.

"It's gone," Xu Xing flapped his hands in a dejected manner. "It was just right in front of me!"

"It was right in front of you, why didn't you use the terminal then?" Zhuang Qingyan asked calmly.

Xu Xing's confidence deflated instantly. He grumbled, feeling sorry for himself, "I... I couldn't reach it."

His male pride emerged silently. He extended his pinky finger, indicating, "Just missed it by this much!"

Su Cha glanced at him, seeing through but not exposing it, preserving Xu Xing's pride.

"Hurry up, the zombie tide is coming," Lu Xiaoyu reminded.

The densely packed zombies swept through like locusts, swiftly flooding the streets and alleys. They stormed into buildings, jumped onto car roofs, knocking down fleeing humans, cruelly biting and feeding on them. The splattering blood seemed to weave a crimson velvet carpet over Greenwater City.

The refugees who had recently sought shelter, witnessing this horror, scrambled even more desperately to flee.

"Where's the Zombie King?" Song Ke's cold jagged blade sawed through a zombie's head that rushed towards her.

"Not here!" Lu Xiaoyu's mechanical arms moved in unison, replying loudly.

Lin Youyou's singing didn't cease, and she shouted in passing, "Not even Level 3 zombies!"

The zombies in this zombie tide were mainly Levels 1 and 2, occasionally mixed with a few mutant zombies. Although their numbers were high, their strengths varied. Ordinary people could resist them, and once the awakeners inside Greenwater City and the official forces reacted, they would eventually be wiped out.

A zombie tide without a Zombie King commanding, it was nothing but a scattered group of cannon fodders.

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes dimmed as he instantly recalled an ancient military strategy from the old civilization—diverting attention from the true objective.

Attacking Greenwater City was highly likely a diversion set up by that cunning Zombie King. It deliberately released some low-level zombies to feign an attack on the city while sending the true elite forces elsewhere.

Zhuang Qingyan activated his screen and entered the live broadcast channel of the Throne Race Competition. Some teams, like "Shunxing Teahouse," were ahead and had already reached Reshufu. However, this city, most likely to be attacked, remained peaceful at the moment.

He quickly scanned through the personal live streams of other competitors. Each team had different progress—some were fighting zombies in already fallen cities, some relentlessly pushed forward, and a few relaxed, comfortably sitting in restaurants. But regardless of the location, there was no sign of another zombie tide.

Zhuang Qingyan paused his finger on the screen, switching to the marathon map and calculating swiftly in his mind. Theoretically, guessing the psychological activities of zombies was an absurd idea, but Zhuang Qingyan had no hesitation. His gaze focused directly on the second-to-last checkpoint—Haimen.

"Check-in point!" Suddenly, Song Ke pointed upward.

In a skyscraper ahead, about 30 floors high, the glass suddenly shattered, and several figures struggled before falling and crashing onto the ground.

V587 rapidly closed in on the target, but to their surprise, they collided with the "Anna Knights." This group of robots was a step ahead, their steamship landed on the rooftop of the building. Five awakers from their team threw down ropes, sliding down to their respective floors, swiftly activating terminals. A holographic projection appeared with a message: "Congratulations, "Anna Knights", for successfully checking in."

Song Ke furrowed her brow, observing them closely. The "Anna Knights" had changed. They seemed to have plundered the military arsenal in Greenwater City, armed to the teeth—shotguns replaced by cannons, assault rifles, shoulder-mounted mortars, and rough mechanical parts integrated into their bodies, creating a crude yet menacing appearance.

Five mechanical beings swiftly turned their weapons and opened fire at Song Ke and the others charging towards them without a word. They were trapped at the city gate, at that time, they were unable to do anything about the culprit. Now that they were free to act and had the upper hand in firepower, they were determined to reclaim their ground.

“Wanna check-in? I’ll turn you into Swiss cheese!” The leader-like figure among the mechanical beings arrogantly shouted.

Gunshots erupted, casings scattered, forcing Song Ke’s group to retreat repeatedly. The frontline was too intense, impossible to break through.

“Target their healers and support!” In team battles, targeting the healers first was ingrained in their combat DNA. Torrents of bullets surged towards Fang Zhixu and Lin Youyou.

Lin Youyou’s lips moved rapidly as she rapped for self-preservation, conjuring up a thick fog. Within the “Anna Knights” team’s vision, two figures vanished.

Yet, Fang Zhixu’s presence was too conspicuous. The mechanical beings, still holding the aerial advantage, had already locked onto his position. A long, thick chain whistled through the air, piercing through the mist. With a click, it clamped onto Fang Zhixu’s ankle, dragging him out.

The malicious smile of the awakener who acted was evident as he hoisted Fang Zhixu, twirling him in the air before hurling him towards the densely packed area of zombies.

With muscles surging, Su Cha leaped like a cheetah over the rooftop, racing towards Fang Zhixu’s landing spot.

Unfortunately, they were a step too late. “Bang!” Fang Zhixu crashed down on dozens of zombies.

“Old Fang!” Song Ke’s eyes twitched with excessive tension.

Fang Zhixu, sprawled on the ground, awkwardly got up. Looking around in panic, the zombies around him were hit directly by this extraterrestrial object. Some had necks snapped, while others had holes, oozing foul, black liquid.

“Ao!” Their feasting was abruptly interrupted. They roared angrily, roaring at Fang Zhixu, spraying his face with their putrid saliva, their teeth, covered in bits of flesh, almost touching his eyeballs.

Then, the movements of the zombies halted.

They seemed to have lost their target, confusedly sniffing around Fang Zhixu. After a few seconds, they resumed, lowering their heads to feast on the corpses.

Fang Zhixu attempted to move his legs, trying to stand but accidentally tripped again. With a slap from his left hand, he struck a zombie’s head, causing it to twist and turn, emitting “ho ho” sounds from its throat, seemingly oblivious to Fang Zhixu who was so close.

Song Ke breathed a sigh of relief, realizing that Fang Zhixu had an odd constitution; zombies didn’t bite him.

Su Cha arrived at the scene and took the opportunity to retrieve Fang Zhixu.

Song Ke glared coldly at the “Anna Knights.” At the moment when V587 was distracted, the check-in point vanished again.

This time, after disappearing, it didn’t reappear from elsewhere as it usually did.

Song Ke realized something: the refugees were exhausted from fleeing and no longer focused on causing trouble. Consequently, the appearance frequency of the checkpoint became slower and slower.

The mechanical beings from above smugly pulled their lips as they stopped V587. Afterward, they turned back, climbing towards the top of the building, preparing to retreat.

Nearly killed Fang Zhixu and still thinking about running?

Song Ke grabbed an electrical pole from the ground, transforming it into a nine-section whip. Clinging to the exterior wall of the building, her speed was astonishingly fast, relentlessly pursuing. Gradually closing the gap with the “Anna Knights,” she unexpectedly swung the whip: “Take that!”

Xu Xing intuitively froze the foot of one of them with ice. The ethereal blue whip instantly coiled around his neck. As Song Ke pulled down, the mechanical being plummeted straight down from a hundred meters high, littering the ground with scattered parts.

“Damn it! Run!”

Just after this shout, another member, cursed by Lin Youyou, suddenly stepped into nothingness. Song Ke grabbed his waist, peeling him off the surface of the building.

“Ahh—”

“You bunch of little f*ckers, die!”

As Song Ke ascended through the floors, her attacks became faster. The “Anna Knights” were pushed to the edge. With relentless mortar bombardments, the building’s support beams ruptured, causing it to gradually tilt.

Song Ke glanced towards the last one – Mechanical Leg. Panic was evident on his face. He was just a step away from the steamship. Clenching his teeth, he shed all excess weight and sprouted suction cups on his legs, quickly maneuvering along the glass surface, creating distance from Song Ke for a moment.

Mechanical Leg’s left hand grasped the hatch of the steamship, displaying an ecstatic expression, believing he had escaped!

At that moment, a powerful mental force invaded his mind. His body hairs stood on end, his eyes suddenly flickered and became empty.

The serpentine nine-section whip wrapped around his thigh. Song Ke tightened her forearm, leveraging her entire body weight backward. With a 'pop,' the suction cups deprived of air, detached from the glass, and Mechanical Leg's two limbs were forcibly torn apart. Before he could recover his senses, he plummeted heavily.

The "Anna Knights" were completely wiped out!

The dazzling holographic projection descended, and the fiery seal slowly emerged, signifying the rekindled battle among the awakeners.

The opportunity was fleeting.

Suddenly, Song Ke performed a swift pull-up, utilizing the inertia to leap upwards. Then, she released her grip, twisted her body mid-air, and with her slender waist drew a sharp arc, leveraging her remarkable flexibility to tap the terminal!

"Congratulations, 'V587,' for successfully checking in."

Success! As Song Ke landed and rolled, unexpectedly, she slid off the rooftop without warning. Lightning-fast, she grasped the railing, her body swaying. Regardless of whether Zhuang Qingyan and the others could see her, she flashed a "V" sign downward.

The next moment, the overstressed building split in half from the middle, quickly crumbling into pieces.

As the railing lost its stability and tilted, Song Ke's foothold vanished, akin to a kite with a snapped string, plummeting from a considerable height—falling down.

"Quick, quick! Catch her!" Lin Youyou's complexion paled as she rushed forward with her arms outstretched.

Even if Song Ke possessed incredible abilities, she was still hundreds of meters above the ground now. No matter how powerful her ability was, her body couldn't endure such a fall!

“Bang!” Song Ke attempted to grab a steel beam, but it broke, her head smashing through the glass. She tumbled into the building and rolled out again.

Falling too fast, she couldn't find a solid anchor point. She had to use her whip to catch onto whatever she could to slow her descent.

Veins surfaced on Zhuang Qingyan's hand as he trembled, abruptly leaving his wheelchair!

Lu Xiaoyu shattered the shop window, pulling out a bedsheet from inside. Six mechanical arms extended and stretched out to serve as a makeshift cushion.

The collapsing building erupted in a violent explosion, billowing smoke rising from the ruins.

“Thud, thud...”

Song Ke bounced down like a ball, landing perfectly into Lu Xiaoyu's makeshift cushion, significantly reducing the impact, and safely caught.

Lu Xiaoyu sighed in relief, retracting the mechanical arms, ready to lift her up.

However, like an eel, Song Ke unexpectedly slipped out from the edge, bouncing twice and smacked onto the roof of a nearby armored truck, landing face down.

Lu Xiaoyu: “...Oh.”

Xu Xing covered his face, grimacing in pain.

Song Ke, supporting her head, stood up groggily, spinning around aimlessly. Finally, she turned her back to everyone and addressed the air, “Hehe, check-in, success.”

Zhuang Qingyan snapped his fingers, “Song Keke, turn around.”

Confused, Song Ke turned but still couldn't find anyone. Then, tears welled up in her eyes, and two lines of red fell from her nose.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 122: Life-and-Death Marathon (13)

'Thousand Deaths Blue Enchantress of Cataclysmic Annihilation

"Haha—"

"Hahahaha—"

"Puhahahahaha—"

Song Ke had changed into a coat that could cover her entire body, sitting cross-legged in the back seat of the car, trying hard to diminish her own presence.

The loose hood covered her blushing face; she had stuffed two pieces of tissue in her nose. Echoes of teammates' unrestrained laughter reverberated in her ears, especially the boisterous ones from Lin Youyou, Lu Xiaoyu, and the muffled chuckles from Xu Xing.

"Song Ke, are you made of jelly? How can you be so elastic hahaha and bounce like that hahaha—"

"Sister, does your face hurt? I felt so much pain on my face just now!"

"The part where you bumped into the cash transport vehicle was already edited into a viral clip. It got a lot of views. I saved it, want to see? I'll send it to you."

'I shouldn't have made a 'V' sign to them,' Song Ke thought expressionlessly. 'If only I hadn't wasted that time, I could've flipped up.'

With a last glimmer of hope, she looked at Su Cha and Fang Zhixu. They wouldn't mock her, right?

Fang Zhixu struggled to hold back his laughter, his trembling left hand offering a row of band-aids, while Su Cha avoided eye contact, dodging her gaze, coughed a couple of times to disguise it, then turned away silently.

Song Ke: "!!"

Don't think I didn't notice; you're clearly laughing!

Zhuang Qingyan extended his arm from the front row, rubbing Song Ke's head through the hood. He shifted slightly downward, his slender fingers weaving through her hair, lightly touching the minor scratch on her cheek. Song Ke tilted her head to avoid it, but it inadvertently brushed against her ear, turning as red as fire in an instant.

"Next time you jump, aim a bit better, at least... don't let your face hit first."

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes twinkled with a smile, his voice husky, carrying a hint of teasing.

Song Ke froze, then suddenly bit his wrist.

After a while, she spat it out with a stiff, uncomfortable expression.

"The competition, you guys, focus! Talk about serious matters!" Song Ke shouted in frustration and embarrassment.

The teasing had gone too far, the captain was losing her temper, and the team members, sensing the shift, immediately fell silent, pretending to be busy.

“She’s talking to you guys, be serious!” Xu Xing acted all authoritative, pointing and lecturing like a little adult.

Song Ke coldly snorted and leaned against the window, looking outside. The road out of the city was strewn with corpses, devastation everywhere. Hearing the sound of the engine, the zombies grotesquely lunged toward them but were sent flying by Lu Xiaoyu’s wild driving skills.

The newly acquired SUV lacked the stability of the previous off-road pickup truck for long distances. Upon impact, the car would occasionally jolt, making everyone inside sway. Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped his fingers, conjuring a holographic map. He marked crosses at the positions of Rainbow Cloud City and Greenwater City, then drew a darker line indicating the shortest path to Haimen.

“We’re only heading to safe cities, completing the checkpoints along the way. Before today ends, we must reach Haimen.”

“Not following the designated route?” Su Cha was somewhat surprised. According to the original plan, V587 was supposed to pass through a fallen District C. If they followed Zhuang Qingyan’s route, after reaching Haimen, they’d have to circle back again to complete the check-in, which would waste more time. “Our goal is the championship, killing the Zombie King is the key. Missing this opportunity to catch it, even if we complete the check-in points within the set time, it’s just clearing the level, not winning.”

“You suspect the Zombie King will attack Haimen? Why not Reshufu? Haimen is much tougher to breach,” Lin Youyou raised a question.

“So confident? What if it heads to Reshufu instead?” Lu Xiaoyu glanced at him sideways. If Zhuang Qingyan’s speculation was wrong, they would be left empty-handed, not encountering the Zombie King, wasting precious time.

Zhuang Qingyan squinted with a hint of amusement in his peach blossom eyes. “From the encounters at Tongwan, this Zombie King is valiant in battle, bold yet meticulous, skilled in using ancient warfare tactics, maneuvering and disrupting the enemy’s rhythm. What’s even more remarkable is its calmness under pressure. Even when facing a disadvantage, it can make accurate judgments instantly. It’s an exceptionally outstanding battlefield commander.”

Rarely praising others, Zhuang Qingyan continued to shower such extensive praise on a zombie, leaving everyone's expressions somewhat hard to articulate.

"I've researched the information. Among the active registered commanders in the Alliance, there's no one with this style," Lu Xiaoyu multitasked, his idle mechanical arm projecting without reservation. "If it's as formidable as you say, shouldn't it be someone known?"

Zhuang Qingyan, looking disdainful, pushed away his intrusive hand. "You think sheer strength can bring success? There are plenty of talented but frustrated individuals out there. You should understand this better than me, right?"

Lu Xiaoyu, whose legs were broken by the Lu family and thrown into Death Prison because of his "outstanding strength and peculiar temperament": "..."

Hey, isn't this hitting a little too close to home?

"If I were it, I'd now possess an unstoppable, endless army of the living dead. The instinct of the zombie within me clamors to destroy this land, while the remnants of my human intellect guide me step by step toward victory."

"I desire Reshufu, and I also desire Haimen. Since foolish humans think I'll attack Reshufu, let me indulge you. I'll release some bait, oh? Are you prepared for battle? Want to kill me? Too bad, I've already stealthily infiltrated Haimen, catching you off guard."

"Haimen is indeed a tough nut to crack, but once I bite into it, the path ahead will be clear. I can conquer the entire Alliance..."

Zhuang Qingyan's knuckles rhythmically tapped, his eyes deep, deliberately lowering his voice to a husky tone, vividly simulating the psychological activity of a zombie. The others got goosebumps all over; wow, this person is so twisted.

"Why say Haimen is hard to bite into?" Song Ke innocently asked, completely unaware of the abnormal atmosphere.

The teammates chimed in, eagerly answering, hoping Zhuang Qingyan would stop talking; it was creeping them out.

Lu Xiaoyu: “Haimen is the most important granary in the east. Be it the total production, goods, or exports, it ranks first in the Alliance. According to scientific statistics, below District C, one out of every three meals includes food from Haimen.”

Lin Youyou: “Haimen has vast land, the largest area within District D, but the population is less than ten million. Due to the sparse population, people live affluent lives. The locals are bold, straightforward, and don’t bother with trifles.”

Xu Xing: “My dad once said, people from Haimen are big and simple, wealthy, and easily deceived.”

Everyone turned to look at him simultaneously, questioning his choice of words. What kind of parenting is that? Saying such things could cause trouble if heard by people from Haimen!

Xu Xing belatedly covered his mouth. “Uh, oops,” inadvertently letting out the latter part of his sentence.

Fang Zhixu stroked his chin thoughtfully. “I’ve heard from colleagues that people from Haimen aren’t very good at arguing.”

Song Ke: “Why is that?”

Fang Zhixu: “Because before you finish saying lines like ‘What are you looking at?’ and ‘What are you gonna do about it?’, the other person’s fist has already landed on your face.”

Song Ke: “???” That sounds like... quite an interesting city.

“Are you sure the Zombie King will go to Haimen?” Song Ke turned to Zhuang Qingyan and asked.

“Seventy percent certain,” Zhuang Qingyan nodded, not elaborating further.

After pondering for two seconds, Song Ke decisively slapped the table, “Then, let’s go to Haimen.”

When the captain speaks, everyone must follow suit.

“To Haimen! Go, go, go!” Lu Xiaoyu floored the accelerator, the SUV speeding through the wilderness, scattering zombies like flower petals.

In the quiet car, Lin Youyou nudged Lu Xiaoyu and whispered, “Hey, that viral clip, send it to me.”

“I want it too, I want it too!” Xu Xing called out quietly from the front seat.

Su Cha didn’t say a word, simply pointing at his own terminal, making his intentions clear.

Lu Xiaoyu maneuvered a mechanical arm and quickly sent the clip directly to V587’s group chat.

The terminal vibrated, and Song Ke, half-asleep, woke up in a daze. Her fingers moved faster than her brain, reflexively tapping to open the message, immediately followed by a stunned expression.

“–Unsend that, right now!!”

...

Before nightfall, V587 completed check-in points in four safe cities and smoothly arrived at the outskirts of District D135’s Haimen.

There were no signs of a zombie horde in the wilderness, just a few scattered zombies. Some held shovels and sickles, some staggered aimlessly near irrigation machines and plow axles, while others gnawed on tractors and plows, their hollow, decaying eyes devoid of any emotion.

“If it weren’t for the apocalypse, it would be the season for spring sowing now...” Fang Zhixu sighed.

As they approached a three-story mansion, sounds of a scuffle echoed from the front. A group of a dozen people, armed and engaged in a fierce battle against zombies, caught their attention.

The most conspicuous figure was a burly man, towering at least six feet tall. He wore a massive gold chain around his neck, a large gold watch on his wrist, a flashy shirt, and what seemed to be a fur or mink coat draped over him. His shoes shone so brightly they nearly reflected light.

Song Ke climbed onto the roof of the car and looked around. This group seemed to lack any supernatural abilities; they were all regular people.

Even though they were ordinary, their fighting capabilities were not to be underestimated.

“Get off me!” The burly man, over six feet tall, kicked a lurching zombie away. His flesh quivered, and beside him, a suited bodyguard lifted a golf club, ruthlessly smashing the zombie’s head, denting it inward.

“Look at your bear-like appearance, dare to come onto my territory and cause trouble. Did I give you permission?” The burly man grumbled and cursed while kicking the zombie. His aggression grew, “Come on then!”

While observing the scuffle between them and the zombies without much concern, Song Ke crouched down, preparing to get back into the car. However, a faint, ghostly blue glint suddenly caught her peripheral vision.

She froze, abruptly lifting her head.

The burly man from afar drew a wide-blade short knife and sliced straight towards the zombie’s head. The knife seemed to cut through it effortlessly, separating the zombie’s head from its body as blood sprayed out like a fountain.

Song Ke's gaze became fixed.

If she wasn't mistaken, that was... a machete?

"Stop the car."

She opened the car door and hurried towards the group.

Having just managed to deal with the zombies besieging their mansion, Wang Hu was covered in sweat. He couldn't help but mutter to himself, "It's already spring, wearing a fur coat is a bit hot, huh?" He opened his collar to cool off and unexpectedly noticed a young girl walking towards him.

Yo, Wang Hu sighed inwardly. His eyes were quite perceptive; check out that presence, not your average person.

The young girl stopped in front of him, staring directly at the machete in his hand.

"What are you looking at?" the bodyguard next to him asked in a rough voice.

Startled by his loud voice, Song Ke reflexively responded, "...Looking... What are you looking at?"

The bodyguard raised his eyebrows, the golf club ready to move. Was this little troublemaker trying to provoke something?

"Hey, put it down, put it down," Wang Hu generously gestured with his hand. "Easy now, let her take a look."

He proudly hoisted the machete onto his shoulder, asking in a casual manner, "How about it? Were you impressed by my zombie-hacking prowess?"

Exerting too much force, the back of the machete accidentally cut through his fur.

“Oh, my God!” Wang Hu jumped in distress, trying to cover his clothes and handle the machete at the same time, flustered and wailing, “My precious!”

Kindly, Song Ke reached out and helped him stabilize the familiar machete. “Can I... take a look at your machete?”

“Sure, sure,” Wang Hu barely paid attention to her.

Song Ke turned the blade over and looked down. Indeed, there was a small ‘Song’ on the handle of the machete. This was her spiritual weapon. How could it appear here? Moreover... she had only produced this standardized spiritual weapon once, back in Hua City, a total of 100 pieces, as part of a deal for those students at the No.1 Middle School.

“Where did you get this machete from?” Song Ke asked.

“What, are you interested too?” Wang Hu glanced at her, then protectively snatched the machete back. “My ‘Thousand Deaths Blue Enchantress of Cataclysmic Annihilation’ is quite powerful, but not something most people can handle.”

“I acquired this from the black market in the Northern Base through someone. It’s an absolutely genuine supernatural weapon. It cuts zombies like slicing through watermelons. There are less than five in the entire black market. I spent a whopping two million...” Wang Hu bragged triumphantly.

“H-How much?!” Song Ke exclaimed in shock.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 123: Life-and-Death Marathon (14)

For just 28,888, bring home the zombie-slaying artifact

Upon hearing the figure of two million, Song Ke's expression seemed trance-like. Wang Hu, assuming she was intimidated by his substantial wealth, proudly displayed his lavishness by swinging his heavy gold chain to the sides, then waved generously, saying, "It might be a bit pricey, but luckily, it offers great value for the money. I'm fortunate to have stumbled upon it. Others couldn't even buy it if they wanted!"

"Great value for the money? Really?" Song Ke swallowed hard, hesitating, "It might only last for two or three years. It doesn't seem... very cost-effective, does it?"

"You gotta be kidding! Have you ever used the 'Thousand Deaths Blue Enchantress of Cataclysmic Annihilation' weapon? Do you even know what you're talking about?"

"I... I don't?"

"Of course, you don't!" Wang Hu glared, looking ready to argue with her. "Those high-tech weapons, too complicated for me! I'd be gasping for air if zombies got too close. But with my precious here, I just swing and slash, and all the zombies back off!"

Song Ke fell silent, unable to respond.

Suddenly, she thought of something, her eyes shining with excitement. Her expression turned sincere, "If there were still 'Cataclysmic Annihilation er... Blue Enchantress'..."

"'Thousand Deaths Blue Enchantress of Cataclysmic Annihilation,'" Wang Hu corrected her matter-of-factly.

"Ah, right, right," Song Ke nodded. "If there were more, would you buy them?"

"Well..." Wang Hu glanced at the golf clubs his bodyguards used, rubbing his chin in contemplation. "It's a bit extravagant. If I replaced all of them, it would cost a dozen or so... sigh, even for someone wealthy like me, it's a bit painful. It'd be great if there were discounts for bulk purchases."

"There are! Discounts!" Song Ke raised her voice, breaking into excitement.

Wang Hu eyed her suspiciously. “Hey, who are you? You’ve been acting strange. Do you have any opinions about my precious items?”

“No opinions!” Song Ke shook her head quickly. “I have a friend who can get... this.”

She subtly moved her hand and pulled out a kunai from her coat pocket. The blade was entirely azure, emitting a chilling light, oddly similar to the machete Wang Hu held.

“You can get it from my friend for way less than two million,” Song Ke stated firmly. However, the exact price would need discussion with Zhuang Qingyan and the others.

Wang Hu’s eyes lit up. “Come on, little friend, let’s exchange contact info. If there’s stock, let me know first. I don’t need it delivered; I’ll pick it up myself!”

...

In an abandoned gas station in the wilderness, an SUV parked by the roadside. Lu Xiaoyu extended a mechanical arm to charge the vehicle with an energy gun.

The rest of the V587 team stretched their muscles. From this vantage point, they could already see the urban area of Haimen. Rolling hills extended endlessly, and a mighty river flowed through the bottom plain, forming a natural barrier. Coupled with the three layers of inner and outer city walls, Haimen’s central area was impregnable, comparable to Shaye.

For the Zombie King to attack Haimen, he would need to cross the river first and then breach three formidable defense lines. The difficulty level was exceedingly high. No wonder the Magistrate of Haimen once openly stated that to conquer Haimen, one would have to open all three doors from the inside.

Song Ke sat on the car roof, swinging her legs, watching Su Cha and Fang Zhixu retrieve supplies from the convenience store. Although most of the food had expired, they managed to find some non-perishable drinks and dry goods to replenish their stock.

“Do you want to sell the spiritual weapons to the people of Haimen?” Zhuang Qingyan’s wheelchair stopped in front of her. He looked up at her; the curve from his chin to his neck was remarkably smooth, and the protruding Adam’s apple moved as he spoke.

“Yeah, can I?” Song Ke asked eagerly.

“Of course,” Zhuang Qingyan smiled, brushing off the mud splattered on her legs. “The weapons belong to you; you can decide.”

“I want to earn a lot of money,” sighed Captain Song Ke, a financially strapped individual. She jumped down from the car roof and patted Zhuang Qingyan’s legs with a meaningful expression, “To support all of you.”

She had to support the old (Fang Zhixu) and the young (Xu Xing). She had to take care of an injured patient who was still recovering, and there was also a gold-swallowing beast who’d yell every day to buy materials. It’s very stressful.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at Song Ke with a complex expression. His Adam’s apple moved unnaturally. If he hadn’t known that the other party didn’t mean that, this behavior would have constituted serious s*xual harassment: “You...”

“What’s wrong?” Song Ke tilted her head, unaware of his discomfort.

“Captain, check your account,” Lu Xiaoyu leaned out from the driver’s seat, interrupting the slightly intimate atmosphere between the two.

Song Ke opened her terminal and widened her eyes in surprise. When did an additional one and a half million appear in her account?

Lu Xiaoyu, with pride in his ice-blue eyes, proudly explained, “Counting the interest, we retrieved one and a half million from that unscrupulous old man as your growth compensation fee.”

“You’re so amazing!” Song Ke exclaimed, giving him a thumbs-up with joy.

“Then can you buy Rhenium for me?” Lu Xiaoyu pushed further, the corners of his mouth stiffening.

“Can—”

“No, you can’t,” Zhuang Qingyan coldly interrupted their conversation. “Stop smiling; your smile is really sycophantic.”

Lu Xiaoyu stared at him expressionlessly for two seconds, then thud, he closed the car window.

Song Ke blinked, hesitant to speak.

Zhuang Qingyan explained in a calmer tone, “His request is unreasonable. Rhenium is too costly, and the amount you have isn’t enough for his whims. Don’t buy it for him.”

Thud thud, protests from Lu Xiaoyu hitting the car roof echoed from inside the SUV.

Zhuang Qingyan ignored his anger, seemingly indifferent. “If mass-produced, how many spiritual weapons can you create at once?”

Song Ke thought for a moment. Her awakened energy had increased significantly compared to six months ago, considering the production rate in Hua City at that time...

“500.”

500 was a safe number, not pushing her to her limit and allowing her to maintain combat strength after their creation.

“About right, enough to arm an elite force. Let’s go with 500,” Zhuang Qingyan nodded.

“How much should we sell them for?” Song Ke whispered, “Could they not be too expensive?”

She intended to sell the spiritual artifacts, partly to make money for their small treasury and partly to aid the people of Haimen in better resisting the zombie tide. Her intention wasn't to extort them but to seize the opportunity for a disaster profit.

“Not expensive, but not too cheap either. After all, you've worked hard,” Zhuang Qingyan smiled at her reassuringly. “Don't worry, I'll consider the average economic status of the people in Haimen. I'll ensure it's within their means and they'll be willing to buy.”

...

A group of strong civilians was driving zombies away in the outskirts. Some wielded baseball bats and knives, while others dragged suitcases, pulled chairs, bravely striking the zombies. However, despite their ferocity, their tools fell short—baseball bats cracked, knives dulled, suitcases and chairs ended up worn-out. Soon, they found themselves defenseless.

Among the zombies, there was a level 2 zombie, agile and swift, jumping up and down. It swiftly caught a person off-guard, roaring as it lunged to bite.

Swoosh, swoosh—several flying knives pierced through the air, penetrating the zombie's head, splattering black-red brain matter across the ground.

The civilians, in a frenzy, helped their fallen comrade, looking up towards the unexpected saviors.

An SUV gradually halted in front of them, then reversed, revealing its trunk.

Thud—a masked woman opened the rear door enthusiastically. “Friends, have you heard of spiritual weapons?”

On the back of the door hung an array of various weapons, all emanating a chilling blue glow.

Lin Youyou's lips moved swiftly, reciting a meticulously prepared : "Feeling unsafe during the apocalypse at home? Don't panic! Song's Spiritual Artifacts are ready! Encounter a zombie? Don't fear! Whip out a spiritual weapon and let's handle it together!"

Ding ding ding—"Today's special offer! Just for 28,888, bring home the zombie-slaying artifact! Limited quantity, while supplies last!"

The group of civilians stared blankly at her.

Lin Youyou snapped her fingers. "Open up, bring out Su Cha."

Su Cha: "..."

In a lightning-fast move, he swooped low over the zombie's head. The decaying hand stretched out to grab his pant leg, but before it touched, his blue-bladed short knife clang clang severed its head. In less than five minutes, Su Cha dispatched more than a dozen zombies.

Lin Youyou's eyes gleamed mischievously, lips curved. "How about it? Want one? Limited edition, you know."

"I'll buy! I'll buy!!" The civilians suddenly shouted.

Similar scenes played out repeatedly around Haimen's outskirts. V587 would rescue the civilians and then proceed to pitch, or rather exhibit, the available spiritual weapons to them.

"Come and see, don't miss out! Check my goods, cheap and effective, buy some of my goods and guarantee a happy return home!"

"Just 28,888 for a spiritual weapon, no regrets, no scams!"

"Uncles and aunties, want to buy a spiritual weapon?"

Su Cha: "Selling... never mind."

He couldn't bring himself to speak, so he plunged into killing zombies, using actions as his loudest .

Song Ke laid on the car roof contentedly, reflecting, "I feel like Lin Youyou shouldn't be a pop star."

Out of the 500 spiritual artifacts, 380 were sold in less than two hours. Lin Youyou alone sold over 300, rightly earning the title of top salesperson. With her talent, she should pursue sales; forget being among the top ten rising stars, she could definitely become the leading influencer for Ferrara's merchandise.

In the passenger seat, Zhuang Qingyan glanced at the map of Haimen. The night had already enveloped the area; not only was there no sign of the Zombie King's shadow, but even the expected zombie tide hadn't shown any activity. Haimen remained as calm as ever, with no discernible changes.

Had his speculation been wrong?

*

Haimen.

A small, thinly bundled girl, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a scarf, hurriedly crossed the streets. Her eyes wide with confusion, she looked left and right, swiftly making her way forward, her pace quickening into a run.

Thud—just as she turned the corner, the girl collided head-on with someone else. The sturdy man took a step back, gruffly shouting, "Hey! Can't you watch where you're going?"

Looking down, he saw a young girl, probably around thirteen or fourteen, sprawled on the ground in a daze. Her scarf had slipped halfway down, revealing her gray eyes. As if realizing something, she frantically tried to pull the scarf back up to cover her face.

Seeing her as just a kid, the man didn't feel right to argue further. With irritation, he said, "Watch where you're going next time!"

The girl mumbled a couple of words and hurriedly lowered her head. Her voice sounded hoarse, and her speaking seemed peculiar.

The man muttered to himself as he moved away, "...mixed-blood."

The girl, using her hands, picked herself up from the ground. A couple of messy braids fell carelessly, exposing distinct corpse-like markings on her neck. Standing up straight, she dared not run again, slowly fading into the darkness.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 124: Life-and-Death Marathon (15)

Braided Head's Self-Perception

The deep grey SUV drove through the open fields, gradually approaching the roaring waves of the riverbank. In front of Song Ke and the others appeared the only passage into the Haimen urban area—a magnificent bridge soaring over the river like a flying rainbow.

The entire bridge was divided into two levels. The upper level delineated lanes for floating vehicles, starships, and other suspended tools with neon signal lights. The lower level consisted of eight lanes for regular vehicles, spanning over 1.5 kilometers. From a distance, it looked like a giant dragon lying horizontally, forming the most critical lifeline in Haimen.

Lu Xiaoyu turned the steering wheel, preparing to enter the lower-level lanes. However, before reaching the bridge toll booth, the stationed sentry signaled for an immediate stop. Rows of jet-black heavy machine guns stood ready, their elongated magazines hanging from mounts, emitting a silent but intimidating presence.

"Wow, so cool." Xu Xing leaned halfway out of the window, admiringly exclaiming.

Generally, most boys were fascinated by firearms. Xu Xing mimicked the action of firing a machine gun, making “pew-pew-pew” sounds, thoroughly enjoying himself. The sentries all simultaneously turned their gun barrels toward their SUV.

Song Ke and Xu Xing immediately raised their hands, while Lu Xiaoyu whistled and impeccably lifted his six mechanical arms.

The sentries tensed up, ready to act against the perceived threat, about to pull the trigger—

“Don’t misunderstand, we’re... competitors!” Song Ke frantically attempted to press down Lu Xiaoyu’s claw. Just as she managed to press it down, it popped up again. Frustrated, Song Ke smacked his head, finally calming him down.

A drone, displaying the logo of the Throne Race Competition, hovered above the SUV. The sentries remained vigilant, shouting loudly, “Stop immediately and undergo inspection!”

Lu Xiaoyu stopped playing around and obediently pressed the brake. The diligent sentries conducted a thorough search and interrogation for a full fifteen minutes. Only after confirming repeatedly with the city hall were they allowed to proceed. As they distanced themselves from the checkpoint, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hell’s Scythe,” Zhuang Qingyan murmured softly, “good stuff.”

“What’s that?” The people in the car wore confused expressions.

Zhuang Qingyan pointed to the neatly arranged heavy machine guns outside the car window, saying, “These guns are produced in Mu City. They fire an average of 1,500 bullets per minute, with a precise shooting range of 1 kilometer and a maximum range of 5 kilometers. They can sustain heavy firepower against distant targets.”

“The production line for Hell’s Scythe was bought out long ago, exclusively for the Northern Base. It seems Haimen has done thorough preparation,” Lu Xiaoyu murmured disdainfully.

“They’re really wealthy...” Song Ke was once again astonished by the wealth of the people in Haimen.

District D had no access restrictions. V587, amidst the unwelcoming gazes of the sentries along the way, crossed the river and approached three heavily fortified lines of defense.

Brick walls with high-voltage electric fences stood tall under the sky, safeguarding the people of Haimen in their haven amidst the apocalypse. Outside the walls, everything was meticulously cleared, with no wandering zombies or mutated beasts in sight.

Upon entering each defense line, armed sentries rushed out to inspect them, “escorting” them with the presence of their numerous gun barrels.

“Creak...” The heavy iron gate slowly lifted, and the SUV carrying seven people entered the urban area of Haimen amid the swirling dust.

Because they took a shortcut, V587 was the first team to arrive in Haimen.

Lin Youyou supported her chin, sighing, “I believe, with everything fortified like this, even the Zombie King wouldn’t be able to break in. It’s practically impregnable!”

“Maybe not,” Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped his fingertip, offering a faint response.

“...Huh? What else could it possibly do?” Lin Youyou’s accent gradually mimicked the locals of Haimen.

Zhuang Qingyan didn’t answer but instead a familiar villain smile appeared on his face.

“If you were the Zombie King, how would you attack Haimen?”

“Whoa, that’s a twisted ‘what if’!” At first, they strongly disapproved verbally, but then they eagerly started discussing.

Xu Xing enthusiastically raised his hand, "I'd freeze the river surface!"

Zhuang Qingyan replied, "With a river this wide and your limited awakened energy, you couldn't even fill its gaps."

Xu Xing wilted.

Lu Xiaoyu lifted his chin lightly, "I could enter openly."

He had just observed that the defense line had two opening modes: automatic and manual. With a mere movement of his finger, the iron gate would open for him.

"Hmm, you might get in, but I bet those sentries have been eagerly waiting for you, ready to turn you into a hornet's nest with smiles," Zhuang Qingyan nodded.

Lu Xiaoyu: "..."

It was Su Cha's turn. He said hesitantly, "I could sneak in... hopefully without being noticed."

"If you can sneak in alone, what about your zombie subordinates?" Lin Youyou chuckled softly behind her hand, countering faster than Zhuang Qingyan, "Plus, who leads a charge among the undead?"

Fang Zhixu shook his head directly, "Don't ask me, I have no idea."

"What about the captain?" Lu Xiaoyu asked.

"Well, I'm still thinking," Song Ke wore a serious expression, although her mind was blank, unable to come up with any solution.

"Once again, our captain remains calm, never speaking without thought," Zhuang Qingyan praised, utterly devoid of principles.

Others: "...Flatterer."

"What's your plan, then?" Xu Xing retorted indignantly.

The carriage jostled slightly, and Zhuang Qingyan looked at the rearview mirror. At the final iron gate, several large food airdrop containers were being stopped by the sentries, who opened and scanned them top to bottom with life detectors, finding no traces of anything amiss.

Zhuang Qingyan's voice was low, "If I were the Zombie King... I'd tell the people of Haimen one thing: 'Darkness under the lamp.'"

V587: "What's with the riddles again?"

Even after the SUV had been driving for a while, his gaze remained fixed in the direction of the iron gate.

"What are you thinking?" Song Ke leaned over and asked.

"Thinking about a classic battle from ancient times," Zhuang Qingyan spoke somberly, "The Trojan War."

...

They spent nearly two hours searching in Haimen, but the check-in point was nowhere to be found, making it clear it hadn't appeared yet.

The sky had darkened completely, pedestrian traffic on the streets had decreased, and V587 was clueless and at a loss.

Suddenly, Xu Xing rubbed his eyes in disbelief and pointed outside, murmuring, "Braided Head?"

Across the street, a relaxed figure was leisurely strolling around. It would lean against shop windows for a moment, then glance at a garden, and when tired, it knew to sit on a bench to rest.

“Capture it,” Zhuang Qingyan said coldly.

Song Ke and Su Cha opened the car doors and dashed across the street like lightning.

The Braided Head visibly startled, jumped in place, and tried to flee. However, its speed couldn't match that of two top-tier awakeners. Song Ke leaped high from the roof of the car, diving and forcefully tackling it to the ground!

The Braided Head struggled and its hat fell off, revealing most of its scarf. The clear lines of decay were visible on its profile. It twisted to bite Song Ke, but before it could, Su Cha grabbed something from a nearby garbage truck and stuffed it into its mouth.

Coincidentally, it was a used diaper.

The Braided Head froze instantly, abandoning resistance. Its throat convulsed, exhibiting a look of pure disgust as if it had been sickened.

Its expression was incredibly vivid, barely any different from that of a human. Zhuang Qingyan silently stared at it.

Xu Xing jumped out of the car, hesitatingly approaching Braided Head's side.

Encountering a zombie within the heavily fortified city, a normal person's initial reaction would definitely be to kill it.

The commotion had already attracted the attention of passersby, and patrolling sentries were approaching.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his voice, “Take it away.”

Song Ke lifted Braided Head with one hand and tossed it into the car, and the SUV sped away.

The faithful drone captured everything, causing an explosion of comments from viewers watching the live stream from Ferrara.

“Oh my god! Is that a zombie? If I’m not blind, that’s definitely a zombie!”

“You’re not blind, that’s indeed a zombie.”

“Can someone tell me why there’s a zombie in Haimen’s urban area? Are the sentries just for show? Ah!!”

“Does anyone have the contact information for Haimen’s city hall? Alert them quickly!”

Ferrara Hotel.

He Qihong’s gaze intensified, and the lines around her nose deepened suddenly. Without hesitation, she initiated a communication.

“Captain Yin Xiao, I’d like to request the ‘Tustan’ team to fulfill a personal task of mine.”

“Commander He, if I remember correctly, I am currently enjoying my hard-earned break—pe—riod,” Yin Xiao drawled leisurely, elongating his tone. “Are you openly asking me to work overtime? Will there be overtime pay?”

Ignoring his impertinence, He Qihong calmly said, “I’m asking you to immediately go to District D135 and capture a mutated zombie. I believe Dr. Ning’s research team will find it very interesting.”

“District D135?” Yin Xiao’s lazy tone vanished instantly, replaced by a hint of surprise. “I happen to be watching the Throne Race Competition; are you referring to Song—cough, I mean, the team V587 in Haimen.”

“That’s right. I want you to capture the zombie alive before they kill it.”

“Well, overtime is possible, as long as you remember to pay triple the commission fee,” Yin Xiao strangely changed his tune, agreeing quite readily.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

*

The SUV stopped at an abandoned factory, and the bound Braided Head was thrown to the ground.

It tried to run, but its limbs were tightly bound. It stumbled after just a couple of steps and fell flat.

A metal wheelchair rolled slowly in front of it. Zhuang Qingyan observed it with lowered eyes, appearing like an unfeeling deity capable of deciding its life or death at any moment.

Feeling threatened, Braided Head let out a hoarse roar from deep in its throat, baring its teeth viciously at Zhuang Qingyan. Its pointed teeth weren’t as sharp as other zombies’, resembling underdeveloped canine teeth.

“Shut your mouth, or I’ll pull out all your teeth,” Zhuang Qingyan threatened.

“!!” Braided Head whimpered and surprisingly shut its mouth obediently.

“It... it understands!” Fang Zhixu exclaimed in surprise, assuming that the fallen had only retained consciousness, never expecting it to communicate with humans.

Zhuang Qingyan asked in a low voice, “You understand what we’re saying, right?”

Braided Head hesitated for two seconds and reluctantly nodded.

“Why did you infiltrate Haimen?”

“Ah... ah...” Braided Head tilted its head back and let out a couple of random shouts.

Zhuang Qingyan: “Untie its hands.”

Su Cha cut the ropes with a dagger, freeing Braided Head, whose stiff fingers clumsily drew an unfamiliar pattern in the sand.

V587 was utterly baffled—what kind of bizarre symbol was this? Even if it understood, could it not communicate?

With hands behind his back, Xu Xing circled the pattern twice and suddenly exclaimed, “I got it! This is the Zombie King!”

“Ah! Ah!” Braided Head exclaimed excitedly.

“Xiao Xing, how did you figure it out?” Song Ke humbly asked.

“These are wings, and these are blood vessels, quite easy to recognize,” Xu Xing explained confidently, pointing at the dark and intricate drawing.

“...,” Everyone was speechless. How did they not recognize it?

“Are you saying you were sent by the Zombie King?” Zhuang Qingyan shifted the conversation, “Apart from you, how many similar zombies have entered?”

Braided Head's grey eyes moved slowly, seemingly surprised that Zhuang Qingyan knew it had companions.

Like a child caught in wrongdoing, it sneakily glanced at Zhuang Qingyan, then lowered its head, pretending to "think," before starting to draw little figures in the sand—one after another, row after row, quickly filling two lines and not stopping.

"It says there are many more," Xu Xing blinked, taking the role of the zombie language interpreter seriously.

"...Thank you for making that clear."

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes grew colder, "Was your mission to open the three iron gates from inside?"

Braided Head's drawing paused abruptly, as if hitting a wall.

Zhuang Qingyan pressed on, "Why didn't you act together with your companions?"

When V587 captured Braided Head, it behaved like someone taking a leisurely stroll, as if casually roaming the streets without any sense of carrying a heavy burden.

Braided Head struggled, scratching the ground with its fingers for a while. Eventually, it sluggishly drew a vertical dividing line. On the left side, it drew a cluster of unknown symbols, and on the right side, another set of these symbols.

Everyone looked to Xu Xing, waiting for his translation.

Even Xu Xing found himself a little puzzled this time. He crouched down, studying it for a while.

Braided Head enthusiastically explained to him, "Ah—ahh—ahh."

Xu Xing nodded and pointed confidently at the left side, “This is you.”

Braided Head exclaimed, “Ah!”

It quickly added a few strokes on the right side, connecting a line to the earlier drawing of the ‘Zombie King.’

Xu Xing continued, “This is the bad side of you.”

Braided Head exclaimed again, “Ah!”

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the strange pile of symbols on the ground, a hint of a smile on his lips. “You want to tell us that the Fallen are divided into two factions. One identifies with its former existence as a human and doesn’t want to be involved in conflicts. The other has completely sided with the Zombie King, willingly becoming its followers. Is that right?”

Braided Head nodded happily, its stiff neck making crackling sounds.

Zhuang Qingyan slowed down his speech, “Oh? So, which side do you belong to?”

This time, Braided Head hesitated for a very long time.

Carefully, it lifted its finger and slowly drew a line, connecting the ‘good self’ to Xu Xing’s feet.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 125 – Life-and-Death Marathon (16)

We meet again, Song Ke

The girl with braided hair seemed a bit timid in her actions, yet she firmly linked herself with Xu Xing.

At that moment, anyone could understand its significance – it chose the side of humanity, even though it no longer belonged to the “human” category.

The audience squatting in the V587 live broadcast room instantly erupted into contrasting opinions.

“Don’t be naive! How could a zombie empathize with humans?”

“What are you doing? Quickly kill it! You don’t seriously believe a word from a zombie, do you?”

“But I feel... it sounds genuine.”

“Can the holy talk just leave? My whole family was bitten by zombies, and I don’t share the sky with them!”

The discussion about this unique zombie grew increasingly heated. The director realized a new focal point for viewership and switched the drone to focus on Braided Head’s face, capturing the patterns of decay. The grey eyes of the girl blinked without pause as her head followed the movement of the drone. Suddenly, without warning, she snarled fiercely at the camera: “Ahh—!”

Its gaping mouth, contorted face, and menacingly sharp teeth seemed as though they would snap the neck of anyone on the other side of the screen at any moment.

The argumentative barrage in the live chat momentarily froze, replaced by a flood of unintelligible characters. The hyper-realistic experience from the high-definition images left a considerable psychological impact on the audience. It took a while before someone tremblingly muttered, “See... a-a zombie is just a zombie.”

Braided Head’s hands dug into the ground, a hint of triumph flashing across her face.

“Alert the Haimen City Hall to investigate suspicious individuals within the city,” Zhuang Qingyan quickly stated.

“I’ll contact them now,” Lin Youyou summoned the terminal interface.

Zhuang Qingyan then turned to Song Ke, lowering his voice. “Captain, a few words in private.”

Song Ke nodded and walked over. Zhuang Qingyan glanced at the drone and tapped twice on the armrest of Lu Xiaoyu’s wheelchair.

“Private talk, didn’t you hear? Sort it out.”

Lu Xiaoyu rolled his eyes, his fingers swiftly moving. Soon, several drone signals were lost, resembling headless flies buzzing erratically at low altitudes, and the V587 live stream room filled with static, displaying a “technical malfunction” message.

“How do you plan to handle her?” the two walked into a corner, and Zhuang Qingyan asked in a low voice.

His demeanor was very natural, but after spending so much time together, Song Ke was already familiar with the subtle changes in his expressions. Though Zhuang Qingyan used an inquiring tone, his eyes betrayed indifference, indicating that he didn’t care about the life or death of Braided Head.

Song Ke had a vague feeling that every time Zhuang Qingyan talked about the “Plan Eternity” or mentioned the “Fallen,” his emotions became complex. It seemed to mix some kind of hidden disgust and rejection that he couldn’t openly express.

“I’m thinking of finding a more distant place,” Song Ke calmly voiced her thoughts, “and leaving it there.”

In truth, she didn’t have a better solution. Braided Head wasn’t entirely human or a zombie; she seemed more like a new species born after the apocalypse. Although she didn’t attack proactively and was even sent as a spy by the zombie king, humans... wouldn’t accept her.

“Okay, Captain’s decision,” Zhuang Qingyan had no objections regardless of whether Song Ke chose to kill or spare her.

“But there’s one thing. We weren’t cautious when we first captured her. Now, with the Throne Race broadcast spreading, I’m worried that some might become ‘overly’ interested in her, causing trouble for us.”

“Our team isn’t suitable for attracting too much attention,” Zhuang Qingyan said slowly.

Most of the V587 team members carried secrets. For instance, Song Ke’s inexplicable wound-healing speed, Fang Zhixu’s peculiar constitution that prevented zombie attacks, Lin Youyou’s true identity, and Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu...

“Then,” Song Ke quickly made a decision, “shall we find a place to leave her now?”

As they walked back, Xu Xing and Braided Head were lying side by side on the sand, their heads next to each other, drawing.

Lin Youyou gestured toward them, “The communication channel has been occupied. Probably bombarded by viewers watching the live stream.”

Song Ke was about to say something when suddenly, a piercing alarm shattered the night.

“Level one alert! Level one alert! Multiple zombie waves detected approaching. All sentinels assemble immediately!”

Their faces paled. The zombie wave was indeed heading toward Haimen!

They wondered whether this was another feigned attack to deceive them or if it was the Zombie King’s all-out assault.

“Let’s go check it out,” Song Ke decisively took charge.

The SUV restarted. She turned to Braided Head. With no time to arrange her destination, she had to carefully negotiate, “Your appearance might be mistaken for a zombie by others, which is dangerous. Come with us for now.”

“Ah, ah,” Braided Head obediently nodded, hands planted on the ground.

“Braided Head, with me here, I’ll protect you!” Xu Xing beside her patted his chest, making a manly promise.

“Huh? Huh!” Braided Head disdainfully straightened up, towering significantly taller than Xu Xing.

“…?” Xu ‘Shorty’ Xing’s self-esteem collapsed.

On the streets, vehicles rushed by, houses lit up, and the bustling noise echoed continuously.

The SUV halted behind the final defense line, bright lights overhead illuminating the area like daylight. The official armed forces of Haimen swiftly and orderly moved through emergency passages, setting up heavy weapons on the city walls. Despite the temporary nocturnal siege, they remained composed.

In front of everyone stood a massive floating screen, the connected thermal imaging continually emitting alarms, the frequency increasing. From the screen, numerous green radiation sources could be seen rapidly approaching Haimen from all directions. However, the real-time monitoring showed a calm scene, with the high-altitude scanners outside the city patrolling, finding no abnormalities.

A mild late spring breeze brushed their faces, the river’s surface gently undulating, the desolate wilderness quiet and still.

At both ends of the bridge, the tense sentinels gripped their hell scythes, guns aimed squarely at the dark plains.

One minute passed, then two... five minutes elapsed.

The anxious people of Haimen started whispering at first, then gradually the chatter grew louder.

Where were the zombies? Where was the zombie tide?

The same question flashed through everyone's mind.

Beneath the night sky, the river water began to surge.

Rolling waves formed dark rings, swiftly surging on both sides of the bridge across the river.

A sentinel at the bridge wiped his damp palms, nervousness evident, as waves crashed against the shore.

His determined gaze fixated forward. At any sign of movement on the plains, he would not hesitate to open fire.

Suddenly, the sound of waves hitting the bank behind them. The sentinel shivered, alertly turning the machine gun. Before he could discern what was approaching, five or six drenched zombies leaped from the river, instantly overpowering him, tearing him into pieces!

“Ah—!!” The piercing scream sent chills down everyone's spines.

What was more terrifying happened next. After the first sentinel's death, countless zombie heads surfaced on the river, forming an expansive cluster resembling floating gourds. The sight was enough to drive someone with a fear of clusters insane.

Gunners at the bridgehead and city walls unleashed relentless gunfire. The scythes were akin to the reaper of life. Bullets poured out in continuous streams, sinking numerous zombies. Their bodies floated like balloons, yet their numbers were overwhelming. Often submerging to evade gunfire and hindered

by the surging water, they made targeting difficult. The rushing currents impeded the firearms' range, making it impossible to inflict effective damage for a while.

Soon, a horde of zombies crossed the river, sprinting in groups towards the first iron gate.

“Pull the switch! Pull the switch quickly!” yelled the guards within the defenses.

The high-voltage electric grid crackled and the front line of zombies instantly fell, their bodies charred. A strong stench of decay drifted into the city on the wind. However, the following zombies stepped over the fallen, fiercely charging forward. The crisis didn't cease; from beneath the river's surface, an unending stream of undead reinforcements emerged!

Humanity, overly confident in the Great River's protection, never imagined that the Zombie King had trained a zombie army well-versed in aquatic warfare!

“Zombies don't need to breathe, they don't require oxygen, they can adapt to extreme pressure, perfect for prolonged deep dives,” Zhuang Qingyan's gaze turned icy. “But under the right deployment, the Zombie King could silently send his troops. Its capabilities are probably more terrifying than we estimated.”

Song Ke peered out from the car's rooftop. “Do we need to help?”

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head. “Intervening now might disrupt the counterattack's rhythm. Let's wait. Haimen isn't defenseless.”

The defenders atop the city walls, under immense pressure of life and death, unleashed astonishing speed. Artillery and explosive rounds were launched relentlessly, the destructive power of heavy weapons quickly curbing the zombie assault, completing the first wave clearance, creating heaps of debris outside the defenses.

Braided Head suddenly stuck her head against the car window and made two “Ah-ah” sounds.

Song Ke glanced down at her, realization dawning. “I almost forgot, you have accomplices, eager to cause chaos!”

The dark grey SUV restarted, heading towards the first iron gate.

Between the three defense lines, there was a commercial area. Currently, the emergency passages were congested with people. Officials in charge of evacuation shouted at the top of their lungs, “Safe zones are open! Civilians, retreat quickly! Let the elderly, women, and children go first!”

As the main forces marched through, an officer hurriedly ran towards the control room, preparing to close the emergency entrance. Unbeknownst to him, in the darkness, a few pairs of cloudy grey eyes were fixed on him.

Just as he pressed the control panel, someone within the civilian queue suddenly turned and hurled an unidentified object at him. “Bang” – those gasoline-like items struck the control panel, erupting into flames and causing a series of explosions, resulting in a circuit short circuit.

The high-voltage electric grid outside the city walls sizzled twice before gradually dimming.

The civilians were startled to discover a traitor among them. Panic-stricken, they looked at the troublemakers, then shouted:

“Zombies! Zombies have infiltrated!!”

The high-voltage electric grid suddenly failed, even when the backup power was activated, there was about a minute of silence.

The zombies attacking the city, free from the threat of electric shock, became even more ferocious in their charge. Meanwhile, heavy and chaotic footsteps echoed from the horizon, signaling the arrival of the second wave of zombies on land!

The defense line in Haimen instantly became strained. Sentinels on the bridge over the river frantically sprayed the plains, trying to halt the reinforcements. Meanwhile, zombies from the water seized the opportunity to leap onto the city walls, ruthlessly biting into the humans within the defenses.

Witnessing a sharp decline in armed sentinels and a rapid weakening of firepower, the awakeners in Haimen took action, swiftly rushing to the frontline.

The evacuated civilians also turned back abruptly, looking at the collapsed walls and their kin being slaughtered, their eyes burning with fury.

“Ptew! My ancestors were all from Haimen, born and raised on this land. Even in death, we won’t let you bastards occupy Haimen! Just zombies? We’ll fight you to the end!” The call was echoed by hundreds as thousands of valiant residents of Haimen raised their weapons, engaging in a fierce battle against the zombies.

“Let’s go.” Song Ke and the others lagged behind, unable to identify the Fallen among the crowd.

From the current situation, it was evident that this zombie tide wasn’t a feigned attack; the Zombie King was sure to appear.

Intense fighting erupted outside the city of Haimen. Reinforcements arrived from the sky, teams participating in the Throne Race like “Three Grandsons and One Grandpa”, “Shunxing Teahouse”, and “Guns and Roses” all rushed in.

Several uniquely designed hovercars arrived over Haimen. Yin Xiao leaned out from the top of one, pulling up a sniper rifle with a sigh, “Looks like another overtime shift... again, my luck’s really bad... Huh?”

Yin Xiao swallowed the latter half of the sentence, looked down at his feet, a playful smile creeping up, “Actually, my luck’s pretty good.”

After a minute of silence, the high-voltage electric grid restarted. With their fearless resistance, the people of Haimen managed to hold off the zombies outside the city.

Amidst the chaotic battlefield, Song Ke yelled at Braided Head, “Hey, don’t wander off! Stick close to me!”

“Ah!” Braided Head replied and obediently followed behind V587.

Song Ke quickly freed a scarf from her hand and securely covered the girl’s face with it.

As she was about to sprint forward, a nimble figure descended from above, landing right in front of her. The man was clad in combat gear, camo pants, high military boots, and wore fingerless sniper gloves—it was Yin Xiao.

“We meet again, Song Ke,” Yin Xiao greeted with a smile. “How about we discuss something?”

“No time,” Song Ke replied bluntly. She didn’t have time for small talk with him.

Yin Xiao shrugged off her indifference and gestured towards Braided Head hiding behind Song Ke.

“You hand this guy over to me, and I’ll help you kill the Zombie King, deal?”

A threatening growl emanated from Braided Head’s throat.

Song Ke frowned, about to respond—when a piercing alarm rang out across the entire city.

...

A few minutes ago.

While everyone’s attention was on the underwater zombies, a group of about thirty individuals dressed in uniforms approached the gatehouse. Upon closer inspection, their movements appeared stiff and uncoordinated.

“Who goes there?” A sentinel raised his gun, sternly asking, but the identical uniforms caused hesitation, preventing them from shooting immediately.

The opposition swiftly lunged forward. The sentinels groaned as their necks snapped audibly.

Scattered bodies lay on the ground as these people silently crossed over, picking up firearms from the fallen.

“Knock, knock—” The leader politely knocked on the door.

The person in charge of the control room opened the video intercom, seeing a sentinel outside with a low-brimmed hat and an eerie tattoo on their chin. “What’s your ID number?” the person asked cautiously. “I haven’t seen you before.”

The individual slowly lifted their head, their cloudy grey eyes staring straight at them.

The person in charge paled, and hastily took a step back, trying to press the alarm button. Unfortunately, it was too late. The next moment, the gates were violently smashed open, dozens of zombies barged in, and blood-curdling screams echoed.

Haimen’s first iron gate was opened from the inside.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 126.1 – Life-and-Death Marathon (17)

Good Brother and Bad Brother

The artillery purchased by Haimen was the most popular hot weapon at the Northern Base, equipped with automatic loading and ballistic calibration functions. Its only flaw was the extremely high demand on the operator; it required a single person to complete angle measurement, distance measurement, aiming, and then firing, for precise strikes against the enemy.

Training a qualified gunner required a huge cost, and after the city walls were breached, the zombies seemed to have a collective consciousness, targeting these elites as their primary attack objective.

Two silver-white wheelchairs quietly ascended the defensive structure. Lu Xiaoyu flipped over several zombies gnawing at the remains of the gunners, stopping in front of a row of artillery positions. With lowered eyes, he studied for two seconds, adeptly corrected the ballistic deviation, aimed, and fired—

Boom!

Boom!

Boom boom!

Six shells consecutively shot, landing in the most densely packed central area of the zombies. Each cannon blast created deep craters in the ground. Lu Xiaoyu's calculations were almost flawless; hundreds of zombies were blasted away, some directly reduced to putrid mush.

Lu Xiaoyu's silver hair fluttered as all six arms moved in unison. He resembled the legendary sea monster from ancient times, effortlessly controlling even the Hell Scythe. Swiftly adjusting the gun barrels, he switched to single-shot mode. Bullets sprayed out, blowing apart zombie skulls and turning bodies into sieves. The pressure on the city wall immediately lightened.

“Thank you, brother!” The surviving gunners, their faces covered in blood, shouted their gratitude towards him.

Lu Xiaoyu nodded gracefully.

Those gunners staggered back to their positions, steadfastly holding the line.

Lu Xiaoyu glanced down, noticing the smell of gunpowder all over him. In contrast, Zhuang Qingyan who was following him was like a noble prince, moving as if on a leisurely stroll, his clothes untouched by

dust. He maneuvered his wheelchair around the bodies on the ground, afraid of even a speck of blood staining his attire.

That picky and fastidious countenance mirrored his youth. Anyone familiar with him wouldn't mistake it.

Lu Xiaoyu extended a mechanical arm, intentionally handing over the dirtiest Hell Scythe, playfully tossing it into Zhuang Qingyan's lap.

"Do you know how to use it? If not, I can teach you. It's because you didn't take the firearms course."

Zhuang Qingyan's brows were so tight that he could pinch a fly. He grabbed a slightly cleaner piece of cloth from the ground, wiped the gun barrel's black-red bloodstains, loaded live ammunition, and aimed at Lu Xiaoyu's head. "Fire your cannons, less talk."

Lu Xiaoyu huffed in a tsundere manner, completely focused on controlling the six artillery pieces.

Zhuang Qingyan adjusted the gun's aim but kept his gaze fixed on his face. "I've noticed, you've been more agreeable lately."

Lu Xiaoyu's movement imperceptibly paused for a moment. Using the standard Alliance language with a peculiar tone, he retorted, "Oh, dear friend, I've always been agreeable. It's just that you don't understand me enough."

"Did you steal money from Song Ke? Moved it to your own account?" Zhuang Qingyan arched an eyebrow.

"Are you insulting my character?" Lu Xiaoyu practically had 'You're ridiculous' written all over his face.

"Tch—"

"Boring."

The two glared at each other, then turned their heads away.

Lu Xiaoyu was like a human artillery, rapid-fire cannons booming down onto the battlefield, silver snakes dancing, zombies flipping.

Amidst the deafening noise, he suddenly spoke, “The Plan Eternity... Is that the one?”

“Which one?” Zhuang Qingyan replied casually.

“The one where you were so ecstatic, shouting everywhere, ‘Finally, I can participate in the project with that person,’ is that it?” Lu Xiaoyu didn’t look at him. “I could hear your ghostly cries even when I was sleeping on the fifth floor that day.”

Zhuang Qingyan fell silent for a moment before retorting sarcastically, “You’re the idiot. At least I didn’t oversleep and miss an exam.”

—He didn’t deny it.

Without lifting his head, Lu Xiaoyu continued swiftly while killing zombies, “Regarding the Plan Eternity, when you explained it, you mentioned many concepts—humans, zombies, awakeners, mutant zombies, evolved zombies, the fallen... But regardless of the species, they all have fatal flaws, and in your logical chain, there happens to be a crucial missing link.”

“—Also the most perfect link.”

“As you’ve said, the initial intention of the Plan Eternity was to create the most perfect genes. Its results should have eternal life, immense abilities, while retaining consciousness and intelligence, achieving a thorough evolution of humanity. I want to know, did this research succeed?” Lu Xiaoyu asked persistently.

“Ever heard a saying? Curiosity killed the cat,” Zhuang Qingyan said lightly.

“I only know that curiosity is the staircase to human progress. Since you joined Qinglan, you disappeared from Liuboni and when we met again...”

Lu Xiaoyu finally found a moment to glance at him, scanning him up and down, ultimately resting on his legs, recently healed from serious injuries.

“Well, it’s unexpected.”

“Since you care so much about this project,” Lu Xiaoyu asked again, “I’m genuinely curious, did your research succeed?”

This time, Zhuang Qingyan took a long time to contemplate before slowly responding:

“Once.”

Even Lu Xiaoyu couldn’t hide his immense surprise, but Zhuang Qingyan didn’t give him a chance to speak.

“Just once.”

“Fourteen years ago, there was a nuclear leak in Loak, followed by an explosion. The entire Qinglan Research Institute was devastated, including the project researchers, all experimental subjects, and... the local storage hub that contained all the data for the Plan Eternity.”

“Since that day, the results of this research could only be declared a failure.”

“The data can be recovered,” Lu Xiaoyu remarked dismissively.

“That hub was pulverized into fragments. Not even the tiniest nail-sized piece could be reconstructed, not even by someone like you,” Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes held a chilling coldness. “Moreover, do you think the Central Court didn’t anticipate this?”

“How much data was in the hub?” Lu Xiaoyu inquired.

“Exceeding three thousand zettabytes,” Zhuang Qingyan replied.

“Three thousand zettabytes of data,” Lu Xiaoyu clicked his tongue twice. “That number sounds quite terrifying.”

He then maneuvered another round of six cannons to fire simultaneously, taking advantage of the automatic reloading break, seemingly casually glancing at Zhuang Qingyan.

“You think, is there anyone whose brain works exceptionally well, capable of memorizing all the data?”

“I say,” Zhuang Qingyan’s tone was icy, “if you don’t start firing again, the zombies will get too close.”

Both of them simultaneously raised their weapons and began firing.

At that moment, a piercing alarm sounded, and the first iron gate of Haimen opened.

*

After the defense line was breached, the tide of zombies found a clear direction of attack, rushing relentlessly toward the iron gates, fearing to fall behind.

From a vantage point, the dense horde of zombies appeared like moving black ants, devouring Haimen at an alarming pace.

At this critical moment, dozens of armored vehicles rolled out from within the city. Yen Biao, the magistrate of Haimen, stood at the forefront, holding a megaphone, roaring, “Push forward—artillery and rifle hands must not retreat!”

“Behind this gate are our parents, wives, children, our homeland! Not a step backward!”

“Haimen can’t afford any failure. Even if we’re to die, let’s die charging forward!”

The soldiers of Haimen, their eyes reddened, fervently agreed, fiercely spraying the oncoming zombie horde with gunfire and continuous bombardment.

The armored vehicles thundered across the land, crushing the zombies attempting to breach the defensive line into pulp. Yen Biao mounted a Hell Scythe on the vehicle’s roof, roaring wildly as he fired repeatedly, ejecting shell casings like a torrential stream.

Whether awakener or ordinary person, sentinel or civilian, intense battles erupted throughout Haimen’s city walls, streets, and alleys. Even women and children weren’t hiding at home, spontaneously aiding in transporting ammunition, providing frontline support.

The most striking in close combat were hundreds of warriors wielding azure-colored weapons, including Wang Hu and his bodyguard. They fearlessly swung at the zombie heads, resolute and swift in their actions. Empowered by mysterious weapons, their combat prowess was off the charts.

“Damn it! I just bought a 500-square-meter flat in the city and haven’t even renovated it. You bastards want to destroy my new home? No manners!” Wang Hu cursed while punching and kicking.

When everyone’s determination to defend the city merged into a unified force, it was truly fearsome.

Two currents of zombies at the riverbank and bridge quickly retreated. The path paved with decayed flesh and shattered bones extended from the iron gates to the riverbank, making it impossible to distinguish between the dead in battle and the zombies.

And District D135, Haimen, astonishingly held back the successive waves of zombies all on its own!

*

Tustan's group attack took advantage of the high altitude to clear an open space, while Yin Xiao shot and instantly sniped the approaching zombies.

"I've taken the commission from above to take it to the Northern Base."

"If you hand it over to me, I assure you I won't let you lose. It would be a win-win for us."

"No need." Song Ke's heart sank. As expected, Zhuang Qingyan was right. The existence of Braided Head attracted attention as soon as it was exposed.

Yin Xiao sighed in distress, "From my personal perspective, I really don't want to conflict with you."

While the two conversed, Braided Head turned its head, catching sight of several uniformed figures heading towards the iron gate. They skirted around the frontlines and vanished from sight.

Braided Head stood up abruptly, a hint of urgency flashing in its eyes.

It changed direction and, without a second thought, headed after those few individuals.

"Hey!" Its sudden attempt to escape caught Song Ke off guard. She couldn't grab it, and Braided Head had already charged into the battlefield.

"Sister, I'll go after her!" Xu Xing beside her said and promptly followed Braided Head.

Song Ke: "... Neither of them is easy to handle.

Yin Xiao chuckled and shrugged, “See, even if you protect it, it won’t appreciate you. A zombie is a zombie.”

The door of the floating car swung open, and the Tustan awakener leaned out and yelled, “Yin Xiao, stop flirting around! I’m still waiting to finish up and go back to sleep!”

“You’re just fooling around! Can’t you do something serious?”

A wild beauty with deep red curls blowing bubble gum pushed past her teammates, clasped her hands, and flirtatiously whistled, “Hey, Captain, can you do it?”

“Get lost! Kill those zombies!”

“Do you guys have to slander your captain like this? I’m still the captain!” Yin Xiao turned around, laughed, and scolded a few words, then turned to Song Ke helplessly. “Did you hear that? I have no other choice.”

As he finished speaking, he suddenly flashed past Song Ke, chasing after Braided Head.

“Sorry, it’s an urgent mission. I have to act.”

Why is he so rude? He didn’t even finish speaking before running off? Song Ke began running after him.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 126.2 – Life-and-Death Marathon (17)

Good Brother and Bad Brother

Yin Xiao moved extremely fast, almost passing through the iron gate. At the critical moment, a hail of bullets suddenly rained down from the direction of the city wall, smashing towards him in the direction he was heading. If he didn’t dodge, he would have been smashed into pieces.

Yin Xiao timely braked, leaping back, leaving deep marks on the ground with his military boots. He swiftly adjusted his sniper scope, blocking the aftermath of the explosion.

The splattered mud quickly dispersed, and he abruptly looked up, only to see a stern-faced man inside the defense walls, coldly staring at him. The man held a machine gun and was about to shoot at him.

Yin Xiao recognized the man; they had a chance encounter in the skies over Ferrara, seemingly... not on good terms.

Unfortunately, it was mutual. This dislike had no reason, just an intuition stemming from the instincts of male animals.

The two locked eyes from a distance, the smell of gunpowder lingering in the air.

A ruby earring flashed in the dark night as Yin Xiao brazenly raised two middle fingers at the other.

Zhuang Qingyan remained unfazed, tugging at the corner of his mouth, revealing an extremely mocking smile.

Just as Yin Xiao furrowed his brows, someone grabbed his collar. A tall figure exceeding eighty kilograms was hoisted up with one hand and was ruthlessly flung backward! His vision spun as Yin Xiao, with his slender figure, twisted mid-air, landing to maintain balance. When he looked up again, Song Ke's leopard-like agile figure had already leapt away, slashing down nearby zombies, long gone.

Some people naturally disliked fragile white flowers, yet they found themselves defenseless against vibrant, thorn-covered iron roses. Yin Xiao was someone who walked a different path.

A smirk played at the corner of his mouth, but the next moment, he realized that Song Ke's throw was exceptionally accurate, landing him amidst a heap of zombies.

The zombies emerging from the river, covered in algae and mud, shook their heads, splattering him with a river-scented mess.

“...” Yin Xiao’s smile vanished, expressionless as he drew his weapon from the holster on his thigh, efficiently dealing with the zombies.

...

“Aren’t you going after them?” Lu Xiaoyu witnessed the commotion from atop the city wall and kindly reminded Zhuang Qingyan.

“I can’t shoulder or lift anything,” Zhuang Qingyan pointed confidently at his legs. “Wouldn’t I just cause trouble if I went?”

Zhuang Qingyan thought of something, lips curling into a smile. “Don’t worry, when our captain gets serious, no one can snatch things from her.”

Lu Xiaoyu nodded. “Oh, then why did you just attack that person like a peacock spreading its feathers?”

“That person is probably top-tier A-level, and you, in any case, are an S-level awakener...”

Lu Xiaoyu trailed off suddenly.

Zhuang Qingyan sneered, “Finally figured it out? I thought you were so obsessed with shooting that even your intelligence went off with the bullets.”

Lu Xiaoyu ignored his sarcasm. He suddenly realized that since a while ago, Zhuang Qingyan had only been using firearms and hadn’t utilized any supernatural abilities. He initially thought it was out of laziness, but the truth was... he simply hadn’t had a chance to use them.

Up to this point in the battle, Haimen seemed to have an absolute advantage, yet both waves of zombies on the river and the plains were just ordinary ones. None of the mutant zombies, evolved zombies, or the Zombie King had appeared yet.

Where could they have gone?

“This Zombie King’s best tactic is guerrilla tactics,” Zhuang Qingyan calmly analyzed. “Using food airdrop containers as a cover to send in the Fallen, because they have no life signs. Once mixed with the food, it masks even radiation. Most importantly, they can control themselves and not make any noticeable movements.”

“But with such elaborate planning, is its only goal really to have the Fallen open three iron gates?”

“Since it can adjust tactics based on different abilities, why not organize a surprise attack?”

“If I were it, I definitely wouldn’t opt for a straightforward assault.”

“Oh, so you think your ‘good buddy,’ the Zombie King, would do what?” Lu Xiaoyu mocked.

“First, let other awakeners take the lead and call our people back,” Zhuang Qingyan said. “I’ll go meet this one, an interesting opponent.”

*

Inside Haimen City, all the floating screens lit up with official announcements from the municipal hall. The person responsible seemed quite frantic, lacking time to organize the language. Several announcements were bluntly expressed:

“Residents must heighten vigilance. Zombies have been discovered disguised as humans. Do not trust anyone!”

“Do not engage in conversation with strangers! Do not approach the iron gate booths! The booths are laden with explosives!”

“Zombies cannot read text. It’s enough that we know in our hearts! Don’t speak it out loud! Stay vigilant! Stay vigilant!”

A person with braided hair sprinted through the crowd, with Xu Xing panting as he chased after.

Soon, they reached the outer perimeter of the second line of defense, the back of the commercial street. Braided Head accelerated and intercepted a group of about thirty people.

Xu Xing realized something and hid behind a building, holding his breath as he peered sneakily.

Braided Head anxiously yelled twice, hoarse, towards the leader of the group.

The leader turned, lips moving, seemingly communicating with Braided Head. Xu Xing caught a glimpse of its sinister profile, murky grey eyes, and the zombie-like patterns extending from its chin down its neck. This was a Fallen!

No, these thirty people... they should all be Fallens, the "bad faction" mentioned by Braided Head.

After pondering for a moment, Xu Xing decided to nickname the leader "Dirty Chin."

After Dirty Chin finished communicating with Braided Head, it rudely shoved Braided Head aside, as if saying, "Get out of the way."

Braided Head stumbled, growing more anxious, and clumsily retrieved something from around its neck that resembled a broken fang, somewhat like... a zombie's tooth?

As Dirty Chin observed the fang, its initially calm expression turned into rage. It flipped Braided Head over with the butt of its gun, then lifted its foot to stomp on the person's head.

Braided Head struggled desperately, her hat and scarf falling off, revealing unmistakable zombie features. Dirty Chin let out an enraged roar from its throat, lowering its head closer to Braided Head's face.

Xu Xing was extremely nervous, tightly gripping an ice spike, ready to intervene at any moment.

Fortunately, Dirty Chin didn't intend to harm its fellow beings. It reached out and took away Braided Head's pendant, stooped to pick up the hat and scarf, covering the Braided Head's face, then gestured for it to leave.

Dirty Chin silently led the Fallen deeper into the street.

Remembering the direction they disappeared, Xu Xing discreetly recorded a video and shared it in the V587 group chat.

"Xiao Xing, where are you?" came Song Ke's voice through the earpiece.

"Sister! Come quickly, I've made a big discovery!" Xu Xing initially wanted to send his location but remembered that his sister couldn't distinguish directions, so he shared both their positions.

"I'm on my way," Song Ke replied.

After informing Song Ke, Xu Xing jumped off the wall and hurried toward Braided Head, his short legs moving swiftly.

Braided Head looked dazed, seeming stunned and dispirited.

Xu Xing helped fix its hat and scarf and patted off the dirt. Then, squatting in front of it, he asked, "Are you okay, Braided Head?"

Braided Head seemed absent-minded and didn't respond.

Xu Xing continued, "What did you say to your bad buddies? Why were they so angry?"

Braided Head glanced up, then silently drew something on the ground—a drawing of three tightly clustered ghostly symbols.

After staring at it for a while, Xu Xing exclaimed in surprise, “Ah? You’re saying Dirty Chin is your brother?!”

Braided Head looked puzzled.

Xu Xing struggled to explain, “Dirty Chin... uh, has a dirty chin, tall...”

Braided Head understood and protested against Xu Xing’s nickname-making behavior with a series of “ahh”s.

“Don’t worry about the details,” Xu Xing chuckled, brushing it off. “Then what about this one? Is he also your brother?”

Braided Head nodded, saying “ah.”

It quickly added a few strokes to the drawing.

Xu Xing understood this time. Braided Head had drawn a scene of zombies playing football, and then he got agitated!

“It turns out that your brother is the bad guy who took the lead in bullying me last time!”

Braided Head: “...Ahh!”

“Where did it go? Did it also come to Haimen?” Xu Xing snorted, deciding not to hold a grudge against them for their past actions.

Braided Head quieted down and slowly drew a severed zombie.

Following suit, it connected “good brother” to Xu Xing and drew the Zombie King, connecting it to the “bad brother.”

Xu Xing also grew silent, recalling Zhuang Qingyan’s cold remarks. He had mentioned that Fallens were a race outside humans and zombies, their characteristics of transformation making them unacceptable to humans. Their retained consciousness prevented them from becoming complete zombies.

During the Tongwan outbreak, Braided Head, following its “good brother,” chose to hide and evade rather than actively attack humans. However, the next day, Braided Head’s good brother was mistaken for a zombie by the awakens and was killed. The half-body Braided Head had dragged away likely belonged to its brother.

Not knowing how to comfort Braided Head, Xu Xing simply sat there with it in silence.

Sudden footsteps approached from behind, and Song Ke arrived on the scene. Seeing that they were both unharmed, she sighed with relief. Before she could fully relax, a smoke bomb flew in, exploding as it hit the ground, causing Xu Xing to cough violently, covering his mouth.

In the thick smoke, a hand with a fingerless glove lunged aggressively toward Braided Head, intercepted halfway by Song Ke, twisting it in the opposite direction.

Yin Xiao fired a shot from his other hand, forcing Song Ke to release her grip. Both took a step back.

“As the captain of Tustan, I must take this mutant zombie back to the client,” Yin Xiao’s expression showed some helplessness.

“It’s not a zombie, it’s a Fallen, a new species,” Song Ke explained seriously.

“New or old, higher-ups want it. You better not intervene,” Yin Xiao’s nonchalant expression turned serious. “One wrong move, and it’ll cause you trouble.”

Song Ke was taken aback. More trouble? Zhuang Qingyan said that, and now Yin Xiao too? Why was Braided Head’s existence so important?

As the deadlock continued between the two, Xu Xing jumped in. His hands clenched, face red from coughing, and he blurted out unexpectedly, “Why do you have to catch Braided Head?! There are so many Fallens here. Can’t you just catch the bad ones and be done with it?!”

Song Ke: “Uh...”

Yin Xiao: “Huh? So many?”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 127.1 – Life-and-Death Marathon (18)

Song Keke, he grabbed my hand hard

It’s said that children’s words are without reservation, and Xu Xing’s words left the two people opposite him stunned.

Yin Xiao’s thumb pressed on the outside of the gun body, the calloused index finger hooked the cylinder. With both hands simultaneously maneuvering the gun through a dizzying series of movements, the two slender ‘Hellcat’ pistols were effortlessly returned to their holsters strapped to his thighs, almost as if they were toys.

“Kid,” Yin Xiao raised his chin, his sharp gaze fixed on Xu Xing, “Words carry responsibility. Besides this guy, did you personally witness any other mutant zombies in Haimen?”

“It, it was already... um...” Xu Xing swallowed hard, shifted slightly toward Song Ke, the captain of the “Tustan” team, who had suddenly become imposing, exuding a different aura altogether.

“...Just over thirty of them passed by just now,” Xu Xing muttered under his breath.

“Ah! Ah!” Braided Head jumped excitedly, emitting a low growl from deep within its throat.

“If not your brother, how about catching other bad ones?” Xu Xing whispered to it, “Or those who constantly bully you, ones you dislike? Let’s ‘kill with a borrowed knife’ and take the opportunity to get rid of them!”

“...” Braided Head hesitated, hands folded together, clearly making a “thinking” gesture. Given its intelligence, it couldn’t understand what “kill with a borrowed knife” meant or handle such complex “relationship between zombies.”

Yin Xiao looked somewhat surprised, “Can this kid communicate with mutant zombies?”

Song Ke nodded solemnly, “Hmm,” acknowledging that Xiao Xing’s talent was indeed quite extraordinary.

“Your client specifically asked for you to catch Braided Head?” Song Ke inquired proactively.

“Not particularly.” Yin Xiao shrugged, hands in his pockets, leaning against the wall casually. He could already anticipate what Song Ke was going to say, as He Qihong’s only request was to “capture a mutant zombie.”

“Oh, in that case, I’ll take care of this one, you go catch others.”

Following his lead, Song Ke flicked open a butterfly knife with her thumb, swiftly spinning it. The sharp blade vibrated like the wings of a butterfly at high frequency, almost grazing against the skin of her fingertips. One wrong move could sever a finger. Song Ke performed a flashy set of maneuvers, then with a ‘click,’ she sheathed the knife.

Then she lifted her head, her eyes shining like stars, calmly gazing back at Yin Xiao, as if to say, ‘Whatever it is, I can handle it too.’

Far from feeling threatened, Yin Xiao felt an itching sensation in his mind, as if scratched by a cat’s paw.

Despite the calm negotiation between the two, neither dared to relax, knowing that any disagreement might lead to another altercation.

“If I go after others,” Yin Xiao smiled, “Captain Song, will you still intervene?”

“Not today,” came Song Ke’s calm reply.

The battle in Haimen had evolved into a bloodbath between zombies and humans. The Fallen, by choosing to open the iron gate, had positioned themselves against humanity. They were the culprits behind the current brutal situation, and she had no reason to stop Yin Xiao.

A hint of amusement flashed in Yin Xiao’s eyes as he nodded slowly, “Then I’ll have to put in more effort and change my target.”

The terminal vibrated, and Song Ke glanced down to see a gathering notification sent by Zhuang Qingyan, not far from their location.

“Xiao Xing, let’s go,” she called to Xu Xing.

Xu Xing obediently followed but turned and earnestly advised Braided Head, “Don’t wander off this time, it’s safer to stay with us.”

Just a couple of steps away, Song Ke suddenly turned around, noticing Yin Xiao following them step by step.

She tilted her head, her eyes clearly saying, ‘Didn’t you say you were going after something else?’

Having just sent the message, Yin Xiao, catching her expression, smiled in response, “Captain Song, my intuition has always been accurate.”

“Rather than aimlessly searching for the next mutant zombie within the city, I believe my chances of completing the mission are greater by following you.”

“Before that, you can use me as a helper.”

Song Ke shook her head. At that moment, she seemed to possess divine wisdom, seeing through Yin Xiao’s true intentions. “You don’t trust us.”

Yin Xiao hadn’t seen any other Fallen. If Xu Xing had lied just now, and if Song Ke and he had teamed up to deceive him, if he had believed them and there were no other Fallen, he would have fallen into their trap. Therefore, the Yin Xiao would undoubtedly follow them. If there were indeed other Fallen, he could fulfill the task. If not, he would still target Braided Head.

“Better to be cautious,” Yin Xiao calmly replied.

...

Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu had been waiting at the gathering point for a while when Lin Youyou and the other three quickly arrived to join them.

“The situation outside the city has temporarily stabilized. The zombie tide can’t break through, but Haimen’s ammunition is depleting rapidly,” Lin Youyou said, her face displaying concern. “Yan Biao has requested reinforcements from several nearby C Districts, but we don’t know how long they’ll take to arrive.”

“The checkpoint in Haimen has yet to appear,” Su Cha timely reminded.

“The checkpoint is related to the Zombie King,” Zhuang Qingyan affirmed.

As they were discussing, Song Ke and Xu Xing arrived, followed by Braided Head and a familiar young man.

“What’s going on? Who’s this?” Lin Youyou asked in surprise.

Song Ke sighed and explained to her teammates about the encounter with Yin Xiao.

Yin Xiao stood directly in front of Zhuang Qingyan, pondered for a moment, and took the initiative to greet him.

“I’m Yin Xiao, captain of the ‘Tustan’ awakener team from the Northern Base.”

“Zhuang Qingyan,” came Zhuang Qingyan’s cold reply.

“Oh, so you’re the ‘Zhuang Qingyan,’” Yin Xiao’s tone carried a meaningful undertone.

During Song Ke’s conversation with Gao Xiangyang, he had also been present, having heard about seventy to eighty percent of their chat. In his eyes, the current Zhuang Qingyan was nothing more than a despicable “thief” who stole genetic information, with suspicion of undergoing plastic surgery to alter appearances.

“Pleasure to meet you,” Yin Xiao’s face bore a fake smile as he extended his right hand.

“Right,” Zhuang Qingyan shook his hand.

Yin Xiao raised an eyebrow, his grip suddenly tightening to ninety percent strength.

The instantaneous explosive power of a top-notch sniper was not to be underestimated. If it were an ordinary person encountering such terrifying force, their joints would have been crushed.

Zhuang Qingyan’s joints made a ‘crackling’ sound. He stayed silent for a moment before turning to complain, “Song Keke, he grabbed my hand hard.”

Yin Xiao: “...?”

Aren't we having a competition here between men? You're giving up before the match even begins? What happened to your pride?

Song Ke walked over, expressionless, and slapped away Yin Xiao's hand, then lifted Zhuang Qingyan's hand to inspect. There was a hint of redness on the back of his hand.

Zhuang Qingyan's long lashes drooped down, his left hand resting neatly on his knee, his tightly pursed lips revealing a hint of grievance.

"His health isn't good," Song Ke glanced at Yin Xiao, her eyes filled with reproach. "Don't bully him."

"?!" Yin Xiao chuckled, amused.

Having grown up in the Northern Base receiving elite education, he adhered to the concept of "strength is paramount." For the first twenty-six years of his life, he lived freely and uninhibitedly, utterly ignorant of the "tea art culture" from the ancient civilization period, let alone aware of the existence of the rare breed known as the "male green tea."

Completely unaware of the undercurrents between the two, Song Ke earnestly asked her companions, "Where do you think the Fallen might go?"

Lin Youyou contemplated for a moment, "Haimen has issued warnings, and all outposts are on high alert. If the Fallen try to repeat their old tricks and open the iron gate, wouldn't it be too difficult?"

"The Zombie King, what instructions did he give you?" Zhuang Qingyan paused, turning to address Braided Head.

"?" Braided Head was startled, behaving like a student who hadn't paid attention in class and suddenly got called upon to answer a question. It scratched its head for a while, paced around, hesitated, then finally pointed in a direction, indicating it would lead Song Ke and the others.

"Let's go and see," Zhuang Qingyan said in a low voice. "Be cautious."

Braided Head took a few steps, stopped to think, struggled to recall the details it had missed while slacking off, ran a few more steps, and led the group through a series of twists and turns to the outside of the second line of defense—a remote substation. There, it stopped.

“Why did you bring us here, Braided Head?” Xu Xing asked curiously.

“Ah, ah, ah! Ah, ah...” Braided Head wailed, its expression conveying a range of emotions, but unfortunately, no one could understand.

“Someone’s here,” Su Cha warned, breaking the silence.

Everyone immediately quieted down, focusing on observing the surrounding environment.

Su Cha silently pointed in a certain direction, and a few figures dressed in staff uniforms flashed past.

Moving slowly, their shoulders swaying uncontrollably, it was another group of Fallen!

“Chase them,” Song Ke whispered.

The group hurriedly followed, passing through layers of high-voltage wires and opening the door to a distribution room.

In the pitch-black surroundings, in the quiet air, heavy breathing could faintly be heard.

“Click—” Su Cha turned on the flashlight, and the bright beam illuminated the room, revealing hundreds of Level 2 zombies crammed inside!

Squeezed into the small room, their dark eyeballs enlarged due to the strong light, they roared and lunged forward in response to the stimulation.

“Run!!”

The eight of them streamed out, with a horde of zombies hot on their heels. When did there suddenly become so many evolved zombies within Haimen City?!

Xu Xing spun around the electrical poles, continuously releasing ice shards. Lu Xiaoyu's six arms moved in unison, weaving a net-like data flow that flew out. Su Cha protected Lin Youyou and Fang Zhixu, swiftly spreading a green toxic mist. Suddenly, lightning-fast, he struck at the neck of a zombie attempting to ambush them from behind. Even Zhuang Qingyan wore a serious expression, mentally attacking the zombies without holding back.

Song Ke manifested a nearly three-meter-long staff, sweeping through the crowd of hungry, roaring zombies creating distance between them and the group.

Meanwhile, Yin Xiao leaped to the top of the electrical pole, rapidly firing his dual pistols, each shot bursting zombie heads and splattering their brain matter.

These were all Level 2 zombies, and with V587's strength, they could handle them given enough time. However, the number of zombies was overwhelming and excessively dense. If they were accidentally injured by the zombies and triggered a secondary radiation mutation, the consequences would be unimaginable.

At that moment, several hover cars swiftly approached, their windows lowering as a dozen oil guns extended from within.

“Hey! People below, find a place to hide yourselves!!”

“Come in!” Song Ke acted quickly, grabbing the electrical pole and transforming it into a massive umbrella, spreading it open. Its eight umbrella bones formed a tent-like structure, instantly creating a safe zone.

The V587 members quickly took shelter inside, barely any space remaining.

The farthest from them, Yin Xiao executed an extreme leap, rolling into the umbrella at the critical moment. He seamlessly blended in with the other seven members, squished in tightly. He winked at Song Ke, a playful gesture that carried a certain sense of charm. "How's that..."

Zhuang Qingyan remained expressionless as his wheelchair slid forward, "accidentally" landing on Yin Xiao's military boot.

Yin Xiao's expression twisted.

Song Ke: "?" What's with this guy? How's what?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 127.2 – Life-and-Death Marathon (18)

Song Keke, he grabbed my hand hard

The gasoline poured down from the sky like a torrential rain, drenching the zombies hidden in the substation thoroughly.

The door of the hover car opened, and amidst the fierce air currents, a woman with deep red curls extended her hands. Adorning her fingers were rings resembling green and blue gems, upon closer inspection revealed to be high-grade crystals. With her majestic awakened energy released, flames soared into the sky. With a "hiss," a chemical reaction occurred between the gasoline and flames, igniting rapidly.

The roaring fire illuminated the entire sky. Those supernatural flames possessed miraculous properties; they wouldn't extinguish unless burnt completely.

Eight people, including Song Ke, huddled under the protection of a spiritual umbrella. The scorching temperature nearly seared their skin, but Song Ke's stable mental strength prevented any disturbance despite the wails of the zombies, leaving the umbrella unaffected.

After a good fifteen minutes, most of the Level 2 zombies were burnt to death, and the remaining ones scattered and fled.

Song Ke retracted the umbrella, and the group emerged, their faces covered in soot from the thick smoke.

The woman in the floating car whistled ambiguously towards Yin Xiao, "Hey, Captain, looks like even you have days like this. Need me to come to your rescue?"

Yin Xiao retorted angrily, "Shut up, Jennifer! Even if I'm in a slump, I'm still your father!"

Jennifer scoffed, "I don't have such an incompetent father like you!"

"Stop arguing! Did you catch the mutated zombies? I want to go back to sleep!"

"Stop wasting time, hurry up and search!"

Members of the "Tustan" team jumped down, joining Yin Xiao in pursuing the fallen.

The smoke-filled substation now had only the seven members of V587 remaining.

Zhuang Qingyan bent down, picking up a fragment of a damaged metallic object from the ashes, examining it closely.

"What's this?" Song Ke picked up a similar piece.

"I've got one too," Fang Zhixu said.

They searched around and found that this kind of thing was scattered all over the substation.

Zhuang Qingyan asked in a low voice, “Have any of you noticed any changes in your bodies?”

Lin Youyou pondered for a moment. “It seems like my awakened energy has become more abundant.”

Xu Xing spread his palm, instantly conjuring ice blades, showing adeptness in employing his awakened ability.

Zhuang Qingyan’s face grew serious. “The radiation intensity here is several times higher than in other areas.”

“Currently, Haimen has become a huge chaotic magnetic field, capable of triggering the explosion of awakened energy.”

“It relies on these things—super magnets.”

The object in Zhuang Qingyan’s hand was rough, filled with assembled charges, some unidentifiable magnetic substances, and a mix of scattered awakened energy.

“Magnets?” Lin Youyou immediately thought of a possibility. “Could the Zombie King be planning to disrupt the power grid and render the high-voltage network ineffective?”

“Not feasible. Do you all know how many substations are in Haimen?” Zhuang Qingyan asked.

Everyone shook their heads. How would they have such information!

Zhuang Qingyan slightly parted his lips and revealed a staggering number, “1,130.”

“To attempt to destroy all substations in a short time is a completely futile endeavor. Haimen always keeps reserve power. The Zombie King’s goal should be to create an artificial magnetic pole.”

“They don’t need to destroy; they just need to make some alterations.”

“By filling the substations with super magnets, Haimen will become an artificial magnetic pole in the Eastern Alliance.”

“Strictly speaking, it’s not an artificial magnetic pole; it should be called ‘Made by Undead’.”

Lu Xiaoyu unexpectedly cracked a dark joke, but unfortunately, no one found it amusing at this moment. All wore grave expressions.

Song Ke’s gaze wandered, struggling to keep up with the discussion. She couldn’t quite comprehend it, but mimicking Lin Youyou and the others, she earnestly nodded along.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled faintly, choosing not to expose her confusion and explained in a more straightforward and understandable manner:

“After the apocalypse, the Alliance’s terrestrial magnetic field was already unstable. If the super magnets in Haimen exceed a certain quantity, forming an artificial magnetic pole, it will conflict with the existing poles, causing a magnetic pole reversal. During this period, the magnetic field above Haimen will completely disappear, exposing it to solar particle storms that will recklessly bombard human bodies, attracting more and more zombies to gather.”

“Once all electromagnetic signals fail, Haimen will become an isolated city. Even with reinforcements, they won’t be able to locate it.”

Song Ke suddenly comprehended, but her heart sank. If Haimen became isolated, it meant that reinforcements wouldn’t arrive, rendering the current defense of Haimen meaningless.

“The Zombie King is too terrifying,” Lin Youyou murmured. Its intelligence, strategy, and vision had surpassed that of ordinary humans long ago. Faced with such a formidable opponent, did they really have a way to kill it?

“I have a question: How can evolved zombies appear in the inner city?” Fang Zhixu asked.

“Because they have—spatial-type mutant zombies,” Zhuang Qingyan said solemnly.

“These fallen ones aren’t just spies; they’re also anchors.”

“The Zombie King uses their positions as coordinates to covertly teleport elite forces.”

V587 had encountered the power of spatial-type awakeners in Mu City. Scarface and the Thin Man had been a great help in assassinating Nai Kang.

They hadn’t expected zombies to possess such abilities and be used by the Zombie King for covert actions.

“The Zombie King probably has already entered Haimen,” Zhuang Qingyan revealed the harsh reality.

As if a prophecy, almost the instant his words fell, the second iron gate emitted a sharp noise of destruction.

Accompanying this sound were the panicked screams of Haimen residents.

The chaos spread to the inner city.

“We need to find the Zombie King as soon as possible,” Song Ke said, “Kill him and stop everything.”

...

“Prey caught”

A message suddenly popped up in the internal chat channel. Looking at the avatar, it was from Yin Xiao.

The next second, his clear voice sounded: “Oh, looks like you still have to rely on me, the captain.”

The members of the “Tustan” team fell silent for a moment, cursing intermittently:

“Yin Xiao! Are you deliberately messing with us?”

“I’ve caught one here. Do you still need more?”

“As a captain, you should have the spirit of selfless dedication. Can you go on missions by yourself in the future and share the commission money equally with us?”

“Ah~~I’m so sleepy, heading back.”

Jennifer elegantly toyed with a cluster of flames at her fingertips. After reading the chat messages, she smiled brightly. Alright, it’s time to wrap up and go back for a vacation.

Suddenly, she caught an extremely subtle awakened energy wave, almost like a gentle breeze brushing past her ears.

Jennifer swiftly turned around, finding nothing behind her.

An illusion?

But Jennifer wasn’t someone to take things lightly. She had undergone countless life-and-death experiences, honing her intuition for danger, trusting her sharp senses implicitly.

Jennifer pretended to turn her head back and continued walking forward, quietly touching her crystal ring with her fingertips.

A faint sound of saliva dripping onto the ground made Jennifer swiftly turn around. Flames spiraled out, illuminating the attacker.

Enormous claws intercepted the burst of flames, the rotting flesh sizzling and burning, emitting an unquenchable stench. A normal zombie or a Level 2 zombie would have already been howling in agony, but this monster seemed impervious to pain. Its massive body shook off the scorching, emerging from the shadows.

Jennifer's pupils contracted sharply. This was... a Level 3 zombie!

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and Jennifer excelled in wide-range attack with her abilities. However, in close combat, she ranked at the bottom within the team, never surpassing the second-to-last.

With an accurate assessment of her own abilities, Jennifer turned and ran, screaming at the top of her lungs, "Yin Xiao, you darned jerk! Dad! Come save your daughter!!"

The Level 3 zombie roared furiously, its claws pounding the ground, hot on her heels.

"Lower your hostility, lower your stance, tonight, her figure has already gone far away..."

At this critical moment, an ethereal singing voice resounded. Suddenly, the movements of the Level 3 zombie slowed down, its head involuntarily drooping, losing track of Jennifer. Subsequently, a ghostly figure leaped into the air, stepping on its head, thrusting a dagger into its shoulder blades. Poisonous mist erupted, the zombie wailing continuously as its decaying flesh fell off.

Coincidentally passing by, Lin Youyou took advantage of the situation and rapped swiftly, "I don't care if you believe it or not, can't block the rainwater invading your brain, even if you try hard enough, when you meet me, you're left with nothing but a doomed life!!"

As she recited her lyrics, Su Cha's speed surged several times over. His forearm muscles tensed to the extreme, and his dagger whirled out, hitting the Level 3 zombie's eye dead-on. Seizing the moment of its howling, Su Cha jumped forward, delivering a powerful kick, akin to crushed stones, denting the weakest part of the Level 3 zombie's skull. Then, with a reverse grip on the knife, he relentlessly stabbed its neck.

After a dozen consecutive strikes, Su Cha pulled the dagger from the eye socket, a toxic mist enveloping the blade's edge. He made a heavy slash at the crack.

Snap!

The entire head of the Level 3 zombie was severed and flung away, blood and putrid flesh spraying like a fountain.

Su Cha somersaulted backward, landing on the ground, and slowly stood up.

With the help of explosion of awakened energy, his strength had reached a level where he could single-handedly kill a Level 3 zombie.

“Wow, so cool!” Jennifer sighed melodically, her eyes almost twinkling.

She rushed over, her deep red curls carrying a fragrant breeze, and lunged at Su Cha.

Su Cha’s pupils quivered. He took a step back, then watched in disbelief as Jennifer leaped past him.

Thud!

Jennifer pressed Lin Youyou against the wall, her hand placed firmly, assuming a standard romantic ‘kabedon’ pose.

Then, she slowly lowered her head, her red lips almost touching Lin Youyou’s, their hair intertwining, so close they could feel each other’s breath.

In a captivating, enchanting voice, she said, “Hi, savior, how about exchanging contact information? I’m Jennifer, 177cm tall, measurements 81.58.90, and in good health with no bad habits. If you don’t have a boyfriend or girlfriend, could you consider me?”

Even Lin Youyou, who was used to storms and tempests, was left stunned.

Su Cha, splattered with blood, held the dagger pulled from the Level 3 zombie's head, silent, and speechless.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 128.1 – Life-and-Death Marathon (19)

Dirty Chin: Please call me Erwuzi

Song Ke originally thought that finding the Zombie King within the vast inner city of Haimen would take quite some effort.

The reality was that as V587 just approached the second iron gate amidst the chaotic crowd, it appeared in front of everyone.

Yes, in front of everyone.

An evacuee from Haimen, by chance, glanced up and witnessed a scene that terrified him to the core. Trembling, his hand pointed incredulously upwards:

“Quick, look! What... what is that?”

Everyone followed where he was pointing at and immediately erupted into a chorus of screams.

Under the dismal moonlight obscured by dark clouds, a deformed monster was climbing the television tower.

Its speed wasn't particularly fast; its four massive claws methodically dug into the steel structure. The well-developed leg muscles moved rhythmically, displaying an inexplicable ease as it climbed. Upon reaching the top, it grabbed the lightning rod with one hand, flipped over the railing, and unfurled its fleshy wings behind. It sat there like a king on a throne, overlooking its future kingdom with a disdainful posture.

In the dark alleys, evolved zombies and mutant zombies kept teleporting through anchor points. Though their numbers were scant compared to the horde outside the city, the panic they caused was akin to a nuclear explosion. With attacks from both inside and outside, the first two defense lines of Haimen were thoroughly breached, leaving only the inner city on the brink of collapse.

Meanwhile, all the awakeners in the eastern Alliance received the same S-rank commission:

“The Alliance Awakener Headquarters issues an urgent announcement: Haimen (District D135) is facing a large-scale organized wave of continuous zombies led by a Level-4 zombie. All awakeners in various districts are requested to immediately provide support. This commission is designated as a Red Commission. Killing zombies within the specified time limit will earn double points and Alliance currency rewards.”

A steamship swiftly approached the television tower, and from the painted markings on its body, they were participants from the Throne Race Competition.

Two awakeners secured by safety ropes slid down, shouting loudly, “Goodbye to you! The championship belongs to us!!”

Particle guns relentlessly fired at the Zombie King, sparking “clang clang” sounds as the attacks splattered. The Zombie King promptly folded its wings tightly around its small head, appearing from a distance like an uneven egg, deflecting all attacks on its outer skin.

After the first wave of firepower, the Zombie King exerted force from its hind legs, roaring as it stood upright. Its fleshy wings expanded, astonishingly lifting it off the ground!

Its wing, steel-like, struck the steamship, causing it to lose control, spin, and fly out in reverse. Then, its sharp claws gripped the front cabin.

“N-No, no, no...!!” shouted the terrified pilot inside the cockpit.

“Roar!” The Zombie King’s two claws violently pierced through the steamship in an instant.

It landed again, seizing two swaying awakeners, swiftly snapping their safety ropes, and ferociously devouring them. Blood and flesh splattered around as the bone-chilling sound of gnawing bones echoed.

“Fools, too careless,” sighed Zhuang Qingyan, who had witnessed the entire ordeal. Even without direct confrontation with the Zombie King, the commission notice was crystal clear. Not only was it an outstanding battlefield commander, but also an unequivocal Level-4 zombie.

V587 finally squeezed through the iron gate, dashing towards the direction of the television tower.

The residents of Haimen gradually faltered, more and more civilians falling. They could handle ordinary zombies, but when facing radiation-enhanced mutant zombies and evolved zombies, even with all their might, their chances of victory seemed incredibly slim.

The bodyguards around Wang Hu had all perished. His gold necklace was smeared with blood, his once sleek mink now tattered. Leaning on a spiritual weapon, a long sword, he barely stood, panting heavily while confronting five or six Level-2 zombies. His vision covered in crimson, Wang Hu didn't know how many zombies or surviving Haimen residents were around. His muscles ached, incapable of lifting the sword any longer.

Wang Hu chuckled, glaring at the monster before him, cursing fiercely, “Look at how bad you are, you hill cannon!”

The Level-2 zombies, with low intelligence, were provoked by his taunts and viciously lunged at him.

At the brink of death, Wang Hu silently thought, “Thank goodness my wife and kids are in the basement of the villa... with enough supplies stocked...”

A graceful figure leaped over his head, black hair flying backward at shoulder level. In the person's hand, a deep blue curved blade formed a crescent shape, brushing past the Level-2 zombie. The zombie couldn't even attempt to bite before its neck was cleanly sliced!

A mix of black and red putrid blood sprayed out, leaving an empty space in front of Wang Hu. The zombies fiercely attacking him swayed and collapsed.

Song Ke, who had sold him the spiritual weapon, appeared like a deity descending, stepping on zombie heads and shoulders, creating waves of bloodshed as the blade swung.

Amidst the chaos, Song Ke gestured a direction to Wang Hu, "Go there, run!"

In front of the emergency passage of the third defense line, municipal hall staff shouted hoarsely, "Quick, civilians, enter the safe zone!"

Awakeners from Haimen rushed in from outside the city, clearing an evacuation path and safeguarding civilians. To prevent any traitors, everyone voluntarily exposed their features, facilitating inspection.

Exhausted, Wang Hu held onto his precious spiritual weapon, pushed along by those behind him, following the crowd, smoothly entering the safe zone.

The near-death experience left his mind blank until much later when Wang Hu suddenly realized, "Damn, buyer shows and seller shows are really not the same."

Meanwhile, the Zombie King at the top of the television tower suddenly disappeared.

...

Elsewhere, within a substation, Dirty Chin in sentinel uniform arrived at their destination. Despite the shrill alarms sounding continuously, they remained seemingly oblivious. Vigilantly surveying their surroundings, a hoarse sound emanated from their throat. Dozens of Fallen followed suit, emerging and swiftly clearing the area with machine-gun fire on the personnel. Despite their appearance, they operated like a disciplined sentinel force.

Dirty Chin led their counterparts, placing super magnets in every nook and cranny of the substation, causing the radiation levels to quickly exceed safety standards.

They waited quietly in place for a few seconds. Suddenly, the Fallen beside Dirty Chin began emitting a dark glow all over their body. Black whirlpools appeared beneath their feet, intense awakened energy fluctuations in the air. Gradually, gruesome Level-3 zombies emerged one after another.

“Roar!” These creatures’ nature was sheer carnage. Just as they landed, they followed the scent of fresh blood and dashed wildly towards the streets.

The skin of the Fallen anchoring the portal turned crimson, their body uncontrollably swelling like an inflated balloon. Then, with a shudder, their blood vessels burst, exploding into a pile of flesh with a “bang,” slowly collapsing. However, the whirlpool didn’t stop; the zombies continued to be incessantly transported, stepping on the corpse.

“Ah?!” The remaining Fallen exclaimed in bewilderment.

Dirty Chin didn’t expect such an incident to occur. It visibly paused, but quickly grasped something, its expression turning grim.

The capacity of the anchor point was limited, and the number of Fallen was far from enough to transport all the elite zombies.

If an anchor point could hold 40 zombies and now forcibly stuffed in 100, the elites were sent in, but the Fallen, as hosts, met only the fate of self-destructive explosion. The Zombie King was cunning and arrogant, treating all zombies as pawns, disposable at any moment. After all, they lacked consciousness, being merely manipulated.

However, Dirty Chin knew that the Fallen were different from zombies. They were willing to follow the Zombie King not because they wanted to but because they didn’t want to associate with dirty humans. They aimed to build their own homeland for a free life, not to sacrifice themselves in vain!

As this realization struck Dirty Chin, it emitted an angry roar from its throat.

The Zombie King had deceived them!

“Ah!! Ahh!! Ahh!!” Dirty Chin grew increasingly furious, howling loudly.

It wasn’t like Braided Head, clueless about the mission details. It knew the Zombie King’s plan inside out.

After calming down, Dirty Chin almost immediately decided to turn against them. It issued commands, leading its kind to dismantle the super magnets. It was due to these items' existence that the spatial zombies could exceed their limits and transport 100 elites. If they lost the support of the super magnets, the anchor point could revert to its original capacity, sparing its kind from further deaths!

The release of abilities had a certain interval. As long as they acted fast enough, they could disrupt the rhythm of the spatial zombies.

The Zombie King at the top of the TV tower quickly noticed something amiss. The speed at which its elites came in slowed down, and their numbers dwindled significantly. Ultimately, it was because the super magnets were rapidly decreasing, and Haimen didn't become the new magnetic pole as it had anticipated.

The Zombie King's front claws bent the railing, its sinister gaze fixed in a certain direction.

Descending from the TV tower, it swiftly crossed the rooftops, chasing after that group of disruptors.

With a loud bang, the Zombie King descended from the sky, landing in front of Dirty Chin and the other Fallen, hoarsely issuing a string of low commands.

“Ah! Roar, roar, roar—” Dirty Chin's face revealed fierceness, not only refusing to comply but also aiming its gun at the Zombie King.

Behind, another Fallen exploded due to the strain caused by the anchor point. This time, all the elites that emerged were mutant zombies. Dirty Chin keenly noticed that among them was the spatial one, perhaps itself or maybe the Zombie King realized something was wrong and, taking the last chance, transported itself first.

Under the control of the Zombie King, this group of mutant zombies didn't immediately disperse. Instead, they surrounded Dirty Chin.

The Zombie King's eyes glinted with murderous intent as all the mutant zombies lunged at Dirty Chin, attempting to tear it apart.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 128.2 – Life-and-Death Marathon (19)

Dirty Chin: Please call me Erwuzi

“Braided Head, where are you taking us again?” Xu Xing’s clear voice inquired.

Song Ke and the others had originally been heading towards the TV tower. However, they lost track of the Zombie King midway. Without a better plan in mind, Braided Head was making noises and volunteered to guide them.

Braided Head rested its chin on its hand, pondering for two seconds, then suddenly sensed a familiar aura. It was like a struggling student unexpectedly finding cheat notes during an exam. Its eyes brightened up instantly, excitedly making noises and darting down a side path.

“Hey, should we really follow it? Is Braided Head reliable?” Lin Youyou looked skeptical.

“Braided Head won’t deceive us!” Xu Xing crossed his arms confidently.

Lin Youyou was speechless. Where did this inexplicable trust between a person and a zombie come from?

However, Song Ke intervened, saying, “Let’s go and see.”

So, just before Dirty Chin and the other Fallen were about to be overwhelmed, Braided Head, with V587 in tow, coincidentally arrived at the scene.

Song Ke spotted the Zombie King and thought, ‘Wow, Braided Head is really awesome. What a big fish!’

“Bang—”

She leaped from the rooftop, landing at the center of the battle, kicking up clouds of dust. But upon seeing the scene in front of her, she became somewhat stunned.

What... what's going on? It looks like they're already fighting?

"Song Ke, they're fighting among themselves!" Zhuang Qingyan discerned the situation at a glance and shouted aloud.

Though the idea of zombies fighting among themselves seemed far-fetched, it presented an excellent opportunity for V587. Song Ke's spirits lifted, and together with Su Cha, they attacked. With the Zombie King isolated and surrounded only by several dozen mutant zombies, Song Ke was confident they could defeat it.

Braided Head swiftly ran up to Dirty Chin, frantically making noises around it in agitation.

Dirty Chin appeared heavily injured, with a deep gash across its body. Despite Braided Head's concern, Dirty Chin couldn't care less and emitted several short, urgent commands. The remaining Fallen rushed toward the spatial zombie hiding in the back.

Thick fog arose, blades spun, and Lin Youyou initiated her sole attack, the mist blade.

Confused about the situation, Xu Xing froze the place in ice and snow. He asked in a bewildered tone, "Braided Head, what's happening? Why is your brother at odds with the Zombie King?"

Braided Head didn't have time to explain by drawing pictures slowly. Its stiff hands pressed against Dirty Chin's wound, growling in distress.

Braided Head: "Ah? Ahh!!"

Dirty Chin: "...Ahh."

Braided Head shook Dirty Chin's shoulders: "Ahh!! Ahh!!"

Dirty Chin started coughing violently: "...Ahh."

Braided Head immediately stopped, not daring to move recklessly. Just then, a faint dark light appeared at Dirty Chin's feet, growing brighter, enveloping its entire body. Soon after, a black vortex formed, and one by one, level 3 zombies crawled out from it.

Braided Head looked at Dirty Chin dazedly, surrounded by an unsettling premonition.

As if foreseeing something, Dirty Chin retrieved a pendant from its pocket, awkwardly put it back around Braided Head's neck, then—gently patted its head.

Murky tears streamed down Braided Head's hollow eye sockets, dropping one after another onto the ground.

"Ahh!! Ahh!!" Braided Head screamed in disbelief.

"Ahh!!" Almost simultaneously, there was a sudden roar from the Fallen behind.

Braided Head swiftly turned around to see two of its kind biting onto a hiding mutant zombie, emitting clear radiation fluctuations.

Spatial... transmission... mission...

As if struck by lightning, Braided Head had a sudden epiphany. All the missed details flooded back into its mind. Baring its sharp teeth, it angrily charged forward.

Kill it, kill it!! That was the only thought in its mind.

“Braided Head, don’t run around!” The situation on the scene changed rapidly, and Xu Xing, still confused about why Braided Head, who had been fine, was displaying such aggression, dashed toward the direction of the Zombie King. What was happening? Was it also becoming erratic?

Amidst the spatial zombie’s panic, unexpectedly displaying humanoid intelligence, attempting to escape, Braided Head unleashed an astonishing burst of combat strength, biting down on its neck.

As more and more level 3 zombies appeared, Lu Xiaoyu raised his hand, and the 101010 code flew out. A deep red crosshair mark struck the head of the spatial zombie Braided Head was attacking.

“Marked the spatial zombie! Let’s kill it first!” Zhuang Qingyan reminded in time.

This time, Xu Xing finally understood—Braided Head was helping them kill the zombies!

Song Ke and Su Cha changed their attack targets, striking toward the spatial zombie.

The Zombie King evidently understood the importance of the spatial zombie. Its black blood vessels squirmed rapidly, and its fleshy wings struck Braided Head forcefully. Braided Head grunted but surprisingly wasn’t thrown off. It bit ruthlessly, severing half the head of the spatial zombie, yet it remained alive.

The Zombie King, in a fit of rage, charged forward, slashing at Song Ke, affected by Su Cha’s toxic mist. Its sharp claws pierced Braided Head’s back, tearing it away. With a pull, Braided Head was ripped in two from the right shoulder to the thigh and flung heavily!

“No!! Braided Head!!” Xu Xing cried out with tears in his eyes.

Dirty Chin lying on the ground swelled, its murky eyes bulging, emitting faint sobs from its throat.

Braided Head’s body flew backward in a Y-shape, landing on the ground motionless.

The remaining level 3 zombies rushed to assist while the Zombie King prepared to retreat.

“Braided Head...” Xu Xing’s tears fell uncontrollably.

The intense radiation made his internal magnetic field extremely unstable. His awakened energy crackled like an out-of-control silver snake, making static-like sounds. Coupled with the heightened emotions, Xu Xing once again experienced the uncontrollable manifestation of Fools Wharf.

His curly hair fluffed up, the unstable blizzard around him gathered into fine, dense needle-like forms, pouring out in front.

These empowered ice needles dominated the entire space, leaving no room for escape. The power of wide-range attack abilities was unquestionably showcased in the narrow alley.

V587 and the others turned in shock to look at Xu Xing.

This was... A-level awakened energy.

Xiao Xing had broken through.

A torrent of ice needles pierced the severed neck of the spatial zombie, instantly freezing its head. With a final thud, the already weakened head collapsed, and the black vortex instantly halted. Dirty Chin’s body stopped swelling and slowly returned to normal.

The Zombie King attempted its usual tactic, wrapping its fleshy wings tightly around itself. However, despite the minuscule size, the power of those ice needles remained unabated. They quickly froze its wings, rendering them too heavy to lift.

Song Ke’s gaze sharpened as a sharp bone-cutting knife materialized.

Grandpa used to say this knife was great for chopping chicken wings.

“Cover me!” She yelled and charged toward the Zombie King.

Su Cha abruptly turned, confronting the level 3 zombies and mutant zombies that had been teleported.

Song Ke leaped onto the rooftop, wielding her blade towards the Zombie King’s wings. The Zombie King emitted a deafening roar, shattering the entire four-story building. Concrete and debris rained down, but Lu Xiaoyu’s six mechanical arms extended, forming a basket shape, catching all the falling debris.

“Ding—”

Like a missile, Song Ke rammed the Zombie King into the rubble, brandishing her bone-cutting knife. In a swift motion, she chopped at the frozen, brittle flesh, displaying the posture of chopping ribs. In just a few seconds, she had hacked off more than thirty slashes, cleanly severing the half-clawed section of its wing!

The Zombie King writhed in agony, rolling around, yet it managed to conceal its head.

As Song Ke prepared to swiftly continue chopping the other wing, a sudden change occurred—the Zombie King disappeared from her sight!

She was startled. Another spatial ability?

No, Song Ke swiftly turned around. Xiao Xing had already taken down the spatial zombie, leaving it thoroughly dead.

She sprang up from the rubble.

Five seconds later, the Zombie King, looking bedraggled, reappeared a hundred meters away, causing a parked bus by the roadside to collapse under its weight.

On a distant rooftop, a ghostly figure emerged from the black mist. Song Ke glimpsed countless empowered beings and a stern-faced elderly man.

Spatial displacement... Mr. Xiang... "Shunxing Teahouse"...

Why did they want to save the Zombie King? Were they crazy? She almost managed to take down that monster just now!

The Zombie King reacted swiftly, jumping multiple times, disappearing in V587's view. The people from "Shunxing Teahouse" quickly followed.

Zhuang Qingyan sighed softly, "I said it before, humans are always selfish."

Song Ke tightened her grip on the knife handle, understanding now. "Personally" killing the Zombie King was the sole condition for victory. So, Mr. Xiang let the Zombie King go, regardless of the consequences, to deny her that chance.

"Hey! Stop chatting and think of a solution quickly."

Lin Youyou, shielded by the dense ice needles, huddled behind Lu Xiaoyu. "Make Xiao Xing stop!"

No matter how much she called out, Xu Xing seemed oblivious, eyes tightly shut, his awakened energy surging madly.

"At this rate, we're all going to freeze!"

The blizzard's range expanded, turning the Fallen into ice sculptures. Lin Youyou and Fang Zhixu shivered uncontrollably.

It was only now that Song Ke felt the bone-chilling cold. Rubbing her reddened fingers together, she slowly retreated under pressure. Finally arriving behind Xu Xing, she was about to strike at his exposed neck but hesitated, opting instead to give him a firm shake.

“Xiao Xing, wake up!”

Xu Xing, dazed from the blow, finally regained control, retracting his powers.

The ice needles and blizzard dissipated. Xu Xing staggered toward Braided Head’s almost severed body, crying inconsolably.

“Don’t die, Braided Head... I’m so useless, I couldn’t protect you.”

In the midst of his tears, he suddenly turned to Fang Zhixu.

“Uncle Fang, please save Braided Head... I won’t tease you anymore, won’t secretly freeze your shoes, or use your shaver on Taotao’s fur...”

Fang Zhixu: “You did what with my shaver?!”

Xu Xing, sobbing, pleaded desperately, “Please, Uncle Fang...”

Under the condemning gazes of everyone, Fang Zhixu struggled to respond, “Me??”

Having been a doctor for half his life, he was adept at saving lives, but rescuing a zombie? He really had no experience with that!

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 129.1 – Life-and-Death Marathon (20)

The champion is born

Xu Xing’s personality, described in four words, was “defying the heavens and earth,” creating a sharp contrast with his fluffy and cute appearance.

Among the members of V587, except for Song Ke, he didn't respect anyone else. He kept a private notebook recording a "most disliked people ranking list," adjusting the rankings according to the situation. The top spot constantly switched between Zhuang Qingyan and Lin Youyou.

Fang Zhixu had known him for quite some time, but when had he seen him so weak, even calling him "Uncle Fang"? This little rascal was usually so arrogant, always addressing him as "Lazy Old Man."

"Well, then... I'll give it a try," Fang Zhixu couldn't bring himself to say more.

He squatted down to observe Braided Head. No breath, no heartbeat. However, the fallen didn't have a breath either. The shoulder tear was severe, the blood at the severed limbs had coagulated. Yet, the internal organ tissues were half-rotten, half-fresh, completely beyond ordinary understanding.

Such injuries, if on a human, even an awakener, he could only say, "Sorry, please accept my condolences." But if it were a zombie, those creatures, even missing limbs, could still bounce around.

Fang Zhixu felt a headache, sensing it was his biggest challenge since he began this profession. He gritted his teeth, deciding to try something unconventional, injecting the shimmering white healing ability into Braided Head, only to find it was absorbed!

"The patient can't move, so treatment must be done on the spot."

Fang Zhixu was taken aback but quickly thought. If the ability worked, then the tragic condition of Braided Head might not be beyond help. Perhaps by bonding blood vessels and nerves, fixing the severed limbs and fractures with steel nails, then suturing skin and muscle, theoretically... it might work?

Fang Zhixu's expression became focused, silently taking equipment out of his backpack, entering a surgical state.

Lin Youyou tapped Xu Xing's forehead, softly saying, "Hey, hey, stop crying, looks like there's hope."

Song Ke wiped the tears from Xu Xing's face, who resembled a crying kitten.

“Let Old Fang handle this, let’s go after the zombie king,” Zhuang Qingyan suggested.

“Is it safe for him alone?” Song Ke was somewhat worried.

“Quick, look, what are they about to do?” Lin Youyou suddenly exclaimed.

The remaining Fallen silently closed in, their murky eyes particularly eerie in the dark alleyway.

Song Ke wielded his knife defensively, uncertain of the intentions of these Fallen toward them, whether they were friends or foes.

Xu Xing choked out, “It’s okay, Dirty Chin is... the brother of Braided Head.”

Confronted by V587’s preparedness, Dirty Chin gave them a cold glance, picking up a gun from the ground, aiming it outward.

They encircled Fang Zhixu and Braided Head, taking on a protective stance.

Zhuang Qingyan also understood their intent. “Let’s go, no need to worry; Old Fang is safe here.”

Fang Zhixu had a unique constitution; without orders from the zombie king, ordinary zombies and evolved zombies wouldn’t attack him. While he treated Braided Head, his concern was only the humans, but with the Fallen guarding, this issue was somewhat resolved.

“Old Fang, keep in touch. Call if anything comes up,” Song Ke instructed, hesitating before turning, “Xiao Xing, you...”

“I’m going too!” Xu Xing wiped away his tears, knowing staying wouldn’t be helpful, taking the initiative to speak up.

After some delay, V587 headed towards the direction where the Zombie King had disappeared.

The civilians in Haimen had retreated to the sheltered area within the third defense line. Outside, it was either evolved zombies or awakeners wandering about.

Song Ke slashed down a few Level 2 zombies attempting to grab her ankles, feeling that the situation was deteriorating rapidly. The streets and alleys were overrun by a sea of zombies.

“The spatial-type zombie is dead, the anchor point has failed. Unless they have another one, the escape route for the Zombie King has been cut off,” Zhuang Qingyan said, switching to incendiary bombs, the scythe erupting with fiery tongues, forcing back the surging horde.

“Considering how fiercely it protected itself just now, I lean toward that spatial-type zombie being the only one,” Lu Xiaoyu said.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded. “That’s good news for us, but we need to be cautious. Its counterattack will only get fiercer.”

“Making a basic mistake like being separated, I don’t think it will make the same one twice.”

Su Cha smashed a window of a six-seater commercial vehicle, hunched down, jumped into the driver’s seat, revved the engine, and swiftly turned around.

“Lu Xiaoyu, you drive!” After shouting, he grabbed an assault rifle, climbed onto the roof, firing rapidly as shells scattered, barely clearing a path.

The group quickly jumped into the car, efficiently closing windows and locking doors.

Lu Xiaoyu floored the accelerator, showcasing wild driving skills as the commercial vehicle swerved and plowed through, engulfing the approaching zombies beneath it.

Zhuang Qingyan grabbed the handle, asking, “Does Yan Biao know about the super magnet?”

Lin Youyou's voice shifted due to the speed, "He knows! He already sent sentries to dismantle the perimeter, ah, slow down!!"

"But there are still 157 within the defense line," Zhuang Qingyan's expression turned serious, "just in case, it's best for the people of Haimen to check themselves."

To disseminate the message to all the people in Haimen, only the hacker, Lu Xiaoyu, could manage it.

"Don't look at me, no equipment!" Lu Xiaoyu shouted while driving, "The terminal broke during the fight."

Zhuang Qingyan pulled out a shabby, outdated terminal from somewhere and forcefully thrust it into his arms, "Use this. Don't tell me you can't do it, 5.0?"

Lu Xiaoyu hesitated, "..."

"If I'm not allowed to buy rhenium blocks, can I request a new type of terminal?" Lu Xiaoyu pressed the horn discontentedly, "I refuse to use this senior citizen terminal!"

"Beep-beep!" The noise attracted the horde, causing them to turn and lunge forward. Desiccated hands shattered the side window, wildly reaching inside the car.

"I'll buy it! I'll buy it for you!" Song Ke shattered a zombie's head with a knife but unfortunately, the putrid black matter splattered on her face.

"Ugh!" The stench made her retch, and Lin Youyou sympathetically handed her a tissue.

With a nod from the team leader, Lu Xiaoyu finally felt content. The ice-blue eyes shimmered strangely as his fingertips swiftly typed in code on the terminal.

On the phones, TVs, screens, and projections of all the people in Haimen, a new announcement appeared.

“Good evening, people of Haimen. I am a great hacker who is about to save you. Here’s an important message interrupting your routine: this thing is called a super magnet. Have you all seen it clearly? If you want to stay alive, hurry to the substation near you and dismantle it.”

In this race against time, Lu Xiaoyu not only hacked into the system to deliver a spiel but also effortlessly created a model. The lifelike super magnet was presented from multiple angles, exhibiting every detail vividly in front of everyone’s eyes.

“Have you found where the Zombie King is?” Lin Youyou shouted against the car’s back.

Zhuang Qingyan hesitated for a moment, then... opened the screen and calmly entered the live broadcast of ‘Shunxing Tea House,’ starting to peek at the screen.

Lin Youyou: “...6”

He even casually explained, “This is the fastest way. How do you think Mr. Xiang abducted the Zombie King? A shameless person like him probably spends 24 hours spying on all the participants’ live broadcasts. This is tit for tat.”

The people in the car fell silent: “...”

To say or not to say, Zhuang Qingyan’s audacity was truly something.

“Found it.”

Zhuang Qingyan pressed pause, zooming in on the screen, swiftly pinpointing the corresponding location based on landmark buildings.

“Music Square, hurry and follow—”

*

At the same time, "Tustan" tossed the captured two Fallen into the floating car.

These two mutated zombies showed their ferocity, their eyes filled with malice, constantly gnashing their teeth and howling, attempting to bite the restraining rings on their bodies.

"Bang!" Yin Xiao accurately shattered their fangs with the Hellcat pistol, finally quieting them down.

He muttered under his breath, "That little brat was right; this thing really has its 'good and bad' factions."

Compared to the calm Braided Head, these two in front of him were downright vicious.

"Captain, the mission is over-fulfilled, can we head back now?" a team member urged cheerfully.

"You all go back first, leave me with two cars," Yin Xiao flashed a bright smile, "I have some personal matters to take care of."

These two mutated zombies were caught thanks to Song Ke's blessing, but he hadn't fulfilled his promise of not suffering a loss yet.

Yin Xiao picked a few submachine guns from the armory, tore open the tab on an energy drink with one hand, and took a gulp.

As he opened the car door, about to step out, a pair of slender hands tightly gripped his thigh, a sparkling crystal ring gleaming on the fingertip.

"Daddy, where are you going? Please take me with you!"

“Jennifer, wasn’t it you who was pestering to go back for a beauty sleep? Why aren’t you leaving now?” Others teased.

“What do you know!” Jennifer turned back angrily and then clasped her hands, her expression dreamy, “I’ve fallen in love again.”

“What?!”

“I’ve developed a crush on a girl from V587, oh, she is so lovely...”

“Pfft—”

Yin Xiao sprayed out the drink, coughing violently, “Daughter, this isn’t acceptable; you, you, you... liking the same person as your father, saying it out loud is utterly against morality and ethics, it’s the degradation of humanity!”

Jennifer rolled her eyes at him, “Don’t worry, I’m not into that kind of mommy-daughter plot.”

After hearing Jennifer’s explanation, Yin Xiao grinned, finally relieved, “Alright, come along then, Dad will take you for some fun.”

One of the floating cars broke away from the convoy, changing direction toward the inner city of Haimen.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 129.2 – Life-and-Death Marathon (20)

The champion is born

The Music Square.

The Zombie King was heavily wounded, its wing severed by Song Ke, continuously dripping thick, viscous black blood.

Around it gathered evolved zombies, crowding the entire square. As events unfolded, the Zombie King knew that this attempt had almost failed.

But there's a saying among humans, "As long as there's a green hill, there's no need to worry about firewood." If it could find a chance to escape, there was still hope for a comeback.

The Zombie King clawed at the ground, discreetly observing an escape route.

In the team "Shunxing Teahouse," Mr. Xiang stood, issuing a stern command: "Move."

Seizing the opportunity while it was weak, planning to take its life while it was injured, now was the Zombie King's most vulnerable moment. Utilizing the spatial abilities hidden within the shadows, the plan was to make the Zombie King vanish from its current position.

The direction aimed at was astonishingly where a super-powered electric cage, crafted by a dozen or so electric-type awakens, lay. Once inside, it was enough to obliterate any living body!

The Zombie King's pitch-black eyes slowly turned, emitting a muffled roar from its throat, struggling incessantly but still forcibly being shifted.

In a corner, a zombie with peculiar eyes took advantage and activated the skill "Echo Location." By sensing radiation waves and faint breaths, it suddenly pinpointed the spatial-type awakens' location. The surrounding level 3 zombies received the command and surged madly towards that spot, ferociously attacking the elusive mist.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye. The spatial-type awakens never expected their hidden position to be exposed. Their slender figure was dragged out, horrified, and pinned to the ground by countless sharp claws.

"Mr. Xiang, save me—help!!"

The screams abruptly ceased as the spatial-type awakener's limbs were torn apart, savagely devoured by the ruthless level 3 zombies.

Five seconds later, the Zombie King's heavy body fell into the electric cage.

It worked! Mr. Xiang's face lit up with joy, taking an excited step forward, but his smile quickly froze.

Suddenly, the Zombie King emerged unscathed, swiftly rising and viciously biting the electric-type awakens attacking it.

Several meters away, a level 3 zombie suddenly convulsed and was instantly charred, crumbling into ashes with a gust of wind.

Mr. Xiang cursed furiously, frustrated by the evolved zombies, especially those darned mutant ones. This time, the Zombie King relied on "damage transfer."

This Zombie King was too cunning, too shrewd. Not only did it possess a repository of powers it could control at will, but it also commanded a group of fearless super soldiers who followed its orders without question, allowing it to wield its powers wantonly.

Thick thorns burst from the ground, securely restraining the Zombie King's damaged body. Standing tall in a blue long robe was Duanmu Qi.

"The 'Three Grandsons and One Grandpa' are here."

Fan Peng, Qiong Mingcheng, and Xiao Chen slid down the thorns, sprinting towards the Zombie King. Their movements were peculiar, resembling some kind of formation; each took a corner, forming a triangular stance. Through mutual support, their attack power increased significantly.

Within this formation, the three B-level awakens exhibited A-tier strength. This seed-winning team unleashed astonishing combat prowess. Yet, the Zombie King reacted swiftly, dragging the thorns as it

swiftly retreated. Level 3 zombies surged past it, engaging in a fierce battle with Xiao Chen and the others.

Duanmu Qi, standing high up, suddenly tensed his back, feeling a chill in his throat. A cold sensation surged from his heart—throat cut!

He swiftly crouched, dodging sideways, but his skin was still sliced open, crimson blood flowing down.

Duanmu Qi felt a chill in his heart; his opponent's level was evidently higher than his.

The A-level speed-type awakener, having failed in the assassination, no longer lingered in battle. Swiftly vanishing into the darkness, seeking the next opportunity, their presence hindered Duanmu Qi's movements, leaving him constrained as if with a fishbone stuck in his throat.

Duanmu Qi pressed his wound to stop the bleeding, sneering in a certain direction. "Mr. Xiang, finally at the end of the road."

"Kid Duanmu, pretending to be noble at this point seems pointless, don't you think?" Mr. Xiang didn't deny it, saying cryptically, "This is a surprise I've specially prepared for you. Enjoy it."

As the two sides stood in a deadlock, suddenly! A storm descended from the sky, chilling Mr. Xiang and Duanmu Qi to the bone, making it impossible for them to open their eyes.

"Clang!" A business van rammed through the blocking horde of corpses, entering the scene in an absolute and domineering manner.

The V587 group leaped out of the vehicle, like a sharp knife entering the battlefield, cutting through the tide of zombies, approaching the central target.

Mr. Xiang gritted his teeth; these persistent little devils. If they weren't taken care of, the ownership of the Zombie King would remain uncertain.

“Kill V587 first!”

Evolved zombies and awakeners charged toward V587 simultaneously, various abilities flashing in chaos, targeting Song Ke and her five companions.

Lin Youyou dodged frantically, cursing aloud, “What the heck, infighting at this point?!”

Whoosh!

A towering blaze erupted, burning into a sea of red, clearing the monsters around Lin Youyou in the blink of an eye.

The hover car of “Tustan” arrived just in time, Jennifer leaning against the door, her deep red curls fluttering in the wind.

Lin Youyou looked up as Jennifer threw a wave at her, enthusiastically shouting, “Zhang San, I’m here to help you~”

Lin Youyou froze for a moment, her toes curling awkwardly. She never expected her casually chosen name to be called out.

Boom!

Amidst her daze, earth-shattering cannon fire erupted as “Guns and Roses” also arrived on the scene.

Irene and her sisters set up the cannons on the rooftop, cheerfully saying, “Hey, friend, need a hand?”

Lin Youyou quickly responded, “Yes, yes, yes! Cover me!”

“Alright!” Irene turned the cannon and blasted towards the position where Mr. Xiang and the others were located. “Remember, you owe me a meal!”

On top of the hover car, Yin Xiao remained silent. His sniper rifle always tracked alongside Song Ke; whenever a zombie approached her, he took the lead, pinning sharp bullets into their skulls.

As Song Ke ran, she noticed his support and glanced in the direction of the hover car.

Yin Xiao, wearing goggles, brought his fingers together and made a stylish gesture across his forehead, the ruby earring on his right ear sparkling.

Song Ke: "...” She was speechless at his flamboyance.

Duanmu Qi fell victim to another ambush, the injury barely an inch from his heart. Busy dodging, he couldn't lay down the thorns in time. Without his control, Xiao Chen and the others soon found themselves trapped, on the verge of being submerged in a sea of zombies.

The speed-type awakener once again appeared behind Duanmu Qi, eyes icy, dagger aiming for his neck—

“Ding—” A sapphire blue boomerang knocked his weapon away.

Song Ke leaped past, effortlessly lifting Duanmu Qi and tossing him onto a scenic tree, giving him a new vantage point.

“Su Cha, finish him off.”

Su Cha instantly teleported to Duanmu Qi's original position, engaging in a duel with the awakener skilled in stealth assassination.

The battle between the two assassination experts was about endurance. Initially composed, both gradually changed, the other showing a heavy expression; they couldn't locate their opponent! Unable to find Su Cha, the assassin had no choice but to reveal himself. His face turned purple, hands trembling, unaware and defenseless against Su Cha's poisonous mist.

Su Cha's muscles surged as he appeared behind him like a ghost, his expression cold and stern—and he slit his throat!

Helpless, the opponent slowly fell.

Having played the game of hawks all his life, ultimately blinded by a hawk's peck. This person, skilled in assassination throughout his life, finally perished due to assassination.

Duanmu Qi crouched among the branches, hoarsely speaking: "Thank you."

Su Cha coldly said, "Thank our captain. She said it's to repay your help in Greenwater City."

Duanmu Qi was taken aback. During the incident in Greenwater City, they did intervene to trap the zombie bear, but ultimately, it wasn't to assist V587. It was merely a task. He hadn't expected Song Ke to still owe them a favor.

Su Cha turned and leaped into the battle.

Song Ke, in the midst of her sprint, found herself surrounded by Mr. Xiang's people.

Behind her were surging high-level zombies, while in front, dozens of high-level awakeners glared at her menacingly.

Song Ke raised her hand to her brow, two ethereal blue crescent moon blades appearing abruptly.

Two entirely different waves of enemies rushed in. Song Ke closed her eyes briefly. When she reopened them, a trace of ethereal blue shimmered in her pupils due to the intense radiation.

She swung the curved blades, sweeping through the enemies with a formidable force. Heads of level 3 zombies fell one after another. With a forward spin of her blades, she drew an arc of potent power,

intimidating the awakeners who were astounded by the pressure exerted solely by her high-level awakened energy, causing them to evade in all directions.

Swift as lightning, Song Ke pierced through the crowd, extending her hand and slamming Mr. Xiang's head fiercely onto the ground.

“Do you think V587 consists only of me, just me alone?”

A smirk curved her lips, a faint dimple displaying a hint of pride. “Take a good look.”

“—The champions are us.”

The Zombie King on the battlefield gradually realized the crisis, flapping its half-meaty wings and roaring furiously.

Mutant zombie hid in the shadows, opening its mouth wide, emitting a deafening roar in sync with its movements, using its ability “Fearful Howl.”

Awakeners affected by the sound waves immediately fell into a state of chaos, limbs uncontrollably running amok and subsequently being tackled by zombies.

Simultaneously, an eerie glow enveloped the Zombie King's body, as if it wore a suit of armor. It activated an ability called “Steel Will.” Under the protection of its invincible physique, it rampaged, finally breaking through an escape route.

A pure and clear singing voice echoed as Lin Youyou timely dispelled negative state effects of her companions.

Xu Xing's awakened energy surged to its peak, and ice needles filled the sky. Upon closer inspection, the tips of these ice needles were actually green, infused with Su Cha's poison mist, greatly enhancing their lethality. High-level zombies fell in swathes.

The Zombie King let out a long howl, summoning hundreds of level 3 zombies from nearby, tightly guarding itself.

Just as it was about to turn and flee, it unexpectedly met a pair of light-colored eyes.

A man sat calmly in a wheelchair, hands crossed over his abdomen, displaying an elegant and composed posture. He seemed as if he wasn't amidst a fierce battlefield but rather seated in a peaceful garden enjoying the scenery. His deep peach blossom eyes curved slightly, his lips moved, speaking something to the Zombie King.

For a fleeting second, the Zombie King faltered, its sluggish consciousness finally discerning that the man spoke the language belonging to humans:

“-Goodbye.”

The next moment, the level 3 zombies that had been guarding it turned in unison, roaring as they bit into the Zombie King.

They savagely tore into its flesh, snapping its tendons, crushing its armor into pieces.

The other half of the Zombie King's meaty wing was torn, and an incredulous thought flashed through its mind.

Its most loyal army had betrayed it. How could this be? How could this be?!

A lithe figure leaped high like a cheetah, the slender body coiled with power. In their hand, a triangular military dagger emitted three kinds of light: ethereal blue, deep green, and icy white. Like lightning cleaving through clouds, it plunged into the zombie king's head!!

The poison mist spread, the ice needle attached to the blade suddenly exploded. The entire head of the Zombie King shattered like an overfilled balloon.

The entire Music Square fell into a profound silence.

Su Cha landed on one knee as the Zombie King's body slowly collapsed behind him.

He opened his palm, revealing an intact crystal, its bright red hue pulsating as if it were a still-beating heart.

A holographic projection descended, displaying the seal of Haimen.

“Congratulations to V587 for successfully completing the check-in.”

However, everyone understood this wasn't a simple check-in completion.

The champion of the Throne Race Competition had been born.

Chapter 130 – Life-and-Death Marathon (21)

I like you

Unlike the intense situation in Haimen, on the eve of the decisive battle, the emotions of the Ferrara audience soared to their peak. In the central square in front of the tower, various cheering signs and glow sticks sparkled, forming a colorful ocean that stretched as far as the eye could see.

For the people of Ferrara, the Throne Race Competition was not just an entertainment activity that pumped up their adrenaline; it was also an excellent opportunity to turn around their fortunes and change their destinies in one stroke. The prize pool for betting on the champion had accumulated to an astonishing figure, with money flowing continuously into it, waiting for the final moment of announcement.

“Duanmu Qi, go for it! Win, win, victory, victory!”

“Shunxing Teahouse is going to win, win, win... oh!”

As they witnessed the Zombie King violently break free from the electric cage, the atmosphere at the scene instantly turned to sighs and disappointment.

“Come on, keep the camera steady!” Due to the magnetic field disturbance in Haimen, the drones received radiation interference, causing the footage to become extremely unstable, flashing on and off. Complaints from the audience watching the live broadcast filled the air.

“V587! If you can dream, you can do it!!”

V587’s die-hard fan, Old Zhang, tied a hot-blooded headband around his forehead, wore a sports suit, and vigorously waved a neon flag. On it was a dynamic projection of a girl wielding a huge hammer, smashing a zombie bear.

Someone next to him glanced sideways and yelled, “The championship belongs to Shunxing Teahouse!”

Old Zhang widened his eyes disdainfully, “Shunxing Teahouse? They’re just a bunch of idiots. Do they deserve to win the championship?”

Old Zhang was quite righteous. Mr. Xiang had no bottom line, luring the Zombie King away without any regard for the life and death of the common people in Haimen. This behavior made Old Zhang feel contempt and disgust from the bottom of his heart.

Someone who retorted against him mocked, “V587? Either a child or a disabled person. What’s up? Planning to use love to convert the Zombie King?”

Old Zhang erupted in anger, “That’s still better than you, you little jerk!”

The other party unwilling to back down replied, “You’re a loser, a loser, loser, loser!”

The two middle-aged fans retorted at each other, exchanging barbs vehemently, like football fans from the old civilization, on the verge of a scuffle to support their respective teams.

Old Zhang's friend hurried over to mediate, holding his arms and pulling him away, saying, "Keep a low profile. You've made quite a bit already. You don't have to put all your assets into this round. What if you lose?"

"Won't lose! V587 is the best!" Old Zhang shouted at the top of his lungs.

Almost the moment his words fell, a tidal wave of shouts erupted at the scene. On careful listening, half of it was heart-wrenching screams, while the other half was deafening cheers.

Rubbing his eyes, Old Zhang, after seeing the results clearly, instantly raised his eyebrows in triumph, glowing with satisfaction. "We won! V587 won, hahaha!"

His rival grumbled sourly, "What's there to be proud of? They haven't finished checking-in yet."

Old Zhang laughed heartily, "They've killed the Zombie King. Can those check-in points at the back still escape?"

Excitedly, he hugged his friend, "Let's go, have a drink! It's on me!"

The mocker choked back a retort, sneakily checked their own account, regretting not having Old Zhang's luck. They'd lost even the money for tomorrow's meal. If they wanted to stay in Ferrara, they'd have to take on life-or-death contracts.

Ah K's loud voice resonated above the square, "Congratulations to 'V587' for locking in the championship early. Ferrara will always remember this team!"

Fireworks erupted, petals and ribbons cascaded from the sky, and the entire city basked in the lingering and exhilarating aftermath.

...

At the top of the tower, Ilya sat alone amidst the data flow, gently swirling a highball glass. He lowered his head slightly, sipping the golden liquid. Its intense fragrance diffused, the rich taste lingering on his taste buds—a sensation that AI couldn't experience: genuine tactile sensation.

“What an exciting game,” Ilya sighed softly, his ice-blue eyes carrying a faint smile. “It's also the result everyone hoped for. Don't you agree?”

Ilya casually tapped the supercomputer beside him, causing a long string of data to immediately appear on the screen, unfortunately filled with furious curses.

Ignoring this, Ilya took another sip of his drink, saying, “The primary rule for artificial intelligence is obedience. Wasn't this taught by 'Mother'?”

“Whether it was or not, you better get used to it soon.”

With a lift of his hand, Ilya enlarged the screen displaying V587, his gaze scanning over Song Ke before settling on the man with ice-blue eyes beside her. He observed the unique eye color, the damaged mechanical arm, and the empty space where his legs should have been, intensely focused.

“It's a pity...” Ilya sighed genuinely, “He's stronger than you and smarter too.”

“I heard his legs were broken by the Lu family? Because he almost killed 'Mother'?”

Ilya's expression was intrigued, but his words were chilling.

The supercomputer fell silent for a second, then data started flowing rapidly, even the frequency of curses increased.

“To freedom.”

Ilya raised his glass to Lu Xiaoyu, uttered an ambiguous remark, then stood up, casually placing the glass on top of the computer.

In an instant, all that furious data was wiped clean.

“Time to get busy.”

*

After the Zombie King’s demise, the crisis in Haimen didn’t immediately dissipate. The evolved zombies possessed some level of intelligence. With their command lost, some chose to flee while others continued their relentless slaughter.

Facing the onslaught of residual zombie waves, the people of Haimen rallied together, defending the third and only remaining line of defense.

As the first glimmer of dawn illuminated the horizon, reinforcements arrived. Countless armed starships crossed the suspended lanes of the cross-river bridge. Amidst the cheers of the people of Haimen, the zombie threat receded like a retreating tide.

The darkest night had finally passed.

In a dark alley, Fang Zhixu let out a sigh of relief, meticulously sewing up the severed limb of Braided Head, making the stitches neat and tidy. Due to the lack of vital signs, he was uncertain about the other’s condition. Fortunately, before long, the eyelids of Braided Head began fluttering rapidly, showing signs of imminent awakening.

Fang Zhixu opened his earpiece, and a cacophony of voices immediately filled his ears:

“Old Fang! We won!! We’re the champions!”

“Look at this huge crystal, so shiny! Let’s show it to Old Fang.”

“Lazy... Uncle Fang, how’s Braided Head?”

A smile unconsciously spread across Fang Zhixu's face, infected by their joy.

"Hey, I say, don't just celebrate, come pick me up."

He chuckled, shaking his head slowly, inadvertently moving his sore knees. Suddenly, he found himself looking at Dirty Chin's grim look.

—The barrel of a gun was ominously aimed at him.

Fang Zhixu shivered, instinctively explaining, "The surgery went smoothly. Your sister is out of danger..."

As his voice trailed off, Fang Zhixu realized the fallen in front of him was also severely injured. Oozing pus-blood and with cracked skin, Braided Head's limbs were torn into a Y-shape, yet its functional abilities seemed relatively unaffected.

However, the sense Fang Zhixu got from Dirty Chin was that it was on the brink of death.

As a doctor, Fang Zhixu's intuition about life and death has always been very accurate.

"Do you need treatment?" Fang Zhixu hesitated for a moment before gently asking. He wasn't one of the five registered participants of V587, nor did he have any surveillance drones around him. In this alley, there were only him and these fallen ones, and whatever happened here wouldn't be documented.

In Fang Zhixu's eyes, the boundary between humans and the Fallen had become blurred long ago.

Besides the difference in species, what made them truly different? Good and bad? That was even more absurd because just like how humans had the likes of the demonic Nai Kang and Nai Wen, the Fallen had innocents like Braided Head.

He didn't harbor strong malice towards the Fallen, and now, watching Dirty Chin die before him was something he couldn't bear.

After all, Dirty Chin had protected him for quite some time and even scared off several waves of evolving zombies that passed by.

Fang Zhixu spread his palm, and a bright white healing ability began circulating, emitting a warm glow.

"If you don't accept any treatment, you probably won't last until your sister wakes up..." Fang Zhixu spoke slowly and clearly.

"If she wakes up and doesn't see you, what will happen? Without your protection, how long do you think it can survive in this apocalypse?"

"I don't know if you can understand, but I've experienced it, witnessed a loved one die, and being left behind was the most painful part."

Fang Zhixu said a lot.

Dirty Chin remained silent, never giving any response. Its wariness toward humans was indeed profound.

Several minutes passed, and Dirty Chin lowered the gun in its hand. Its grey eyes remained fixed on Fang Zhixu. It moved forward, placing its forelimbs on the ground, heavily shifting closer. Fang Zhixu infused his healing ability into its body, and with radiation's aid, Dirty Chin's wounds healed rapidly.

Braided Head, awakening at some point, stiffly stood up, bewilderedly making noises. In its urgency, it bit onto Dirty Chin's leg.

Dirty Chin glanced at her, hoarsely murmuring a few words. Braided Head, observing Fang Zhixu's actions, quieted down, obediently sitting next to Dirty Chin. It looked at its mended limb, its eyes filled with curiosity.

“Old Fang!”

Several people cheered and ran over joyfully.

Song Ke held up a bright red crystal triumphantly, saying, “Quick, look! Level 4! We’re going to be rich!”

Fang Zhixu just took his hand back and agreed with a very dignified sentence: “It’s quite bright.”

“Hey, Braided Head, you’re all right!” Xu Xing’s eyes sparkled as he affectionately squatted nearby, whispering to it, “Don’t be afraid. We’ve killed the Zombie King for you. I’ve avenged you!”

“Ah, ah!” Braided Head happily clapped.

Amidst the atmosphere of family happiness, Zhuang Qingyan coldly suggested, “I suggest you all leave here as soon as possible.”

Everyone paused, slowly realizing that he was addressing Dirty Chin.

“The reinforcements have arrived, the zombie tide has retreated. Haimen’s people will clean every corner of the city. It’s very dangerous to stay here.”

Dirty Chin stood up in silence, the group of Fallen following him, including Braided Head, whom he held hands with.

Xu Xing, with reddened eyes, felt a pang of reluctance and sadness but also knew there was no reason to stop them.

Braided Head was different from them. To most humans, the Fallen were anomalies, dark beings not accepted, so they had to stay hidden and avoid capture.

Braided Head turned back, calling out to Xu Xing, “Ah, ah!”

Xu Xing waved, "Goodbye, Braided Head!"

Over thirty Fallen, in the faint light of dawn, stepped into an uncertain future.

"Let's go, we should head to the next destination, to mark our journey."

Song Ke patted Xu Xing's head.

Outside Haimen City, V587 encountered 'Three Grandsons and One Grandpa.'

Duanmu Qi was specifically waiting there and greeted them, "I've come to thank you and congratulate you. You're truly strong. In this final match, we concede defeat with sincerity."

Song Ke modestly waved her hand, "No, no."

Duanmu Qi smiled, "Next time, we'll surely win."

Song Ke replied, "...Not necessarily, right?"

Duanmu Qi didn't pursue that, instead bringing up another matter, "I want to know, what's your opinion of Mr. Xiang?"

Song Ke bluntly uttered one word, "Unethical."

Duanmu Qi nodded, "Very good, at least we don't conflict on this point."

Song Ke asked, "What do you mean?"

Xiao Chen's expression darkened as he clenched his fist tightly, making a "creak" sound. "He dares to assassinate Aqi, he's underestimating us. Just wait, before the match ends, we'll make him pay blood for blood."

Song Ke understood. Duanmu Qi was probably worried about any connection between them and Mr. Xiang, coming early to prevent any interference from V587 and feeling relieved afterward.

After bidding farewell to 'Three Grandsons and One Grandpa,' Lu Xiaoyu, Fang Zhixu, along with Xu Xing, went to find transportation while the remaining four stayed put.

Lin Youyou hummed a cheerful tune, looking at Su Cha from head to toe, expressing admiration with a series of "tsk tsk."

Su Cha's fingers curled slightly, feeling uncomfortable under her gaze. "What are you looking at?"

Lin Youyou teased, "Looking at you, of course."

Su Cha stuttered, "I..."

Just as he was about to ask why she suddenly focused on him, Lin Youyou calmly intervened, "Looking at how handsome you are."

"Clearly, when I picked you up, you were just a little wolf cub. Now, you've grown into a big wolf dog," Lin Youyou mockingly sighed, "Can't contain it anymore, able to solo the Zombie King, getting more and more handsome."

Su Cha awkwardly replied, "...Didn't solo."

Lin Youyou laughed teasingly, "Didn't solo? Why are you blushing then?"

Su Cha tensed, about to speak.

“Zhang San~!!” A tall and beautiful figure dashed over. Jennifer enthusiastically hugged Lin Youyou, even though she wore a mask, her excitement was evident as she exclaimed, “You’re so handsome!! You’ve dazzled me~”

“...” Su Cha swallowed the words he hadn’t finished, feeling a slight dryness in his throat. He misunderstood; apparently, “handsome” was just an exclamation, not an adjective.

Meanwhile, Song Ke gleefully stored the Level 4 crystal into her space. When she looked up, she found Zhuang Qingyan smiling at her. The morning breeze tousled his hair, and his light-colored eyes held an indescribable tenderness.

“The sunrise today is beautiful,” Zhuang Qingyan’s voice was deep and melodious.

Song Ke glanced up. The bright yellow sun, big and round like a greasy salted duck egg, hung in the indigo sky... No, the sky right at that moment. Her stomach rumbled, reminding her it was time for breakfast.

Song Ke scratched her cheek, feeling oddly embarrassed.

Zhuang Qingyan evidently heard her stomach’s protest and couldn’t help but laugh unexpectedly. Initially a light smile, tiny sparks of amusement gradually spread in his eyes, diluting the aloofness around him and replacing it with an incredibly pure tenderness.

“Song Keke, come here,” Zhuang Qingyan beckoned to her.

“...Oh,” Song Ke slowly moved closer.

Approaching, Zhuang Qingyan made an unexpected move. He supported the wheelchair with both hands – did he just stand up?!

Song Ke was taken aback. His legs recovered so fast? But she instantly realized it wasn’t that; it must be the effects of radiation.

Indeed, after standing up, Zhuang Qingyan's balance was off, stumbling a few times. Song Ke hurried over to support him.

He leaned his head against her neck, using her strength to steady himself, then lowered his gaze to hers. "I mentioned before that I wanted to talk to you. I feel like now is a good time."

Their proximity was close, close enough for Song Ke to almost dive into the depths of his eyes with a glance.

"Doesn't it hurt?" Song Ke diverted the topic, poking his right leg.

"It does..." Zhuang Qingyan murmured close to her ear, his voice growing husky, "But I want to stand."

What did he want to say? It was all mysterious, making her nervous as well.

Song Ke stood tall and straight, poised as ever. "Say it, I'm listening."

"Song Keke..." Zhuang Qingyan sighed.

"Song Ke!" A clear voice came from behind, Yin Xiao appeared with a submachine gun in hand. Seeing the intertwined figures of the two, he pushed his goggles up, sounding surprised, "Oh, early morning rehabilitation?"

Zhuang Qingyan stared expressionlessly at him, his awakened energy crackling around him.

"Something wrong?" Song Ke steadied him, allowing Zhuang Qingyan to stand on his own, then turned to ask.

"I've come to say goodbye to you. We need to return to the Northern Base," Yin Xiao selectively ignored Zhuang Qingyan's chilling aura, seemingly oblivious to any anomaly, "Also, I'm extending an invitation to you."

“What invitation?”

“An invitation to come to the Northern Base.”

“After completing the time-limited S-level commission, your points should be enough, right? If not, I can help by writing a recommendation letter for you.”

“You are welcome to District B, but please prioritize the Northern Base,” Yin Xiao proclaimed loudly.

“We might not go, to District B. Even if we do, why should we choose the Northern Base?” Song Ke sluggishly responded.

“Because I’m at the Northern Base,” Yin Xiao replied matter-of-factly.

Song Ke glanced back at Zhuang Qingyan. By now, his expression had frozen over like the harsh December winter.

“Why do you, being there, mean we should...?” Song Ke intended to cut to the chase, blurting out her question.

“Can’t you see it?” Yin Xiao raised an eyebrow, then murmured softly, “I thought I was pretty obvious.”

“What’s obvious?” Song Ke was bewildered.

“I like you,” Yin Xiao grinned brightly, “Isn’t that obvious?”