

## Doomsday 131

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 131: Life-and-Death Marathon (22)

Lin Youyou's wish (End of Competition Arc)

"Next stop, Rongzhou or Reshufu?"

Lu Xiaoyu somehow managed to get a rare amphibious vehicle in District D and, after a series of operations on the control panel, switched the off-road mode to floating mode. A nimble speedboat glided over the river surface, leaving behind several sparkling water trails as it raced away with full horsepower.

After asking the question, there was no response from anyone behind.

Lu Xiaoyu turned around to see Fang Zhixu and Xu Xing in the back seat, sprawled out, lightly snoring intermittently.

One elderly and one young. The old one, with his energy depleted, immediately lay down upon boarding. The young one had experienced great ups and downs in a short period, undergoing a breakthrough and farewell to a friend, experiencing intense emotional fluctuations. It was understandable for them to relax and fall asleep now.

The remaining four young and strong individuals, however, were lost in their own worlds, paying no attention to his words.

"Where are we going?" Lu Xiaoyu asked again.

Still, no one paid attention. All four were immersed in their own thoughts.

Lu Xiaoyu didn't tolerate this behavior. He swiftly accelerated and made a sharp turn in the speedboat. The turbine spun fiercely, creating intense eddies, and the boat, skimming close to the river surface, seemed to fly low. He casually opened the skylight, splashing river water onto a few people's faces.

"Ptui! Ptui! Lu Xiaoyu, could you please follow some traffic rules!"

Song Ke and Lin Youyou were jolted awake as if from a dream, rushing to the window to vomit. How disgusting! Who knows how many zombies died in this water!

"Awake? Then tell me where we're going," Lu Xiaoyu snorted lightly.

Zhuang Qingyan silently handed over a lit screen. Lu Xiaoyu reached out and took it. The next route had already been marked on it.

Song Ke closed the car window and stole a glance at Zhuang Qingyan's face through the glass. He was resting his chin on his hand, browsing through data with lowered eyelashes that cast shadows, concealing all emotions. It was impossible to discern who he was angry with, his profile frozen like an ice sculpture.

After Yin Xiao uttered that mind-blowing "I like you," he and Jennifer returned to the hover car, supposedly hurrying to meet with others from "Tustan" and submit the commissioned objective above.

"Life is unpredictable. What if he disappears at Haimen..."

Song Ke turned back to support Zhuang Qingyan. His eyes narrowed dangerously, his tone carrying a chilling seriousness.

Song Ke stared expressionlessly at him, pointing to the ubiquitous drones around, making her meaning clear.

"...Just kidding," Zhuang Qingyan responded with a faint smile, slowly retracting his mental ability.

“He’s gone. What do you want to talk about?” Song Ke didn’t forget what had been interrupted earlier.

Zhuang Qingyan looked down at the seemingly indifferent Song Ke, his brow gradually furrowing.

“He just confessed his feelings to you.”

“Yeah.”

“What do you think about it?”

“I was a bit surprised,” Song Ke admitted truthfully.

“Besides surprise?”

“...Nothing else.”

This response left Zhuang Qingyan in a more difficult position.

“He said he likes you, yet you have no reaction.” Zhuang Qingyan began to realize something, his expression turning serious.

Song Ke blinked, humbly seeking advice: “...Should I have had one?”

Zhuang Qingyan silently gazed at Song Ke, suddenly pondering a question he had never seriously considered before.

“Song Keke, do you know what ‘liking someone’ means?”

This time, Song Ke seriously contemplated for a while, shook her head, her grandpa hadn’t taught her that.

Then Zhuang Qingyan fell silent.

Zhuang Qingyan, who could calculate without a change in expression even facing the cunning and sly Zombie King, was now sitting in the speedboat, seemingly encountering some complicated puzzle of the century, rarely lost in thought.

Song Ke stole glances at him for a long time before silently retracting her gaze.

In fact, she could realize that, apart from being a bit slow, she was quite obtuse in terms of emotional memory. This was a problem she had since she was very young.

Regular kids would display various emotions like joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness, but Song Ke didn't know how to express them properly. When others laughed heartily, she would end up in tears, and when others cried loudly, Song Ke's eyebrows would knot, her little face turning red, appearing particularly angry.

So, people who didn't understand her, like Aunt Qing, would find her gloomy and unpleasant.

Song Ke had once asked her grandfather why she was different from others. Her grandfather told her to observe and learn more, starting with imitating people of her age around her. He said Song Ke was a very, very smart child who would surely learn well.

Encouraged, Song Ke studied hard. As she grew older, gradually she became like others: she cried when she needed to, laughed when it was appropriate, and never had untimely actions. Expressing "normal" emotions became her instinct.

But there was one thing Song Ke never learned—how to like someone.

She didn't have parents, and her grandfather didn't have a wife. In her lonely journey of growing up, there was no reference around to tell her what two people who liked each other should be like. Song Ke liked her grandfather and also the member of Team V587, but she felt that what Zhuang Qingyan meant wasn't this kind of liking.

“I have a question for you all,” Song Ke, who couldn’t figure it out, straightforwardly asked, “What does it feel like to like someone?”

Lin Youyou instantly became spirited and leaned in, gossiping, “Who! Who likes you? Did someone confess to you?”

“Yeah,” Song Ke nodded honestly.

“Huh, someone can’t sit still anymore?” Lu Xiaoyu’s mechanical arm clapped lightly.

“If you like each other, you should be together!” Lin Youyou glanced at Zhuang Qingyan, deliberately raising her voice decisively.

“Together?” Song Ke became more confused.

“Start dating first, then get engaged, married, and then...” Lu Xiaoyu paused for a moment, lacking practical experience, and rigorously flipped through the data. “The book ‘Analysis of Old Civilization’s Customs and Ethics’ says so.”

Lin Youyou immediately objected, “It’s the end of the world now, let’s skip engagement and just get married!”

Lu Xiaoyu was more concerned about another point, “What about the crystallization of love? If we divide the responsibilities, I suggest making a schedule. Where should the household registration be? What about schooling in the future? Staying in Liuboni or maybe Askar? I highly recommend these two institutions.”

Lin Youyou nodded, “Household registration indeed needs careful consideration. Ferrara and Tongwan are also options. I think the boy should study medicine and the girl should study art.”

Lu Xiaoyu started looking through the information again, “If the birth parents are genetically selected, the baby’s gender can be autonomously—”

“Shut up,” Zhuang Qingyan spoke coldly.

“?” Lu Xiaoyu opened his mouth, about to protest.

“Shut up,” Zhuang Qingyan interrupted him again, his expression as cold as frost.

“...Yin Xiao,” he spoke through gritted teeth, “the one who confessed, it’s a jerk named Yin Xiao.”

“...what?” Lin Youyou said, confused.

“...Ah,” Lu Xiaoyu stayed quiet for a few seconds then unexpectedly spoke, “Who’s Yin Xiao? Do we have someone in our team with that name? Is it a new nickname for you?”

“Yin Xiao is the captain of ‘Tustan,’” Lin Youyou said and wilted, then glanced at the co-pilot seat, lacking interest, and sat back.

Hearing Tustan’s name, Su Cha, who was curled up in his seat like a saw-mouthed gourd, slightly moved his shoulders in an imperceptible way.

Song Ke, completely clueless throughout the whole situation, asked, “What is the ‘crystallization of love’?”

“There’s no crystallization,” Zhuang Qingyan sneered, “except for fragments, he shouldn’t expect anything.”

Until they reached the next check-in city, except for snoring, the airship remained deathly silent.

...

After the Zombie King's death, the threat from the zombie tide weakened, the situation of the refugee influx eased, and surviving cities got a chance to catch their breath.

The latter part of the competition proceeded smoothly, at least on V587's side, it could be described as "extremely boring."

The audience in Ferrara sought thrills and excitement, but after V587's stunning operation in killing the Zombie King, they swiftly returned to their nonchalant attitude, leisurely following other teams to check in, occasionally strolling through the live broadcast room designated for the presumed champions. Either Song Ke held the terminal, seemingly counting money (though actually doing something else), or Xu Xing and Fang Zhixu put on a show of deep sleep for everyone. Only Su Cha went diligently for the check-in alone, while the rest of the team rarely appeared on camera.

Without any exciting content, the viewership in the live room rapidly declined, and gradually, the audience lost interest.

How lazy was V587? They were lazy enough to specifically choose cities that other teams had already checked in to, just trailing behind them—picking up the scraps.

Even the barrage comments started saying, "This isn't a championship team, it's clearly the king of slacking off," "V587's slacker behavior award..."

The next day, the most discussed topic became the feud between "Three Grandsons and One Grandpa" and "Shunxing Teahouse."

The two teams clashed three times, concluding with Xiao Chen sustaining an abdominal injury and Mr. Xiang being seriously injured and comatose.

"Xiao Chen's pretty ruthless, huh?"

"Mr. Xiang is pretty ruthless toward Duanmu Qi! He could even commit assassination. Deserves retribution."

“The old man might not make it through this time, given his age.”

As expected, a day later, Mr. Xiang died at the check-in point just before the finish line, Rongzhou.

Due to severe internal conflicts, “Shunxing Teahouse” didn’t manage to complete the competition.

However, these had nothing to do with V587. Two days later, V587, having completed the check in, smoothly returned to the final destination—Ferrara.

Each time they arrived in this city, it always gave a completely different feeling from the apocalypse, and this time, they were welcomed with an unparalleled grand celebration.

Amidst enthusiastic cheers, Song Ke and Xu Xing lifted the trophy representing the champions. Although the other members cited “inconvenience” and refused to appear publicly, the name V587 had long been known throughout the entire eastern Alliance.

Ferrara, Tongwan, Mu City, Rongzhou...

Liuli Port, Greenwater City, Shaye, Haimen...

Different C and D-grade cities held legends about them.

Compared to the 5 million Alliance coins awarded for winning the championship, the additional 1000 points were like a drop in the bucket.

Considering the completion of the S-level commission in Haimen, which earned them double the reward, V587’s current points had reached a terrifying 700,000, far exceeding the 500,000 threshold to enter the District B.

After the celebration, V587 arrived at the top floor of the tower, meeting a person, or rather, an artificial intelligence.



Apart from points and Alliance coins, the most important reward in the Throne Race Competition was the chance for Lord Ilya to fulfill one wish.

As per the agreement, this opportunity was handed over by Song Ke to Lin Youyou.

The ice-blue data streams formed a gorgeous carpet, and a slender figure leaned quietly on the couch, waiting for them. No longer the ethereal hologram when they first met, the present Ilya, after half a year of transformation, was solid, a flesh-and-blood human.

Looking at Ilya, Song Ke couldn't help but recall her question to Zhuang Qingyan.

If an artificial intelligence had an independent consciousness and a body to freely control, was it still an artificial intelligence?

Did that mean Ilya was already human? There was a hint of depth in Zhuang Qingyan's eyes back then, but that person might not have wanted to be human.

"Good evening, my champions," Ilya greeted proactively.

Lin Youyou removed her mask, and Ilya didn't show any surprise, as if she had known all along she wasn't "Zhang San."

Song Ke noticed the trembling breath of the person beside her and squeezed her hand as a form of encouragement.

Lin Youyou took a deep breath, her clear words echoing in the spacious top floor:

"—Ilya, I want you to help me save someone."

"Save someone?" Ilya cocked his head, a spark of interest lighting up in his eyes. "As far as I know, your team has an outstanding healer with exceptional abilities. If it's about saving someone, he should be better than me."

“I know,” Lin Youyou nodded. “As long as they haven’t died, or are not on the brink of death, Old Fang can bring them back.”

“But the person I want to save... is someone who’s already dead.”

Ilya showed a hint of surprise, even V587 was taken aback. Though they knew Lin Youyou wanted to save someone, they weren’t aware of the specifics.

Lin Youyou opened her terminal and played a recorded video she took before heading to the Sin City. The location was the Fifth Hospital in Tongwan. On a hospital bed lay a person covered in various instruments. Well, calling this person a patient wasn’t accurate—the level of decay had surpassed a Stage Three mutation, more exaggerated than a Fallen. Their appearance was almost indistinguishable from a zombie, lying there lifelessly, like a corpse.

“This is my sister, Lin Xiu. She underwent irreversible zombification due to radiation. Her body is beyond salvage.”

Lin Youyou’s fingertips curled, her gaze firm as she spoke, “So... I want you to turn her into an artificial intelligence.”

“An artificial intelligence?” Ilya chuckled softly. “Interesting, but as I said before, this isn’t something I need to handle.”

He raised his hand slightly, a tiny stream of data pointing towards Lu Xiaoyu. “It seems like you don’t know your companion very well. Do you need me to recommend someone? For instance... this exceptional talent from the Lu family. Transforming a person into an artificial intelligence, he’s equally capable.”

Lu Xiaoyu was staring at a supercomputer, even though the screen displayed nothing, he was completely absorbed.

However, Lin Youyou slowly shook her head. “What I want is an artificial intelligence named ‘Lin Xiu.’”

Lu Xiaoyu could fill in memories, like in Sin City, where he restored the fragmented consciousness of Lord Hades, enabling him to become 'Hu Yong.' But the restored Hu Yong wasn't the same as the original Lord Hades. Lin Youyou desired an AI that fully possessed her sister Lin Xiu's memories.

"My sister, Lin Xiu, was declared brain-dead in the Loake Accident fourteen years ago."

Upon hearing a familiar keyword, Zhuang Qingyan subtly lifted his eyelids.

Lin Youyou's parents passed away early, and she was raised by Lin Xiu, who was a generation older. When Lin Xiu graduated from Tongwan Medical University, she became involved in a secret project. From then on, the chances for the sisters to meet decreased. Ultimately, Lin Youyou received news of her sister's death due to nuclear leakage.

For fourteen years, under Tongwan's top medical conditions, Lin Xiu, despite brain death, maintained a controllable level of radiation. However, when the apocalypse erupted, her zombification accelerated drastically. Even though doctors had concluded Lin Xiu was irreversibly a zombie, Lin Youyou refused to give up.

Unable to accept seeing Lin Xiu fully zombified, during that time, Lin Youyou desperately collected crystals, sought experts, participated anonymously in competitions, trying every possible means, despite the hope being faint.

Later, Lin Youyou met Song Ke, Fang Zhixu, Lu Xiaoyu... Hu Yong's experience opened up new possibilities for her. She conceived the idea of allowing Lin Xiu to continue existing in another life form.

But a crucial piece was missing.

This piece could only be provided by Ilya.

"Lin Xiu, she underwent memory storage," Lin Youyou said, each word deliberate.

"She had the habit of regularly updating that memo."

“I want to retrieve her memories from you. I want a complete Lin Xiu.”

“I also want to know what happened fourteen years ago in Loake.”

Memory storage was a secret known only to the locals of Ferrara.

Ferrara’s AI was highly advanced, and even before Ilya became the city’s magistrate, this unique service had emerged. As humans aged, their memory ability gradually declined, forgetting many things. But computers didn’t. Therefore, the people of Ferrara could archive and backup memories in AI.

By merging brainwaves and neurons with a fixed AI port through weak electric stimulation, they linked it with the storage module in the AI’s memory. This action formed a synchronous “memoir” in the cloud. If humans lost certain memories due to accidents, aging, or forgetfulness, they could retrieve them through a “rollback” function.

After Ilya emerged as a super AI and Ferrara’s ultimate authority, he naturally connected to all intelligent terminals, including the part used to record the “memoir.” This was why Ilya knew everything—the memories of all Ferrara citizens.

Lin Xiu was among the first volunteers in the project, depositing all memories since birth into the AI.

In the silent stillness, Ilya smiled.

“If this is your wish, I can fulfill it for you.”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 132: Fire Seed (1)

LAK0017

Starships flew past from high above, their silver-white streamlined designs resembling soaring seagulls with outstretched wings.

As they approached the city, transparent energy shields activated, and the starships decelerated into the platform. The energy pillars imprinted with the Lu's logo automatically docked, and passengers disembarked, chatting and dispersing towards various exits. If someone from below District C stood here, they would undoubtedly widen their eyes in surprise because the Lu's starships, long thought to have vanished, seemed unaffected, continuing their regular operations.

Before their eyes stood an enormous three-dimensional city.

The weather was clear, sunlight abundant, even the air felt remarkably fresh, carrying the fragrance unique to flora.

Highly intelligent robots and hovercars were engaged in cleaning, transporting, and patrolling tasks.

Ultramodern skyscrapers, equipped with self-cleaning glass and fully automated elevators, towered into the clouds. Intersecting sky bridges and pedestrian walkways interconnected the entire city like transparent ribbons, occasionally dotted by figures on skateboards or parkour enthusiasts, whistling past slow-moving sightseeing spheres.

On both sides of the streets, colossal billboards and holographic posters updated in real-time, delivering firsthand life information to the residents.

All passersby adorned intricately customized accessories. A gentle touch projected holographic images—a premium feature unique to District B.

The initial impression the city conveyed: cleanliness, modernity, orderliness, barely affected by the aftermath of doomsday.

Another starship returned, docking at the high-rise exclusive channel. The hatch opened, and He Qihong, clad in a dark grey suit, briskly descended.

The secretary team waiting at the platform promptly approached. A young woman in her early twenties held flowers, warmly addressing, "Commander, welcome back to the Northern Base."

"Your schedule for today is as follows: a half-hour meeting with the Logistics Minister at 10 o'clock, then at 10:40..." He Qihong's administrative secretary, Ye Zimei, dutifully began reporting.

"Let's talk about these later," He Qihong raised a hand to interrupt her subordinate's report. The overnight flight had left her fatigued; she rubbed her forehead tiredly. "Have the two mutated zombies captured by 'Tustan' been delivered to Dr. Ning's laboratory?"

"Yes, Captain Yin Xiao personally escorted them, and Dr. Ning has received them," came the reply.

He Qihong nodded in satisfaction. Despite Yin Xiao's unruly nature, he was dependable when it came to tasks.

"How is General Ye's health?" she inquired.

"Physically, he's doing alright," Ye Zimei carefully chose her words. "He's been sleeping soundly these days and even had two extra bowls of food."

He Qihong paused, a hint of concern furrowing her brow. "...But his mood isn't great?" she prodded.

"Something has been bothering him," Ye Zimei murmured softly.

"What happened?" He Qihong's steps halted abruptly.

Glancing around discreetly, Ye Zimei lowered her voice, "Two inspectors from the Central Court arrived."

"Inspectors? Under what pretext?" He Qihong's expression turned tense.

“They’re here regarding Dr. Ning’s ongoing research project. They strongly object to it, alleging that he’s withholding classified Alliance information. They’ve demanded Dr. Ning’s team publicly disclose their research progress. It’s been a tug-of-war with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the past couple of days.”

“Hmph,” He Qihong scoffed. “Dr. Ning is a free agent now, conducting independent research funded directly by the Northern Base. Even if they want to interfere, they probably won’t find a legitimate reason.”

“Right, right!” Ye Zimei nodded vigorously, then hesitated, biting her lip.

“Is there something else?” He Qihong sensed she had more to say.

“Well... Commander, during your absence, two S-level awakeners... were taken away by Tokushima (District B16),” Ye Zimei’s voice grew softer, her head bowing lower.

He Qihong, with a relatively composed expression, managed to ask, “Which type?”

“One was a lightning-type awakener, and the other...” Ye Zimei struggled to swallow, her expression on the verge of tears, “a weapons expert, the chief designer of the ‘Hell Scythe’ firearms...”

In the post-apocalyptic world, S-level awakeners became crucial strategic assets, and the quantity of S-levels also determined the upper limit of development for a region.

The Northern Base boasted a million high level awakeners, making them exceptionally powerful within the Alliance. However, what saddened He Qihong was their scarcity of S-levels in District B, barely reaching a number in the single digits, and now, two more had been taken away...

He Qihong’s heart raced with frustration. “They took our people, won’t you take them back?!”

Ye Zimei sounded somewhat helpless. “We did, but the envoys we sent also switched sides...”

He Qihong felt a pang of anxiety. "Issue an immediate district-wide commission. Find a batch of eloquent speakers."

"Furthermore, open wide recruitment. If S-levels from other districts show any inclination towards the Northern Base, regardless of conditions, agree first and find ways to retain them at all costs."

"Yes, Commander," Ye Zimei acknowledged with a slight whimper.

Reflecting on the Throne Race competition she witnessed in Ferrara these past few days, He Qihong paused before adding, "We've always underestimated the awakeners in the lower districts. There are plenty of outstanding awakeners there too. This recruitment drive, send a copy to the lower districts as well."

The CDE districts? Ye Zimei was surprised. Having grown up in the Northern Base, she had never set foot in the lower districts. However, she had heard from others that those areas suffered severe damage from the apocalypse, with most cities being overrun by zombies. Could there truly still be powerful untamed awakeners there?

Yet, as the directive came from the leadership, she nodded in agreement, "Understood!"

\*

Tongwan, Fifth Hospital.

Outside the special care ward, Lin Youyou covered her face, her voice trembling. "...Is it really okay?"

"I don't know," Su Cha shook his head.

"He insisted on coming along," Song Ke added.

"Yeah, yeah, it's not our business~" Xu Xing chimed in.



Lin Youyou shifted her fingers, stealing a glance at the unexpected guest, sighing inwardly. Although she had requested this person herself, he was the highest executive in Ferrara. Would his presence here in Tongwan not cause a diplomatic incident?

The “unexpected guest,” Ilya, wasn’t dressed in his signature velvet suit. Instead, he wore understated black and white attire, a baseball cap firmly pressed down on his golden hair, concealing most of his icy blue eyes. Otherwise, his arrival in the city would have surely caused a stir.

After meeting V587 in the tower that night, Ilya agreed to fulfill Lin Youyou’s wish. Using the reason “memory storage is the most private secret of humanity; I need to meet Lin Xiu in person to confirm the authenticity of your words,” he tagged along with them to Tongwan.

Although Ilya had been very friendly and approachable throughout, given the cautionary tales of many who had been deceived, Song Ke and the others didn’t dare underestimate him. They remained on high alert, fearing he might pull some kind of stunt and quietly arrived in Tongwan.

Following the group into the hospital room, Ilya glanced at the barely recognizable Lin Xiu for a moment before diverting his gaze, casually surveying the surroundings.

Song Ke stepped back slowly, whispering to Zhuang Qingyan beside her, “How do we... open that memo?”

“If the person is still alive, it’s usually accessed through biometric information or brainwave connections.”

Song Ke’s eyes widened. Lin Xiu had turned into a zombie, devoid of fingerprints, irises, even her facial features had completely transformed. Where would they find biometric information?

“She’s brain-dead. Brainwave connection won’t work, right?”

“Exactly.”

Song Ke leaned closer to Zhuang Qingyan’s ear, almost touching his cheek, “He just glanced at Lin Xiu.”

“Do you think... he just wanted to come out and play?” Since Ilya had been created, he hadn’t left Ferrara. Song Ke suspected that he might have used the excuse of fulfilling the wish to venture out with a new body.

“I think you should lower your voice; he might have heard that,” Zhuang Qingyan advised.

Normally, Zhuang Qingyan would have educated her on the notion of boundaries between genders for such an unconscious display of intimacy. But now, he remained calm, showing no hint of emotion in his tone.

Song Ke quickly covered her mouth, and true to his prediction, Ilya glanced at her lightly with unclear meaning.

“Memory projection requires a carrier. What are you planning to use?” Ilya turned to Lin Youyou.

“Anything will do. Whatever works best,” Lin Youyou replied, already prepared with various types of terminals, screens, computers, and storage hubs, as if she was offering a selection.

Ilya swiftly acted, his irises shimmering with an unusual color as vast amounts of data flashed through his eyes. Extracting the memory unit named “Lin Xiu,” he transferred it to the new model screen. It appeared like a download, and a progress bar immediately displayed on the screen.

Lu Xiaoyu took the screen, using his abilities to rapidly construct a stable environment to prevent Lin Xiu’s memory from dispersing due to data turbulence before it could form.

“Her original body has died, so the saved memories will slowly rebuild based on consciousness. There might be a period of confusion initially, but over time, they will become more refined. After all, artificial intelligence needs continuous learning,” Ilya remarked cryptically.

When the progress bar reached 100%, the screen blinked and then went black.

After a few seconds, a clear holographic projection slowly emerged, depicting a young woman in her twenties, wearing a scientist's lab coat. She held her head, looking slightly disoriented, her eyes vacant yet clouded.

Ilya completed his task and left with Lu Xiaoyu from the hospital room. Song Ke glanced at him but made no move.

From her position, she could only see Ilya stepping into the hallway and stopping beside Lu Xiaoyu, who was basking in the sunlight.

Lin Youyou widened her eyes slightly, unable to contain her excitement, "Big sister..."

Lin Xiu, overwhelmed by the sudden influx of memories, appeared a bit confused. She gazed at Lin Youyou with puzzlement, "Who are you..."

Suddenly, her expression changed, "No, wait, who are you calling 'big sister'? Do I look that old?"

Lin Youyou, brimming with joy, choked up instantly, "I-I'm Youyou."

When Lin Xiu passed away, she was in her prime, not much older than Lin Youyou currently. It was understandable that she couldn't recognize her.

The holographic projection occasionally flashed with chaotic streams of information. Due to the death of her original body, Lin Xiu's state was highly unstable. She gazed at the face resembling hers and softly exclaimed, "Youyou? Are you Youyou? How... how did you grow so much?"

"Big sister!" Lin Youyou cautiously reached out her finger and lightly touched Lin Xiu across the gap. Two tears trickled down her cheeks.

Lin Xiu hugged her briefly, displaying warmth for a moment, then pushed her away with disgust, shaking her hand.

“Who’s this con artist? Trying to deceive me?” Lin Xiu was furious, “Our family’s Youyou is just eleven!”

“I... I’m really your sister!” Lin Youyou cried and laughed at the absurdity, immediately presenting her identity information.

Lin Xiu stared at it for a moment, but then her consciousness became confused again. She covered her head, starting to flicker.

Song Ke couldn’t help but chuckle. She was starting to believe that Lin Xiu and Lin Youyou were indeed sisters. Their nonsensical way of speaking was uncannily similar.

Lin Xiu lowered her head and, unexpectedly, discovered her fully zombified body. She instinctively exclaimed, “Oh my, what’s this? Mummy cosplay?” Then, she noticed the patient information at the bedside, and her pupils dilated suddenly, “Wait a minute... is this me? Am I dead?”

Lin Youyou nodded expressionlessly, “Ah, yes, you’re already dead. It’s been fourteen years. I extracted your memoirs, and now you’re an artificial intelligence with autonomous consciousness.”

“Memoirs...” Lin Xiu murmured. “I remember now. I did memory storage...”

Lin Youyou took some time to explain the sequence of events to Lin Xiu, and the two sisters finally recognized each other, embracing each other in tears.

“Sister, what happened fourteen years ago? Why did you suddenly pass away?” After reminiscing, Lin Youyou asked with a serious expression.

Recalling that last memory, even in the holographic projection, Lin Xiu’s face turned pale.

“Passed away? Yes... I remember something important, but I can’t recall it.” It felt like a missing storage chip in her mind. Lin Xiu held her head, groaning in pain.

“Loak... radiation... explosion... L...” Her eyes reddened, a splitting headache struck her. The holographic projection flickered continuously, replaying the terror and fear from the moment before her death, but because the memories weren’t transmitted back to the cloud in time, the fragmented pieces remained incomplete.

“Sister, stop thinking about it for now.” Lin Youyou felt sorry for her and quickly intervened.

“Okay, I won’t think about it...” Lin Xiu gradually calmed down. The screen stabilized, and she slowly raised her eyes, unexpectedly catching sight of the man sitting by the window. Her expression first went blank, then blinked in disbelief, “Vincent? Dr. Zhuang? You are... Dr. Zhuang, right?!”

Zhuang Qingyan’s finger twitched in surprise; he hadn’t expected Lin Xiu to suddenly attack him.

‘Uh-oh,’ Song Ke whistled silently in her mind.

Zhuang Qingyan pursed his lips and quickly glanced at her. Song Ke responded with an innocent expression. Vincent, Dr. Zhuang—she had no idea.

“I am Lin Xiu, a records officer of the G Group at the Qinglan Research Institute’s Loak Branch. I officially joined the Ignition project team in June of the New Calendar’s 30th year,” Lin Xiu stated.

Lin Xiu looked extremely excited, holding her cheeks in disbelief, “You surely don’t know me, but I can’t believe I’m seeing you in person.”

“I’m your idol!”

Lin Youyou coughed twice, “Sister, that’s not...”

“Sorry, sorry! You’re my fan!” Lin Youyou covered her forehead in disbelief.

Lin Xiu's holographic image excitedly moved around, unaware of her slip-ups, "I apologize, I was too excited. I've read all your publicly available genetic engineering papers. It's a huge honor for me to join the project team under your personal guidance!"

"Dr. Zhuang, how did you... become younger?" Lin Xiu began uncertainly, "You seem more handsome too, with more hair. Did you get a hairline transplant?"

Song Ke maintained a composed expression, inwardly amused: Hahaha!

Zhuang Qingyan sighed, intervening in her nonsense, "Lin Xiu, it's a pleasure to meet you. Unfortunately, the Loak incident made us lose a... remarkable colleague like you."

Song Ke struggled to contain her laughter, looking up at the sky, pretending not to hear Zhuang Qingyan's attempt at misleading.

"No, no, I'm just a records officer. I'm far from remarkable," Lin Xiu shyly smiled. Suddenly, her gaze dulled, as if recalling something, "Records officer... Dr. Zhuang, I have important things to report to you."

"Report... Experimental subjects... lost... L..." She repeated some fragmented phrases aimlessly.

Zhuang Qingyan furrowed his brow slightly, attempting to help her gather her thoughts. "If you're talking about the loss of experimental subjects, after the Loak incident, Qinglan conducted a detailed check internally. All registered experimental subjects died, and there were no instances of the losses you mentioned. You might be mistaken."

"If it's before the incident, that's even more impossible..."

"LAK0017." Lin Xiu swiftly reported a string of codes.

As if frozen in place by a spell, Zhuang Qingyan abruptly ceased speaking upon hearing these numbers. Every muscle in his body tensed.

“The lost experimental subject is LAK0017,” Lin Xiu repeated.

“LAK0017, according to the experimental logs, on November 7th of the New Calendar’s 33rd year, due to the failure of the 1314th gene fusion, the original cells died. This experimental subject no longer had research value,” Zhuang Qingyan spoke in a low voice. “LAK0017, along with LAK0117 and LAK0366 from the same batch, were destroyed. It was personally—cough, I, at the center, personally confirmed the results.”

November 7th of the New Calendar’s 33rd year was a Thursday, the fixed date for the concentrated destruction of failed experimental subjects.

November 8th of the New Calendar’s 33rd year was a Friday, the day the Loak nuclear leakage erupted, engulfing the Ignition project team in flames.

“Destroyed? Yes... yesterday, Ming destroyed them all,” Lin Xiu muttered.

Her memory halted on the eve of the accident, shrouded in a thick fog that she couldn’t penetrate. Lin Xiu tugged at her hair, and the holographic projection flickered in disarray. “No, it’s not like that... I saw it, they weren’t destroyed!”

Lin Xiu suddenly screamed frantically.

“—Ming took them away!”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 133: Fire Seed (2)

Parting Ways?

“Dr. Zhuang, I’m sorry. My life ended so suddenly, I never expected to tell you the truth in this way.” Lin Xiu finally recalled her memories before death; her expression became calm, and her emotions gradually stabilized.

“Why are you so sure that LAK0017 was taken away?” Zhuang Qingyan furrowed his brow and asked.

Lin Xiu replied in detail, “I am the record keeper for Group G. After the destruction process was completed, it was my responsibility to upload the operation logs. However, when I reviewed it, I didn’t receive any data from LAK0017. I immediately contacted Ming, but he had already... disappeared along with the subject.”

“Why didn’t you report it immediately?” Zhuang Qingyan pointed out the flaw in her explanation.

Lin Xiu lowered her head in shame, “As colleagues, Ming and I had a good personal relationship. I thought he was just... momentarily confused. I didn’t want him to face consequences because of it. I’m sorry, Dr. Zhuang, it was my negligence at work.”

Zhuang Qingyan’s expression turned cold, “Momentarily confused? Who was actually confused?”

The holographic projection was incredibly lifelike, and Lin Xiu’s expression showed clear regret, “Dr. Zhuang, I know my excuse is feeble. I failed to recognize Ming’s true motives in time. He was the only cultivator in Group G, spending day and night with those subjects, the person most familiar with them. Initially, I was puzzled why he voluntarily applied for the destruction process. Now I think he must have planned it beforehand.”

“In your opinion, what kind of person was Ming?” Zhuang Qingyan suddenly changed the topic.

Lin Xiu thought earnestly, “Ming was gentle in character, diligent in work, meticulous, and patient. We often joked that he shouldn’t be a cultivator but rather an animal caretaker, especially for those soft, cuddly cubs.”

Gentle in character... meticulous in work... Zhuang Qingyan pondered over Lin Xiu’s assessment. Why would such a person steal experimental subjects privately?

“Dr. Zhuang, would the loss of the experimental subjects bring any negative impact to the institute? The Fire Seed project was already extremely challenging. If you were reprimanded because of this...” Lin Xiu’s tone was very anxious as she inquired.



Zhuang Qingyan remained silent for a moment and then nodded reassuringly, "Don't worry. What Ming took was just an abandoned experimental subject. Besides you, no one else noticed it. Moreover, the Loak incident has already covered everything up."

Lin Xiu breathed a sigh of relief, "That's true. The original cells had all died, and that subject had no further research value. I just don't understand the significance behind Ming's actions..."

Lin Xiu, who had revealed the truth, felt a weight lifted off her chest. She now focused on studying her newfound AI form and spoke in low tones with Lin Youyou, inquiring about her current situation.

Zhuang Qingyan's fingertips tapped rhythmically on the armrest of his wheelchair as he fell into contemplation, his gaze lowered in deep thought.

The researcher codenamed Ming... his brain was like an extensive library, swiftly retrieving the needed information from within.

Ming, full name Ming Zhi, a cultivator in the Fire Seed project's G group, was also among the first outstanding graduates of the Lozan Training Program.

He had crossed paths with Zhuang Qingyan several times before. In memory, Ming was a young man with a refined appearance.

Ming's life trajectory was quite intricate. He was born in Lozan (District B25) but later moved with his family to the Northern Base (District B10) due to his parents' work. Subsequently, he obtained a doctoral degree in genetics in Ascal (District B9). When he joined the Fire Seed project, Ming was only twenty years old. In the eyes of society, he was worthy of the label "youthful genius."

His documented records halted five years after the Loak incident in the list of casualties.

Loak wasn't just one area but a collective term for two nearby cities, including Lozan (District B25) and Fenak (District C26). The nuclear leakage incident from that year had shocked the entire Alliance. Continuous explosions led to raging fires, dispersing a substantial amount of high-energy radioactive material into the atmosphere. This caused a perennial fog in both cities, leading to their abandonment.

Zhuang Qingyan believed Lin Xiu's account. Ming had fled with an experimental subject, for whatever reason. An alien experimental subject wouldn't survive long in regular air and needed a specialized chamber with enriched oxygen. Ming was highly likely to have returned to the familiar B District.

“...So, I'm almost forty?”

Lin Xiu, engaged in conversation nearby, suddenly burst into laughter. The holographic projection flickered, changing her appearance to that of a mature middle-aged woman.

Lin Youyou smiled at her, and the two seemed to switch roles, Lin Youyou becoming the composed elder sister, while Lin Xiu took on the role of the lively younger sister.

“Oh, who's this handsome young man?” Lin Xiu noticed Su Cha standing against the wall and asked curiously.

“He's Su Cha.”

Surprised, Lin Xiu exclaimed, “Oh my, Youyou, you're already dating a boyfriend at such a young age? No, no, I got it wrong again... How old are you this year?”

As she spoke, she glanced at Fang Zhixu and Xu Xing in the back row, momentarily getting confused about the situation.

“Seriously? Your son is already this big? Call me Aunt~”

Xu Xing's curly hair stood on end in shock. “!”

Lin Youyou felt deeply exhausted. “Firstly, I don't have a boyfriend. Secondly, I don't have kids. Thirdly, I'm twenty-five this year!”

“So, you’re twenty-five and still don’t have a boyfriend?” Lin Xiu asked incredulously. “You’ve never been in a relationship?”

“I’m really busy with work. Men only slow down my songwriting speed!” Lin Youyou winced at the jab.

“Songwriting? Last month you were arguing about becoming a starship stewardess, envying how they get to fly in the skies every day.”

“Sister, that was years ago. Can we not bring up ancient history?”

The sisters bickered and joked, with Su Cha passing a bottle of water to Lin Youyou.

“I almost forgot, it’s now the year 47 in the New Calendar...”

Lin Xiu’s gaze drifted towards Zhuang Qingyan, hesitating to speak several times before stopping herself.

Zhuang Qingyan felt uncomfortable under her scrutiny. “What do you want to say?”

Lin Xiu, eager for knowledge, asked, “Dr. Zhuang, you’re fifty-five... er sixty this year? You’ve aged so well. Is it some new anti-aging technology from the institute?”

“Pff!” Lin Youyou sprayed water all over Su Cha’s face.

“Hahahahaha!” Song Ke laughed mercilessly.

Zhuang Qingyan’s expression darkened.

...

Outside the ward, Lu Xiaoyu sat in a wheelchair, basking in the sunlight. The light cast a faint golden filter on his somewhat pale cheeks, his silver short hair falling over his shoulders. His six mechanical arms were retracted. If one didn't notice his empty legs, Lu Xiaoyu appeared like a convalescent, a frail young man in the Fifth Hospital.

A slender figure leaned against the railing, observing him with keen interest.

In an imperceptible realm, two entirely different streams of data clashed, briefly touched, then separated swiftly, akin to two wandering snakes promptly marking their territories, erecting defensive barriers in alertness.

Lu Xiaoyu raised half an eyelid, sensing no hostility from Ilya, and casually closed it again.

Ilya smirked involuntarily. Truly worthy of the Lu family, always arrogant towards artificial intelligence.

“This is our first meeting, yet you seem entirely unsurprised,” Ilya remarked.

“Why should I be surprised?” Lu Xiaoyu spoke with closed eyes. “Oh, are you referring to that useless idiot who, after you snatched his body and turned him into a low-level AI in a computer, thinks I won't figure out his identity just because he's silent?”

In one breath, Lu Xiaoyu continued without pause, coldly assessing, “He can't even look after his own body; the one crying and trapped inside a machine should be the surprised one.”

At the top of the tower, when Lu Xiaoyu released a bit of his mental energy, he detected familiar traces of data manipulation originating from the same source as him. After searching around, his gaze finally settled on a blank-screened computer. Recalling Song Ke's mention of the conflict between Ilya and Lu Xinglan, even if the other feigned death, Lu Xiaoyu instantly understood.

Waste.

With just a glance, Lu Xiaoyu averted his gaze.

“This body belongs to your Lu family. Don’t you mind?” Ilya displayed a standard smile.

“The Lu family...” Lu Xiaoyu tugged at the corner of his mouth, still unaccustomed to making this expression. His smile was stiff and indifferent. “What’s that got to do with me?”

Indeed a thorn, Ilya sighed lightly, almost imperceptibly. “I admire your character. It’s a pity. If it weren’t for the lack of legs, I might consider changing target. I believe we could have cooperated very well.”

“No,” Lu Xiaoyu shook his head solemnly. “I won’t cooperate with you. I’ll only make you hide and cry inside the computer.”

If Song Ke were here, she’d undoubtedly be very surprised. The current Lu Xiaoyu was entirely different from his usual self. When facing outsiders, he revealed a sharp, proud, and unequivocal side, appearing difficult to communicate with. But in reality, this was the true nature of Lu Xiaoyu.

As an S-level hacker with supernatural abilities, he was confident in speaking these words. If Ilya’s initial target had been him, forget three months, even in three years or thirty years, it would have been impossible for Ilya to succeed.

The relationship between hackers and AI is one of mutual growth and competition—whichever is stronger holds absolute authority.

Lu Xinglan wasn’t as powerful as Ilya, so he lost and had his body taken away. But at this moment, Ilya neither desired nor saw the necessity of determining a winner between him and Lu Xiaoyu.

“I want to make a deal with you.”

“Not interested.”

“Thanks to you, the Lu family is now in decline, searching everywhere for a replacement for that Mother,” Ilya continued, seemingly to himself.

“Really? Are they eyeing you up? Do you think being their Father would be a good idea?” Lu Xiaoyu cracked a dry joke.

Ilya didn't laugh. His icy-blue pupils flashed with a cold gleam. “Compared to that one, I'm just an insignificant kid. It's been less than ten years since I awakened my independent consciousness. Even if I become the magistrate of District C, I'm still weak. How could I contend with the Lu family that has influence throughout District B?”

“But even so, I don't want to sit and wait for my demise,” Ilya's expression softened slightly.

“If I indeed become a 'father,' believe me, that won't make you happy.”

Lu Xiaoyu's eyelids twitched.

Ilya raised his hand, and the code 101010 slowly formed an illusionary image, a faceless visage. “Do you want her dead, too? How ironic, so do I. We have a common enemy; in a way, we're on the same side.”

“What kind of deal do you want?” Lu Xiaoyu opened his eyes, looking at him.

“I want you to share some data, particularly about District B, especially all information on Erjia, District B8,” Ilya smiled. “As part of the trade, I'll grant you access to all underlying codes of Ferrara except mine.”

Lu Xiaoyu raised an unexpected eyebrow.

Ferrara was a highly virtualized city under Ilya's control. Him offering access to his underlying permissions meant that Lu Xiaoyu, if he wished, could effortlessly control all artificial intelligences.

“Deal.” Both of their similar icy gazes flickered simultaneously, instantly establishing consciousness communion.

“Compared to that idiot, you're more suitable for this body,” Lu Xiaoyu praised sincerely.

“You flatter me. I hope you only lost your legs and not your determination.” Ilya turned away, his upright figure melding into the data stream and disappearing from the ordinary people’s sight.

\*

After leaving the ward to Lin Youyou and her sister for reminiscing, Song Ke and the others found two separate resting rooms.

As they entered, Zhuang Qingyan glanced at Song Ke’s constantly trembling shoulders, sounding both aggrieved and helpless. “...I’m not sixty years old.”

Song Ke couldn’t hold back her laughter. “Hahaha!”

Zhuang Qingyan sighed, “That Lin Xiu... has poor judgment and talks nonsense.”

Song Ke: “Haha! Hahaha!”

Zhuang Qingyan sighed again, “I’m not Vincent.”

Song Ke: “Haha! Hahaha... Huh?”

“I’m not the Vincent she knows,” Zhuang Qingyan’s voice was low and deep, his gaze locking onto her. “But Lin Xiu didn’t exactly mistake me. Reporting this to me wasn’t wrong because I am Zhuang Qingyan.”

Song Ke’s laughter gradually subsided.

Zhuang Qingyan reached out, hesitantly massaging Song Ke’s soft fingertips. “Song Ke, I promised not to lie to you.”

“This explanation is very complex. Do you want to hear it?”

“Do you want to know?”

In the quiet room, only the faint hum of the ventilation system was audible. Song Ke had a premonition that Zhuang Qingyan wanted to tell her something, maybe about his true job at Qinglan or perhaps regarding his secret identity.

Some secrets evoke sighs, while others bring fatal consequences. Song Ke didn't know which category Zhuang Qingyan's secret fell into, but she knew that once a secret was divulged, it would scatter like dandelion seeds carried away by the wind.

“Zhuang Qingyan,” Song Ke called out to him.

“Hmm,” Zhuang Qingyan softly replied, “I'm here.”

Song Ke held his face and said earnestly, “You being Zhuang Qingyan is great.”

Zhuang Qingyan was a bit surprised but then understood. He reached out, pulling Song Ke into an embrace, and they maintained that posture for a long time.

The sunlight outside the window was just right, and the gentle wind blew clusters of willow fluff into the sky.

Song Ke fidgeted uncomfortably. “Zhuang Qingyan, why do you want to hug me?” she asked softly near his ear.

Blushing, Song Ke stammered, “A-are you... cold?”

Zhuang Qingyan had recently recovered from a serious illness, and he actually felt quite warm.



Zhuang Qingyan's back stiffened. "I'm not cold... When will you finally understand?"

After a while, Song Ke hesitated, "But I... feel a bit hot."

Zhuang Qingyan let go expressionlessly. "The competition is over. Have you thought about where to go next?"

"I haven't decided," Song Ke shook her head.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, his gaze distant as it fell upon the thick shade outside the window.

"Before you decide, could I trouble the captain to take me to District B? I want to check on something."

Despite knowing each other for so long, this was Zhuang Qingyan's first time making a request. While everyone in V587 had their own goals, he seemed indifferent, willing to go with the flow, saying, 'I'll only suggest, you have the final say.'

Song Ke seemed to sense something. "Are you going to find that L..."

"LAK0017," Zhuang Qingyan finished.

"It's abandoned, won't it have no impact?" Song Ke asked, puzzled.

"After all, it's something Qinglan lost. I have a responsibility to find it," Zhuang Qingyan said calmly.

District B?

Song Ke pondered. She didn't mind; besides her teammates, she didn't have much attachment. She had planned to visit District B long ago. Xu Xing and Fang Zhixu should be fine, and as for Lu Xiaoyu... she needed to ask his opinion. But previously, when District B was mentioned, he didn't show obvious aversion, except for District B8 – Erjia seemed to be his minefield.

As she pondered, Song Ke's thoughts suddenly halted.

Lin Youyou and Su Cha...

Lin Youyou was a local celebrity in Ferrara, rich and famous, and Su Cha always followed her.

Actually, she had intentionally or unintentionally ignored something. After the Throne Race ended, Lin Youyou's wish was fulfilled. As per their agreement, the transaction between her and Song Ke should have ended. Lin Youyou could leave V587 and continue her peaceful, serene life surrounded by admirers. There was no reason for her to continue risking adventures with them.

'So, would the seven-member V587 team part ways?' Song Ke thought, stunned.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 134.1: Fire Seed (3)

Welcome to V587

"Shall we start the meeting?" Song Ke asked for everyone's opinion.

Everyone found their seats, and V587's "First Annual Work Summary and Commendation Conference" officially began.

Xu Xing fetched himself a small stool, fetched one for Song Ke, and after some thought, also fetched one for Fang Zhixu.

Fang Zhixu was taken aback by the favor, staring at the stool for a while, afraid it might suddenly spring out some strange prank, like freezing springs or the like.

Feeling a bit nervous hosting the meeting for the first time, Song Ke sipped on orange juice she squeezed herself.

After the apocalypse, crops underwent some changes due to radiation, resulting in oranges that were incredibly sour, far from the enjoyable functionality of the energy drinks provided by Yin Xiao. Nonetheless, they were fresh, so she grimaced but finished drinking them.

Song Ke cleared her throat. "Firstly, congratulations to Sister Lin Xiu for coming back."

Applause.

"Sister? I feel like I've gained a younger sister or no, maybe an ancestor," Lin Youyou complained, but her joy was evident in her eyes.

Her statement wasn't an exaggeration. Lin Xiu's mental age was only twenty-three years old. Although she lost her body and became an AI, she adapted well, exceedingly curious about new things. Besides, with the workplace blown up and no need to go to work, she had plenty of time to squander.

Lin Youyou was content to reunite with her loved one, separated by life and death. There were no regrets, yet the reminiscence of the past still brought a tinge of sadness and humor. "At first, I was way too fanciful, collecting crystals everywhere and even wanting Old Fang to try reversing the zombification."

"Impossible," Fang Zhixu honestly intervened. "You were putting me in a difficult position."

"I was in a panic back then, my mind was all over the place," Lin Youyou laughed. "Even if it worked, Lin Xiu wouldn't have agreed."

Just yesterday, Lin Xiu had pinched her nose and complained, "Sister, you're my only sister. Please, I beg you, hurry up and burn my body."

Turning to Lu Xiaoyu, Lin Youyou said, "If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have thought of turning Lin Xiu into an artificial intelligence. Thank you."

“You’re welcome,” Lu Xiaoyu graciously replied.

“In short, I and Lin Xiu have reached this satisfactory ending today. Thank you all for giving me the chance to make a wish.”

Lin Youyou didn’t overplay the emotions, standing up and slightly bowing to everyone. Su Cha behind her silently nodded.

Song Ke took a sip of sour orange juice and continued conducting the work.

“Secondly, congratulations to Xiao Xing for the breakthrough, reaching A-level!”

Applause erupted.

Xu Xing stood in the center, proudly displaying his new awakener certificate to everyone.

He had already completed the testing at the Ferrara’s awakener center, updated his information, and now was a bona fide A-level Ice-type awakener.

Finally, he wasn’t just a drag or a 666-calling salted fish anymore. Xu Xing’s eyes curved into crescent moons as he smiled.

“So, does that mean we’re an all-A team?” Fang Zhixu wondered aloud.

Lin Youyou, Su Cha, and Fang Zhixu were all A-level. Song Ke’s visible level was also A-level. As for Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu, these two individuals weren’t registered, being unlicensed persons and not counted in the statistics.

“Is an all-A team very powerful?” Xu Xing asked curiously.

“Is it?” Fang Zhixu wasn’t entirely sure either.

“Tustan’s team is all-A as well. In the latest round of rankings for awakener teams in the Northern Base, they rank seventh,” Lin Youyou casually mentioned.

“Wow, then we’re really awesome!” Xu Xing exclaimed, stars in his eyes.

“How do you know that?” Su Cha’s voice was somewhat dry.

“Jennifer told me,” Lin Youyou replied.

She opened the terminal’s chat box for everyone to see, and the screen was filled with blinding heart emojis.

This Jennifer... has quite the enthusiastic personality.

“Ahem,” Song Ke redirected the attention of her teammates. “Next up, let’s split the money!”

The championship reward from the Throne Race Competition and the S-level mission reward for killing the zombie king amounted to 7 million Alliance coins in Song Ke’s hands. This was the result of everyone’s joint efforts. As a fair team captain, she proposed dividing the money into seven equal shares, but everyone refused.

“I don’t need money,” Xu Xing said confidently.

“No way,” Lin Youyou insisted. “I’ve made my wish. How can I still take money? Song Ke, at least give a share to Su Cha. His savings were wiped out in the Death Prison, and he’s still carrying debts.”

During the time in the Sin City, everyone was quite poor. Song Ke’s purse was cleaner than her face, and Su Cha, the only one who faced massive financial pressure, paid the first fine out of his own pocket and paid it in full.

Su Cha quickly declined, "No need..."

Song Ke didn't hesitate and transferred 1 million to him, saying assertively, "Take it."

Lu Xiaoyu was even more direct, saying, "Captain, convert mine into materials, this is my updated list."

After Song Ke took it, his eyes started to sparkle again. Why was this list getting longer and longer?

Fang Zhixu declined too, "I still have some savings, and besides, you giving me money won't have a place to spend it."

Song Ke helplessly looked at Zhuang Qingyan; he was the only one left.

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head slightly and said three words, "You're in charge."

"Okay, I'll hold onto yours for now," Song Ke patted the terminal, reassuring everyone.

Amidst the banter, Song Ke took a deep breath and slowly began, "One last thing, I intend to go to District B."

Except for Zhuang Qingyan, the rest were somewhat surprised. Although they had joked before about leaving Ferrara after the competition to visit District B, Song Ke's serious announcement implied that this plan was now in motion.

The reasons were rather complex and hard to explain briefly. Song Ke sought help by looking at Zhuang Qingyan.

"I'll explain," Zhuang Qingyan naturally took over. He had changed his hairstyle, brushing all the bangs to the front, wore narrow-framed glasses on his nose, and had a refined, scholarly look on his side profile, exuding a mysterious and reserved aura. His new appearance diluted the academic feel he had

before. Although his face remained the same, his demeanor was vastly different. It seemed as if overnight, he transformed from a research genius into a sophisticated gentleman. Now, even Gao Xiangyang and Lin Xiu might hesitate for a while before uttering “Vincent.”

Zhuang Qingyan continued, “Due to personal reasons, I need to make a trip to District B. Song Ke will accompany me, and while the others are theoretically free to choose...”

Song Ke tugged at his sleeve.

Zhuang Qingyan held her hand, gesturing for her to wait. “...But the captain hopes that everyone will join us.”

“Wherever sister goes, I go!” Xu Xing was the first to express his stance.

Song Ke happily ruffled his hair.

“I’ll go too. You guys get into fights and get injured every day; I can’t rest easy if I’m not with you,” Fang Zhixu said with a smile.

Despite the earnest efforts of the 119th Hospital to retain him, Fang Zhixu chose to resign. Bound by so-called obligations and responsibilities in the first half of his life, always busy, now with the apocalypse upon them, he wanted to live as Ayao suggested – following his heart.

Zhuang Qingyan looked to Lu Xiaoyu, “You’re going back sooner or later, join us?”

Lu Xiaoyu shrugged, “I don’t mind.”

Finally, Zhuang Qingyan turned to Lin Youyou and Su Cha, “Our cooperation has ended.”

Lin Youyou was stunned.

“Before heading to Sin City, Song Ke made a deal with you both. You temporarily joined V587 and acted with everyone until the Throne Race ended,” Zhuang Qingyan explained slowly. “For certain reasons, the initial team formation process wasn’t pleasant, but fortunately, the outcome was satisfactory. So, you’re free now.”

Was this a breakup?

“Yeah, it’s over...” Lin Youyou’s mind was in disarray as she responded dryly.

Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes behind his glasses were incredibly serene. “Song Ke said that from now on, you can do what you want. Even if we can’t be teammates, at least we’ll be friends. There will be a chance for us to come back to Ferrara and watch your performances.”

“Yeah, I’ll sing your hit song,” Song Ke chuckled.

“Oh, come on, Song Ke, you sing off-key and don’t even realize it,” Lin Youyou smiled brightly, tears shimmering in her eyes. “Hey, couldn’t you try to convince me to stay? Or invite me to join you?”

“We’re treading on dangerous ground with every step,” Song Ke gently shook her head. Whether it was rescuing Lu Xiaoyu from the Death Prison, aiding Fang Zhixu’s assassination of Nai Kang, or killing the Zombie King, every action was perilous. Hence, they had all suffered injuries to varying degrees.

“But you’re different,” Song Ke gazed at Lin Youyou. “You have a home.”

Zhuang Qingyan, Lu Xiaoyu, Fang Zhixu, and Xu Xing, along with herself, were people without attachments. They could easily pack their bags and go wherever they pleased. But Lin Youyou was different; she had a home in Ferrara, a sizable studio, irreplaceable loved ones, and a stable and respectable job. Within V587, she was the one who needed the most determination because she always had an exit strategy.

Lin Youyou’s vision blurred as she stared blankly, realizing that Song Ke... and even Su Cha and the rest were in a similar position. Only she was different.



Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 134.2: Fire Seed (3)

Welcome to V587

Lin Youyou tilted her head back, holding back her tears, and softly asked, "When are you leaving?"

"In a week," Song Ke replied.

Lin Youyou curled her fingers, "Then when you leave, I'll see you off."

"Okay."

"You guys chat, I'll go... check on Lin Xiu," Lin Youyou abruptly stood up and walked out of the room, almost bumping into Su Cha.

Su Cha glanced back at the people in the room; his dark, inscrutable eyes revealed no emotions, but that was his usual demeanor, and no one minded. Finally, he nodded and silently followed Lin Youyou outside.

After the two figures disappeared, Xu Xing, confused, asked, "Aren't they going?"

"They were temporary additions; we can't force them," explained Song Ke.

"Oh," Xu Xing's grudge notebook now had two fewer people in it, suddenly feeling empty.

Lu Xiaoyu redirected the conversation, "So, about District B, where do you plan to go first?"

Zhuang Qingyan considered before replying, “Probably several places in the North—Askar (District B9), Baishen (District B13, the largest independent research project incubation site)... or maybe the Northern Base (District B10).”

Entering District B not only required reaching the threshold of 500,000 points but also undergoing comprehensive awakener testing. Despite V587’s wealth, the entry city was crucial; it would be their calling card in the future, essentially their second home in District B.

Lu Xiaoyu blinked in confusion, “Why not prioritize the Northern Base? I just found out they’ve released a new recruitment notice, the first time openly recruiting high-tier awakeners from District C and below.”

Xu Xing found the notice Lu Xiaoyu mentioned and read it aloud, “Recruiting high-tier awakener team members now. Excellent benefits, joining the Northern Base grants equivalent treatment to District B awakeners, free accommodation in the central district apartments, access to professional awakener training rooms and breakthrough courses, comprehensive medical education, basic life services...”

“Apartment!” Song Ke exclaimed.

“Breakthrough!” Xu Xing cheered.

Fang Zhixu pondered, “Oh? Medical care in District B...”

Lu Xiaoyu argued, “The black market in the Northern Base is renowned; it has the widest range of materials.”

“...” Zhuang Qingyan remained silent.

“I suddenly can’t remember...” Lu Xiaoyu glanced at him and slowly said, “There was someone called Yin Xiao, almost at S-level strength, skilled with guns. Where was he from?”

“I know, I know, the Northern Base!” Xu Xing eagerly raised his hand to answer.

“Captain, you’re quite close to Yin Xiao, right? We can go seek refuge with a familiar face,” Lu Xiaoyu sincerely suggested.

“Huh?... Not that close,” Song Ke muttered softly.

Zhuang Qingyan stared at Lu Xiaoyu; a glint passed through the lenses, and suddenly, he smirked coldly, “You’re quite fond of riding on others’ coattails? Sure, let’s go seek refuge with familiar faces at the Northern Base.”

\*

Lin Xiu ordered a bunch of fried chicken and beer, watching Lin Youyou’s early performance videos, specifically picking those edited by the haters, occasionally bursting into laughter.

Even though she was an AI and couldn’t eat the chicken or drink the beer, unable to sense the taste in the slightest, it didn’t stop her from enjoying the cheerful atmosphere.

Lin Youyou rested her chin on her hand, gazing absentmindedly out the window. Lin Xiu wanted to share some embarrassing stories with her several times but couldn’t draw her attention.

“What are you thinking about?”

“I parted ways with some friends,” Lin Youyou candidly mentioned V587’s decision to go to District B.

“Wow! That’s heartless, why’d they leave you behind?” Lin Xiu was initially indignant and then puzzled. “But why did you initially join through a trade?”

“Because... I did some morally questionable things...” Lin Youyou stuttered.

She confessed about snatching Mirror Lake’s crystal from Song Ke.

“Lin Youyou, you’re downright deceitful, the most treacherous!” Lin Xiu exclaimed in shock. “Did I teach you to be like this?”

“It’s all to save you! When you suddenly deteriorated, I was frantic!” Lin Youyou retorted.

Lin Xiu covered her mouth. “You’re yelling at me? How dare you yell at me?? Sob, I’ve long been dead, if I rot, I rot! Why are you fussing around when I’m already dead? No wonder people don’t trust you.”

Lin Youyou felt a stab in her heart.

The two sisters stared at each other for a while. Lin Xiu tentatively spoke, “So, what are you thinking now?”

“I can’t think of anything else. My home is here, and so are you. I’ll just stay here honestly,” Lin Youyou responded nonchalantly.

“But I feel like you want to go with them,” Lin Xiu said quietly. “You’ve always been stubborn since you were little, pretending to be indifferent while caring deeply. It seems so insincere.”

Lin Youyou’s shoulders slumped. “Song Ke was right. I have too many things I care about...”

“Wow, it’s the apocalypse out there, everything could be destroyed at any moment, and you’re worrying about attachments?” Lin Xiu sat beside her, patting her shoulder in the air. “Besides, aren’t I the one you care about?”

Lin Xiu snapped her fingers. “That’s an easy fix; after all, I’m currently a jobless wanderer. I can just take myself with me.”

Lin Youyou froze.

As she got no response, Lin Xiu waved her hand towards the side, “Hey, handsome guy, Su Cha, what do you think?”

Su Cha spoke softly, “I’ll follow her lead.”

“Such a loyal little dog...” Lin Xiu mumbled indistinctly, “So, what do you think of your former teammates?”

Su Cha paused, “They are... good people.”

Lin Xiu smiled satisfactorily, “There you go, it’s settled. You already have your answers inside. Trust me, taking that step isn’t that hard.”

Lin Youyou glanced at Lin Xiu, then at Su Cha. After a moment of silence, she suddenly burst into laughter without any warning.

Her laughter, with her features relaxed, vibrant, and radiant, seemed to release all the pent-up emotions, like a dazzling morning glow impossible to ignore.

\*

A week later, at the Tongwan City gate.

The streamlined design of the Lu’s Starship engine roared as it circled slowly in low altitude.

Song Ke sat at the cabin’s doorway, swinging her legs as she peered into the distance, “They really didn’t come.”

“I told you, the most reliable way to work together is to bind through interests, but you insist on their willingness,” Zhuang Qingyan said casually. “Human hearts are the most unpredictable; who knows, they might have already figured it out, living in a villa in Ferrara, sipping champagne.”

Song Ke sighed deeply, leaned back, and inadvertently laid her head on Zhuang Qingyan's thigh, looking up at him, her eyes glistening with an indescribable sense of grievance, "Not happy..."

Zhuang Qingyan couldn't continue with the lecture, so he covered her eyes with his hand.

"Are we leaving?" Lu Xiaoyu poked his head out from the cockpit.

"Let's go..." Song Ke, unable to see anything, sighed again.

As the starship ascended a bit, about to enter the orbit—

A rugged off-road vehicle rushed in, drifted 180 degrees when it neared, blocking the road. Its wild driving style was akin to Lu Xiaoyu's. The car door opened, and a man and a woman jumped out, both wearing black sunglasses, carrying backpacks. They were tall and well-proportioned, surrounded by an aura characteristic of high-level awakeners, displaying an extraordinary demeanor.

The woman was dressed in a tactical jacket and jeans, her long hair styled into a single-sided braid that fell gently to one side. She wasn't wearing a mask and had applied delicate makeup, looking radiant and lively.

"Hey, friends, mind if we hitch a ride with you?"

Xu Xing and Fang Zhixu heard the commotion and squeezed to the side of the hatch, waving excitedly at them.

"You guys, you came?" Song Ke let go of Zhuang Qingyan's hand and looked at them, unable to contain her surprise.

And indeed, the two were Lin Youyou and Su Cha.

Lin Youyou smiled brightly and freely, “I’ve thought about it. Being a big star, I’ve had my fill of these years. But I haven’t been to District B yet. It’s a good thing to broaden my horizons, so count me in!”

Song Ke was about to speak when—

“Hey, don’t tell me about danger. Come on, Song Ke, it’s the end of the world now. Everywhere’s dangerous, right? I perform at the Sycara Theater, and I have to worry about zombies suddenly popping up from underground!”

“And don’t talk about what I’m attached to or not. I’ve got everything arranged. Look, this time I’ve brought my whole family.” Lin Youyou patted the screen stashed in the side pocket of the backpack and then casually patted Su Cha.

Amidst the airflow stirred by the starship, the two looked at each other for a few seconds. Then, Song Ke and Lin Youyou simultaneously broke into a smile.

“Welcome to V587!” With a hint of dimples on her cheeks, Song Ke said loudly.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 135: Fire Seed (4)

Do you think S-level is just a cabbage?

“What’s District B like?”

Song Ke lounged on the soft couch in a sprawling “大” shape, occasionally flipping over, curiously asking when there was nothing else to do.

The journey to the Northern Base was long. Lu Xiaoyu activated the autopilot, allowing the starship to cruise at a constant speed in high orbit. The seven of them either nestled in their seats watching movies or wholeheartedly engrossed in holographic games. The rest were... playing cards.

Lu Xiaoyu, Zhuang Qingyan, Fang Zhixu, and Su Cha played the popular Texas Hold'em from the ancient civilization.

“On this matter,” Lu Xiaoyu, the dealer for this round, dealt three community cards, swiftly glanced at his own cards, raising an eyebrow slightly, “I can’t give an objective evaluation.”

“Then how about your subjective opinion?” Lin Youyou mumbled through her face mask.

The first betting round began. Fang Zhixu followed Lu Xiaoyu, tossing in the big blind.

Zhuang Qingyan slid a whole row of chips with his slender fingers, silently raising the stakes.

Su Cha watched the game with lowered eyes, cautiously choosing to fold.

“Subjectively speaking, the people there are all very arrogant, almost wanting to inscribe ‘I am the chosen one’ on their foreheads,” Lu Xiaoyu’s sharp and acerbic tongue spoke.

“Why? Does District B also have a hierarchical system?” Song Ke rubbed her chin against the pillow, shifting to a more comfortable position.

“Not exactly. The arrogance of District B residents doesn’t stem from their status; it’s innate,” replied Lu Xiaoyu.

“For instance, our friend here, the spokesperson for arrogance, why don’t you ask him?” He gestured towards Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan coldly glanced at him, adding another bet during the turn.

Although Zhuang Qingyan never explicitly stated where he was from, given his profound knowledge and bottomless pool of information, everyone assumed he hailed from District B, just like Lu Xiaoyu.



Song Ke turned over, poking Zhuang Qingyan's arm. "Tell me?"

Zhuang Qingyan used the cards to hold her mischievous hand down. "If District C plays an irreplaceable role, then District B represents 'completeness.'"

"Completeness?" Song Ke repeated the word, puzzled.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded. "The Alliance has designated different privileges for each district. Only District B has complete access to knowledge channels, comprehensive information privileges, and a complete welfare system. Those with District B citizenship, from birth to old age, all adhere to the so-called 'elite cultivation plan.' Every person from District B is crafted using the best resources available."

"But even with the best resources, one can still cultivate waste," remarked Lu Xiaoyu, noncommittally, setting down the final round's river card.

Zhuang Qingyan continued, "Individuals from District B raised in this environment hardly ever set foot in lower-level districts. Due to their lack of experience in the lower strata of life, their empathy is low. They cannot relate to many things, and even if they haven't done anything wrong, they might come off as naturally arrogant."

"Do you know the two most commonly spoken phrases among District B residents?" During the showdown phase, Lu Xiaoyu signaled for everyone to reveal their cards.

Song Ke and Lin Youyou shook their heads.

"What? You don't even know this? Huh? You don't have that there?" Lu Xiaoyu mimicked it perfectly, that slightly naive curiosity and the unwitting air of superiority, which could really get on one's nerves.

"Talking about this makes me furious! Knowledge censorship, right?" Lin Youyou ripped off her face mask, scolding, "Before my debut, I wanted to gather gossip from District B's entertainment industry, and it said 'insufficient privileges.' Oh yes, yes, we District C folks are only worthy of receiving neutered information."

“CDE districts are all considered lower-level zones. We’re all the same,” Fang Zhixu chimed in.

“Right,” Su Cha nodded silently.

Song Ke from District F interjected, “Um... guys, haven’t you forgotten something?”

Xu Xing, still enthusiastically gaming nearby, had become obsessed with this new holographic game. After all, District F didn’t have anything like this. Even if Xu Weiguo could get it, he wouldn’t allow Xu Xing to play.

Song Ke glanced at him and then at herself, suddenly realizing.

District F might not even be considered a lower-level district, and most people from District B probably wouldn’t even know such a rural place exists, right?

Lin Youyou sighed, “Wait, you two are from District B as well. How come you don’t have these annoying traits?”

After she finished speaking, she was stunned for a moment, and then she thought...why doesn’t it count as nothing? When Lu Xiaoyu was with them, things seemed normal, but the crimes he committed in Death Prison, the records of his wrongdoings, and his behavior of not even bothering to remember names when facing outsiders—wasn’t that a kind of ingrained arrogance?

As for Zhuang Qingyan, although he always had a smiling face and seemed approachable, in reality...

“I quit! I keep losing,” Fang Zhixu threw the poker cards, sulking, his nerves almost pulled bare from the back of his head.

“You keep winning,” Su Cha stared at Zhuang Qingyan expressionlessly, “Did you cheat?”

Zhuang Qingyan adjusted his glasses, gathered all the chips on the table, and smiled faintly.

“Huh? You guys don’t count cards?”

“You, you, you... you damn District B person!!” Fang Zhixu’s trembling finger pointed at him.

The arrogant Zhuang Qingyan faced strong condemnation from everyone, had all his winnings confiscated (22 crystal chips), and was banned from speaking for a long time.

...

The New Asia Alliance’s territory was vast, spanning from Tongwan in the east to the Northern Base in the north. Even with starships, it took nearly three days to traverse countless mountains and valleys. Song Ke was enthusiastic on the first day, ordinary on the second, and by the third day, she was so bored she was almost growing grass.

In high-orbit mode, over 8000 meters from the ground, outside the porthole was a vast expanse, only showing undulating clouds and moisture.

“When will we arrive?” Song Ke asked listlessly by the window. If she didn’t move soon, her limbs would go limp.

“Five more hours,” Lu Xiaoyu replied.

Song Ke whimpered.

After the captain sternly requested an early arrival and with Lu Xiaoyu’s agreement, they switched to manual driving mode.

Three hours later, they finally saw the Northern Base.

The scene before them left them speechless.

The periphery of the Northern Base was an endless wasteland, filled with ruins, destroyed buildings, collapsed billboards, drifting scraps of paper, and plastic bags... Thick dust and sand buried the former prosperity of the city; the development of this land had been completely frozen in the river of time.

Above was a dimming setting sun, casting a gloomy shadow over the land. For miles around lay plains overrun by withered grass, the view dominated by dismal shades of gray, with the solitary Northern Base standing as the only splash of color.

Rather than calling it a city, it was more like an "oasis."

"Why did it turn out like this?" Song Ke asked.

"War. Nuclear war," Zhuang Qingyan said in a deep voice.

Before the establishment of the New Asia Alliance, a brutal war erupted among the Cario Empire and the Luce Federation lasting for three years. The entire northern region was razed to the ground. Later, the three political entities signed a ceasefire agreement and a non-aggression treaty, finally ushering in an era of peace.

"The Northern Base was originally a post-war reconstructed homeland, inhabited by survivors who experienced the war," Zhuang Qingyan said.

"Almost fifty years ago," Fang Zhixu murmured.

"The war had profound effects on the Northern Base. The city's founders remembered the lessons of the past, accepted wanderers from various places, provided them with a stable living environment. He personally participated in reconstruction, military training, and the selection of those with supernatural abilities, gradually leading the base onto the path of military-civilian integration. Therefore, after the apocalypse, the Northern Base's characteristics made it the refuge with the most people possessing supernatural abilities."

Zhuang Qingyan's cold voice echoed in everyone's ears, "The entire Northern Base only pledges allegiance to that original founder, not under the jurisdiction of aristocratic families, super conglomerates, or the Central Court. It's a unique presence in District B."

Lu Xiaoyu's tone remained unchanged, "That's right, the last hope of humanity—the Northern Base, a phrase known since childhood."

Lin Youyou recalled, "I think I've heard, that founder's surname was Ye..."

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, "Ye Zheng, General Ye, the longstanding leader of the Northern Base."

As they approached the Northern Base, Lu Xiaoyu halted, "We're nearing the detection zone. Let's discuss how to proceed."

"Can't we just fly straight in?" Song Ke asked.

Occasionally, various flying terminals crossed the sky. When they neared the Northern Base, a transparent protective shield appeared above the city, an invisible ripple scanning before the barrier automatically opened. Once they entered, the transparent cover swiftly closed as if it had never appeared.

"Obviously, we can't," Lu Xiaoyu said.

"What about using your abilities to break it?" Lin Youyou persisted.

"I can make it briefly malfunction for a second, but what about after we enter? This is District B, do you think the patrols inside are idle?"

"One second?" Zhuang Qingyan smirked playfully. "The mighty S-level hacker, are you used to eating soft food? Aren't you ashamed to say that?"

Lu Xiaoyu's icy gaze sharpened, "What, too short? How about you try? Let me see how long you can manage."

The two locked eyes, sparks flying, old grievances resurfacing.

Song Ke sighed, separating the two with a hand on each of their heads, "Stop it, no fighting."

"Can't we use the main entrance?"

In the tense atmosphere, Xu Xing's talent for breaking the deadlock was triggered, "That recruitment requirement, didn't we all meet it?"

V587 collectively responded, "Oh, right!"

"Oh, right!" Song Ke exclaimed as if awakening from a dream.

It seems like making mischief had become a habit. Always thinking about sneaking around, this time wasn't like the incident with Mu City. They had openly announced the recruitment. Why did they keep wanting to break in? Blame it on those two people from District B; they twisted their thinking.

Lu Xiaoyu lowered altitude, and from a distance, everyone saw a small city in front of the Northern Base.

Song Ke poked her head out, "What's that?"

Zhuang Qingyan replied, "That's the Immigration Center."

Song Ke asked, "What's it for?"

Zhuang Qingyan sighed, "Song Ke, do you know how many people want to get into the Northern Base after the apocalypse?"

The seven of them descended from the starship, not yet close to the central gate, and were stunned by the massive crowd ahead.

How many were there? To put it this way, Song Ke had never seen so many people in her entire life.

Well, except during the zombie wave.

Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu, citing “inconvenient movement” as the reason, furrowed their brows and adamantly refused to proceed. Song Ke happily waved her hand, taking on the role of the team leader, “You guys wait here; I’ll go and take a look first.”

She took a deep breath and struggled to squeeze into the crowd.

Half an hour later, Song Ke, with her wrinkled clothes and face nearly flattened, finally made it into the hall. She rubbed her almost squashed face and tearfully remarked how difficult it was to enter the Northern Base. Perhaps it would be better to let Lu Xiaoyu use the black protective shield...

Inside the center, there were different zones, with many floating light panels indicating passages like “Immigrant Zone,” “Talent Recruitment,” “Temporary Entry Applications,” and the “Awakeners Fast Track,” though ironically, the area with the most people queued up was the “Fast Track.”

Song Ke looked around and saw continuous prompts on the floating screen:

“Please attend to A1322 at Immigration Window 8.”

“Please attend to C0654 at Talent Window 2.”

“Please attend to E119988 at Awakeners Fast Track 17 for genetic testing.”

Song Ke exclaimed, “...119988?”

There are so many awakeners here, it'll take forever to get through this line!

She stubbornly wandered around the center and suddenly had a bright idea! Beyond a corridor, a newly opened area was marked with a sign saying "Recruitment Zone." Song Ke hurriedly squeezed her way there.

As the automatic doors opened, the bustling crowd diminished instantly, and the air became noticeably fresher. This area was evidently filled with high-ranking awakeners. Groups of them stood in small queues, their mixed awakened energies faintly shimmering around them.

Song Ke obediently joined the last queue, looking around while observing her surroundings. Unexpectedly, she noticed, through the window, on the other side of the transparent sky bridge, a luxurious passage lay with a red carpet. It was empty, and above it was written in black elegant script, "VIP Channel."

Song Ke tilted her head, 'What's that? There are so few people there. Can I go there?'

As she contemplated heading over, the opposite door suddenly opened. A sleek and luxurious starship docked directly at the passage. A middle-aged man, impeccably dressed in a black uniform and wearing a top hat, descended from the gangway, followed by family and staff, all surrounding him like stars encircling a moon.

On the other side, the center's high-ranking official, looking very important in his tie, personally came out to greet him. He wore a gracious smile, his face brimming with excitement and joy. He nodded and gestured for the middle-aged man to enter. The passage was cool and refreshing, in stark contrast to the noisy place where Song Ke stood.

The people in front of Song Ke started discussing in hushed tones; they were all high-ranking awakeners with their own sources of information.

"Isn't that Ken Oda? An S-level engineering awakener, a renowned architect from Tokushima (District B15)."



“Wow! How did he end up at the Northern Base?”

“Why else? He must have been paid a fortune. I heard Tokushima poached two S-levels from the Northern Base a while back, so it’s tit for tat.”

“You only know half the story. Those taken by Tokushima were a powerful attack-type lightning awakener and a weapon master. No matter how you look at it, the Northern Base seems to be at a loss.”

“Uh... that makes sense.”

Song Ke blinked slowly. S-level attack-type ability... that’s what she had too.

She turned towards the VIP channel and took a couple of steps but accidentally bumped into another group of people talking.

“What are you doing? Trying to cut in line? Go to the back!” The burly group immediately turned and glared at her.

“No, I’m going that way,” Song Ke pointed in the direction where Ken Oda had disappeared.

The person she bumped into scrutinized her and burst into laughter, “Are you serious, little girl? That’s the S-level channel.”

As if hearing some ridiculous joke, he loudly shouted, “Hey! Someone wants to use the S-level channel!”

The entire recruitment zone erupted into laughter, various onlookers’ eyes fixed on Song Ke.

“Trying to cut in line, she should come up with a better excuse. S-level, as if she could even say it with a straight face.”

“Too ambitious...”

“Let her go; I want to see how she gets kicked out.”

“Where did this country bumpkin come from? She didn’t get lost, did she? Hey, you! This is the Recruitment Zone; regular people go to the main hall.”

“I know,” Song Ke politely replied, but amidst the loud noise, nobody heard her.

Some kind-hearted soul, unable to watch quietly, advised her, “Hey, you’re new here, right? Ignore them. The VIP channel requires a prior appointment, personally arranged by the leaders. It’s mostly for those who have finalized agreements from other districts and switch over. It’s not usually open.”

Song Ke asked humbly, “So, what if someone hasn’t made an appointment, a wild S-level, for instance?”

The nearby awakeners’ mocking laughter grew louder:

“A wild S-level? Hahaha, what nonsense are you saying?”

“An S-level is snatched up by every district as soon as they’re registered. How could there be a ‘wild’ one?”

Someone intentionally bumped into Song Ke’s shoulder provocatively but ended up surprised when she didn’t budge.

Unaware of this, others continued their mockery:

“You think S-level awakeners are just everywhere, like cabbages? The entire Northern Base only has eight; that’s already remarkable, okay?”

“Yeah, do you think you can pull anyone from the streets and they’ll be S-level?”

Amidst the laughter, Song Ke remained expressionless, thinking to herself: 'Yeah, there's nothing extraordinary about it. There are three in our team.'

Picking out anyone randomly from outside now, there's a fifty-fifty chance they'd be one too.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 136: Fire Seed (5)

Who gave you the courage?

Song Ke returned somewhat disheartened.

Those seeking shade under the trees gathered around.

"How's it, Captain?"

"Can we go in now, Song Ke'er? If not, I'll go back to get sunscreen, it's melting under the sun."

"...I smell something like cooked meat."

"Sister, do you want ice cubes?"

In the midst of the peak summer, the sun shone relentlessly, drenching everyone in sweat, and when that heat rose, the smell... truly defied description.

Song Ke glanced at her teammates in front of her, then suddenly closed her eyes, swiftly reaching out like lightning to grab Lin Youyou.

Lin Youyou: "?"

With a hint of regret, Song Ke let her go and tried again. With closed eyes, she groped forward twice and, with a casual grab, this time caught Fang Zhixu.

Others: “?”

Song Ke: “??”

She made a sound of disbelief, then for the third time, stubbornly extended her hand. Thinking she was playing a game, Xu Xing voluntarily placed his hand in Song Ke’s palm.

Song Ke: “...”

Well... maybe those people weren’t entirely wrong; randomly grabbing an S-level on the street was indeed a bit unlikely.

Everyone looked puzzled as Song Ke slowly explained the queue situation inside and the VIP channel to everyone.

“To get through this process, won’t it take three to five days?” Fang Zhixu sighed.

“Three to five days? That’s too optimistic,” Song Ke shattered his illusion. “These are the numbers I got.”

Two virtual numbers appeared on the terminal: “30—E216544, 07—Z003577.”

“The first is the number of days to wait, and the second is the number of people queued on that day.” Just in case anyone didn’t understand, Song Ke explained specifically.

Fang Zhixu slowly closed his mouth, worriedly scratching the back of his head.

“No wonder the Northern Base needs Qianzhan City; it can’t do without a buffer,” Lin Youyou fanned herself with her hand due to the heat and lifted Su Cha’s wrist. “Look, one-stop service for clothing, food, shelter, and transportation, along with various supporting services.”

While Song Ke queued inside the center, Su Cha wandered around the city but didn’t gather any useful information. Instead, he was bombarded with a bunch of forced ads.

The most frustrating part was that because he used a terminal in District C with lower permissions than District B, those ads were like rogue viruses that couldn’t be deleted. Now, whenever he opened the terminal, various flashy projections automatically popped up, such as “XX Immigration Agency (Group offering 20% off),” “XX Consulting to make your supernatural resume shine,” “Wanderfort Awakeners Hotel (Grand opening, free genetic testing provided by our store)”...

Lin Youyou took Su Cha’s terminal off, tossed it to Lu Xiaoyu, and asked him to help clean it up.

“Now, what do we do?” Song Ke shrugged.

“Wasn’t there a VIP channel?” Zhuang Qingyan said casually, “Our captain started from scratch, self-reliant, an outstanding S-level attack-type awakener. Shouldn’t we be able to walk the red carpet?”

Song Ke proudly straightened her chest, then slumped down, “That requires an appointment, and my credentials are A-level.”

She had just been mocked, called a country bumpkin with delusions.

Zhuang Qingyan tapped his wheelchair’s armrest, nonchalantly speaking, “Then let’s go public.”

Others were somewhat surprised.

Zhuang Qingyan continued, “We used to choose to remain secret because Ilya interfered, not wanting the Alliance to overly focus on Ferrara. Plus, there wasn’t a need to be high-profile. But times have changed. Since we’ve come to District B, the level becomes an important entry pass.”

“Don’t forget, what’s the highest principle of the Northern Base.”

“Strength,” Song Ke interjected. Yun Xiao had said this was a city where fists spoke.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, “Moreover, we not only have an S-level but also four A-levels. The five of you, one S and four A. Even though the Northern Base has abundant talents, such a team configuration needs to be seriously considered, right?”

“Do you, Captain, have any objections to the decision on publicizing the levels?” Zhuang Qingyan didn’t forget to ask for Song Ke’s opinion.

“No,” Song Ke shook her head, then thought of something else, “The five of us, but what about you two?”

The only two individuals from District B within V587 had never registered as awakeners. Most had guessed they didn’t want to disclose their identities.

Zhuang Qingyan’s light-colored eyes curved behind the lenses as he confidently said, “Me? I’m a family member of an S-level.”

“Ah?” Song Ke’s expression was baffled.

“Found it.” Lu Xiaoyu lowered his head, quickly getting results.

The new recruitment notice from the Northern Base would inevitably leave data traces in District C. Lu Xiaoyu didn’t spend much effort tracing it back to the terminal used by the person “Ms. Ye.”

He swiftly edited the intrusion’s malware. Just as he was about to send it—

“Wait.” Zhuang Qingyan stopped him in time, quickly skimming through it.

[Hello, we are a very powerful team of awakeners, with one S-level and four A-level members. We're here to join you. Queuing is bothersome, so please let us use the VIP channel immediately. Thank you.]

Though Lu Xiaoyu used "hello," "please," and "thank you," the tone of this letter was completely imperative and forceful. There was a 99% chance it would be treated as a scam and tossed into the trash—no, even scammers were more polite than this.

"The elective course you failed in, "Language Socialization and Arts," was really not an injustice to you," Zhuang Qingyan remarked with a cold snort, clicking to select all and delete, starting the modification again.

...

Northern Base, Department of Awakeners Management.

Leaning on her chin, Ye Zimei faced four large, high-definition floating screens displaying the teams awaiting approval for the recruitment notice. The more she watched, the more fatigued she felt, slowly nodding off, stifling a yawn.

"Ding—"

The idle terminal on the desk suddenly sounded.

"Ding—Ding—Ding, Ding, Ding, Ding, Ding, Ding!!"

With no response for a long time, the terminal vibrated frantically as if it were at a disco.

Ye Zimei was fully awake now, scrambling to silence it. "What's this? Do terminals in the lower districts have such high failure rates?"

She had purchased this terminal from the black market specifically for releasing announcements, leaving it idle after use, without adding any contacts. How could it suddenly make incessant noise?

The terminal persisted in its insistent chiming, and Ye Zimei, not knowing what she pressed, suddenly saw a letter pop up. She clicked on it in confusion:

[Forgive the intrusion. I've heard of the matter of high-level awakeners being lost in your district. I am Song Ke, and I've long admired General Ye. I'm an attack-type metal element awakener. Despite years of diligent training, my humble background has always kept me from entering District B. Fortunately, due to a recent stroke of luck, I've broken through to S-level. Due to certain constraints, I haven't undergone genetic testing. Delighted as I am, recalling my past determination, I hope to serve the General.

Apart from myself, the team includes four other A-level members: two are attack type, one is a support type, and one is a healer. We've all reached the entry and exit center. Due to the tedious approval process and our decision not to disclose our breakthrough to the outside world, coupled with financial constraints, after lingering for a few days, we considered withdrawing.

Before our departure, I'm sending this letter to you, reluctantly, as a last resort. Hoping for a response.]

The letter was followed by high-definition images, all captured from the Throne Race, showcasing exciting moments: Song Ke single-handedly facing Mirror Lake's Water Monster, Xu Xing's ice needle explosion clearing the area, Greenwater City's siege against the zombie bear, and Haimen's coordinated kill of the Zombie King. These were provided to substantiate the authenticity of the materials.

Ye Zimei bounced up from her seat in an instant. "Ah! A wild one! An S-level attack-type awakener! And leading a team!!"

She kept jumping on her toes, joyfully spinning around, realizing that she had exceeded her KPI (Key Performance Indicators) for the year!

"Connect me to Commander He's communication channel, and, I want to go to the entry and exit center right away!"

\*



The team verification process for the recruitment notice was quite complex. While Song Ke was out for a short while, the waiting teams remained almost unchanged; they were the same people as before.

So, when she entered for the second time, she received a uniform and sharp gaze from everyone. This time, she wasn't alone; she was accompanied by other V587 team members.

Whispers started swirling, occasionally mixed with a few assertive comments:

“Why is this country girl here again? And she brought people along?”

“Does she think this is a nursery or a rehabilitation center for the disabled? Don't be too excessive.”

“She doesn't really believe that the Northern Base will accept just anyone, does she?”

Song Ke paid no attention to the murmurs. This time, she didn't even wait for the queue and confidently sat down on the sofa.

The venue was full of high-level awakeners, and her behavior clearly indicated a lack of regard for them, a provocation, a blatant challenge!

A yellow-haired awakener turned his heels, walking arrogantly towards Song Ke. Judging by the outward projection of his mental energy, he was an A-level awakener.

“Hey, let me tell you, don't pollute the air here. Go back where you came from—”

Su Cha stood in front of Song Ke with a cold face. He wore a black T-shirt, stood at 1.9 meters tall, exuding an intimidating aura with broad and sturdy shoulders, well-defined arm muscles, a slender waist reminiscent of a powerful snow leopard. When he looked at people with narrowed eyes, there was a distant yet lethal air about him.

Before the yellow-haired guy could react, Su Cha appeared behind him like a ghost, a chilling dagger suddenly placed at his neck.

“Even among awakeners of the same level, there are significant differences in combat prowess.”

Zhuang Qingyan lazily reclined in his wheelchair, speaking with a refined yet arrogant tone, devoid of emotion, “Who gave you the courage to speak so boldly in front of our captain?”

Almost as soon as his words fell, all members of V587, whether sitting, standing, or leaning against the wall, released their awakened energy at the same time—of course, three of them slightly restrained themselves.

Powerful and majestic awakened energy collided in space, screens flickered, lights swayed, desks and windows vibrated, the terrifying pressure resembling an overwhelming tsunami made people shiver from the depths of their souls.

Some awakeners couldn’t withstand it, their knees trembling, and their feet involuntarily giving way.

“A... all A-levels?!” an incredulous shout rang out.

“Boom—”

The VIP channel’s gate burst open, and Ye Zimei, dressed in the senior uniform of the Department of Awakeners Management, hurriedly walked in. Behind her, the head of the center, sweating profusely, and dozens of staff were busy preparing the red carpet, flowers, and welcome banners.

“Where are they? Where are they?!” Ye Zimei shouted anxiously.

Spotting V587 in the recruitment area from afar, she dashed like the wind across the sky bridge, running over to grab Song Ke’s hand excitedly, holding it so tight as if she would never let go: “You... oh no, no, no, you’re the Song Ke who wrote to me? The S-level attack-type awakener!”

“Goodness, indeed dignified and extraordinary, with the bearing of a master.” Ye Zimei’s cheeks flushed with excitement. “Commander He is busy with official duties, so let me receive you first. She will come later to talk to you personally. Shall we go inside? Let’s talk inside!”

Suddenly recalling something, Ye Zimei abruptly turned around. “And everyone, the full A-level team V587! You’ve waited for a long time, please don’t leave. The Northern Base can provide everything. Please make sure to stay!”

The entire recruitment area fell silent, plunged into a deathly quiet.

Under the stunned and cheering gazes of thousands of high-level awakeners, Song Ke’s group walked towards the VIP channel paved with the red carpet, gradually disappearing from view.

“What... what’s going on... S-level attack-type awakener? That country girl?!”

“Did I hear it wrong? No, no, no, I must be deaf or blind!”

“Commander He personally receiving them, even Ken Oda didn’t get such treatment...”

The awakener who first called Song Ke “country girl” touched his neck nervously, with a lingering fear in his heart and was about to cry without tears: “Excuse me, can I still see the sun tomorrow?”

\*

Ye Zimei led the seven individuals through the VIP passage of Qianzhan City, eventually arriving at a luxurious hotel suite.

“Song Ke, as per regulations, before entering the Northern Base, you all need to undergo genetic testing. It will take about a day for detailed data to come out. Please rest here for now, and if you need anything, you can tell Jia.”

A quiet artificial intelligence stood at the door, nodding politely in response to Ye Zimei's words, impeccable in manners.

Song Ke stole several glances. Though not too obvious in appearance, Jia's gestures and microexpressions hinted at traces of AI, quite different from the elegance displayed by Ilya in his every move.

Worried that Song Ke might misunderstand, Ye Zimei quickly added, "Occasional errors can occur in awakener tests in other regions, but we use the R-type tester. To ensure fairness and accuracy, all awakeners entering the Northern Base must undergo genetic testing again."

Song Ke nodded. Her level tested in Ferrara wasn't incorrect, after all.

"Then, please register your basic information," Ye Zimei lightly tapped her pearl earring, and a holographic lens shimmered into view over her left eye. "I'll send you the details you need to fill in."

Song Ke lowered her head to glance at her quiet terminal and asked blankly, "How do I fill it?"

Ye Zimei glanced at her terminal and apologized, "Sorry, I forgot. You mentioned in the letter that you're from a low-level district. I'll send it in a different mode."

Jia timely handed over a miniature connector. Ye Zimei took it, approached Song Ke's terminal, and simultaneously, the holographic lens in front of her eyes emitted a glow. The District B exclusive terminal activated, facilitating the smooth transmission of data.

During the waiting interval, Ye Zimei casually asked, "Specifically, which low-level district are you from? I'm quite adept at Alliance geography; perhaps I might know."

"District F177," Song Ke replied.

Ye Zimei paused for a moment, her gaze visibly blank for a couple of seconds: What? District F177? Does the Alliance have such a place?

However, she quickly composed herself, pretended nonchalance, and casually touched her earring. The terminal promptly provided information, and details about the District F appeared in her mind. "Oh, District F177. Heard of it, heard of it... Hmm... In the old calendar era, it was a barren fishing village. Due to underdevelopment, it became one of the most rampant areas for illegal activities... Ahem..."

"Black household," Song Ke looked at her innocently.

Ye Zimei chuckled awkwardly and cleverly changed the subject, "So, there are seven of you, right?"

Song Ke corrected her, "No, five." She gestured towards her remaining four A-level teammates.

"Then, these two are...?" Ye Zimei hesitated, looking at Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled faintly and earnestly stated, "I'm V587's technical consultant."

"Ah," Ye Zimei nodded. S-levels are allowed to bring family and assistants, so she quickly accepted this explanation. "And the other one...?"

"He's the driver," Zhuang Qingyan replied warmly.

While Song Ke was filling out the forms, her fingers twitched, swiftly pushing back the mechanical arm Lu Xiaoyu extended.

"..." Ye Zimei stared at Lu Xiaoyu's empty legs for a while. Her good manners prevented her from immediately questioning the term "driver," but she asked in confusion, "Is life in the low-level districts really so diverse and colorful?"

In her impression, transportation in low-level districts remained in the early stages of machinery. Except for starships, most were manually operated. How could a person without legs become a driver and use hands to operate?

As Ye Zimei refreshed her perspective, she regained her composure and said, “Later, Jia will arrange for your genetic testing. After the results come out, Commander He will personally discuss the benefits and treatment with you. Of course, if any of you have urgent requests, feel free to mention them, and I’ll make sure to solve them for you.”

Zhuang Qingyan glanced at her without a change in expression.

Perhaps Ye Zimei hadn’t noticed herself, but the wording she used—“I”—indicated that before confirming the genetic results, He Qihong wouldn’t waste time meeting them. Yet, Ye Zimei easily promised to fulfill their requests. This indicated that on certain matters, she could make decisions herself without consulting higher-ups.

This suggested that Ye Zimei had considerable authority within the awakeners department, and even in the Northern Base.

“There indeed is,” Zhuang Qingyan pondered for a moment before slowly speaking up.

Ye Zimei looked slightly surprised, “Please, go on.”

“In fact, one of the reasons we came to the Northern Base,” Zhuang Qingyan’s lips parted lightly, “was to... seek refuge with acquaintances.”

Even Lu Xiaoyu was surprised this time. Zhuang Qingyan and Yin Xiao were like peacocks displaying their magnificent and competitive behavior, and he was actually seeking him out? Did the sun rise from the west?

Surprisingly, Zhuang Qingyan didn’t mention Yin Xiao.

“There’s a famous couple of cognitive psychologists at the Northern Base: Ming Gang and Lucia. If possible, I’d like to meet them,” Zhuang Qingyan added unexpectedly.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 137: Fire Seed (6)

The first S7 level

Since its establishment, the Northern Base had opened a green channel for talent introduction, attracting elites to settle with various preferential policies. After nearly half a century of accumulation, it had already gathered countless industry giants and leading figures.

Zhuang Qingyan's request was reasonable. Ye Zimei quickly agreed, but out of curiosity, she still asked:

“Since you're acquainted, why didn't you contact them yourself?”

Zhuang Qingyan's expression turned solemn. “Mr. Ming Gang's only son, Ming Zhi, was my close friend. He mentioned several times before his passing that he wanted to introduce me to his parents. Although I had a long-standing friendship with both seniors, due to the nature of my work, it was delayed. Who would have thought that Ming Zhi would depart so suddenly...”

Recalling the sad past, his eyes lowered, exuding an air of melancholy and loneliness. “Things change unpredictably. Mr. Ming Gang and his wife are now white-haired, and how could I dare to disturb them recklessly...”

Ye Zimei hurriedly waved her hands. “Uh, I'm sorry, I didn't know about the situation...”

Zhuang Qingyan earnestly said, “Luckily, our captain understands righteousness deeply and doesn't mind that I'm a useless person. She's willing to bring me to the Northern Base. With this opportunity, I want to fulfill my friend's last wish and visit the two seniors for him.”

“Understanding righteousness,” Song Ke muttered to herself. She was already accustomed to his ability to talk nonsense.

Lin Youyou, however, wasn't quite used to it. She glanced nervously at Lin Xiu, relieved to see the screen was in sleep mode; Lin Xiu, engrossed in a drama, probably hadn't heard their conversation.

“Understood, I'll arrange this matter as soon as possible.”

The lustrous pearl earrings emitted a sparkling light. With the vast population of the Northern Base, Ye Zimei couldn't possibly know everyone, but as the terminal operated timely, knowledge within her reach flooded in. Information related to Mr. Ming Gang and his wife instantly appeared in Ye Zimei's mind: the couple had moved to the Northern Base about thirty years ago, had a son named Ming Zhi, who later joined the confidential project at the Qinglan Research Institute, aligning with what Zhuang Qingyan had said.

As Ye Zimei spoke, Lu Xiaoyu's gaze paused for a second on her earring.

In District B's terminal, compared to six years ago when he was exiled, it seemed... their permissions had further deepened.

After Ye Zimei left, they rested for half a day until Jia Yi came to inform them that the genetic testing had been arranged.

As the most important VIP, Song Ke was naturally placed in the highest priority exclusive channel, while the others had to wait, but in any case, they would all get it done today.

An unmanned floating car departed from the hotel, steadily flying towards the pure white building at the heart of Qianzhan City—the Awakener Detection Station.

It was Song Ke's first time in such a luxurious extended version of a floating car.

“Wow~” She couldn't help but emit a small exclamation of awe at the luxurious interior.

She explored it, shifting from one position to another, sometimes reclining fully and then suddenly sitting upright, inadvertently meeting the gaze of the camera on the console, resulting in a silent standoff.

Song Ke: “...”



She gradually straightened up and, for the latter part of the journey, remained motionless as if she had been struck mute by poison.

Because the information she had provided described her as an S-level, inconsistent with her Awakener certification level, and given the high importance placed by the base's awakener department, as soon as Song Ke landed, over a dozen staff in white robes were waiting at the entrance to receive her.

A woman in her thirties with short hair stood out among them. She wore understated silver-framed glasses and spoke with a rapid and crisp pace.

“Hello, Song Ke, I'm your awakener analyst, Grace.”

Song Ke's ears perked up, hearing someone nearby softly calling her “Director” and attempting to transmit data to her via terminal. Grace's lenses glowed, faintly transmitting data that swiftly passed by.

Grace nodded towards Song Ke. “I'll be in charge of your genetic testing. Please follow me.”

The moment Song Ke entered the testing station, she was captivated by the towering, centrally placed, and precise equipment. It was massive, nearly integrated with the entire building, all white in color, with numerous fine silver wires connected at its ports.

“The R-Type Awakener Analyzer is currently the most advanced instrument in the Alliance. It can simultaneously accommodate data analysis for 500 people, maintaining an accuracy rate of over 97%,” Grace explained, noticing Song Ke's gaze.

Song Ke glanced around the empty testing station, expressing confusion with her eyes: Where were the 500 people?

“To ensure your results are 100% accurate, we've cleared the area. All testing for awakeners has been suspended,” Grace said solemnly.

“Ah...” Song Ke's initial reaction: There were probably more people waiting in line at the Immigration Center.

Following Grace, Song Ke continued forward. The design of the entire testing station was both sleek and futuristic. White lights mimicking daylight were omnipresent, illuminating the space vividly.

As Song Ke walked, she gradually placed a hand over her chest, feeling slightly uncomfortable—a combination of intense light and confined space seemed to unsettle her.

Grace: “Let’s start with the routine checks—blood draw, collection of bodily fluids, and some biological information to conduct chromosome and DNA analysis.”

After entering the room, Song Ke saw numerous unnamed instruments and mechanical arms emitting a cold light.

Similar examinations had been conducted in Ferrara, and Grace patiently guided her step by step. Before long, she smoothly completed the process.

Then, Grace led her to a laboratory-like room with a circular machine and a single bed positioned at a gap in the equipment.

“This is the Radiomagnetic Resonance Spectrometer linked to the R-Type. It can comprehensively analyze your awakened abilities,” explained Grace.

Song Ke obediently lay on the single bed. A virtual light screen appeared before her eyes. It was many times more advanced than the black box Wu Juemin had used at the Fools Wharf, inundating her vision with various lines and data, leaving her momentarily dazzled.

Grace and her assistant entered the observation room. Once the instrument started, an intricate buzzing noise echoed around Song Ke. She distinctly felt a slight fluctuation in her awakened energy, as if stagnant water was slowly starting to flow.

On the panel in the observation room, Song Ke’s various data skyrocketed, instantly surpassing the threshold of S-level.

Her awakened energy, explosiveness, reaction speed, and muscle core strength increased at a nearly terrifying rate.

An assistant exclaimed excitedly, "It's rising so rapidly, it might even reach S5."

"It's my first time seeing a living S-level," another person who had recently arrived at the testing station marveled at Song Ke's data.

"You're lucky. You get to see two at once. Later, Mr. Ken Oda will be here."

"Ken Oda's results won't be surprising. He's a well-known S2, and how can you compare engineering-type and strong attack-type..."

Everyone was excited; it had been a long time since a fresh S-level had joined the Northern Base.

Suddenly, Grace made a puzzled sound, furrowing her brows slightly.

"Director, what's wrong?" the assistant beside her asked nervously.

"There are impurities showing in the spectrum," Grace said in a grave tone. It was an unprecedented situation.

"Could it be a machine malfunction?" Even the speaker didn't believe it; the R-Type Analyzer had self-repair programs. How could it possibly malfunction?

Grace's expression turned serious as she focused on the imaging panel. The impurities increased, spontaneously gathering around Song Ke, gradually forming a large shadow enveloping her entire being.

"This is... radiation?"

Grace, usually composed, displayed an expression of extreme astonishment.

Twenty minutes passed, and Song Ke lay inside the machine, yawning out of boredom. She mused hazily, wondering why this whatever-it-was instrument took so long. It didn't seem that advanced either.

Another ten minutes went by before the annoying noise gradually ceased. The single bed rolled out slowly, and Grace stood in front of Song Ke, smiling. "Although the specific report isn't ready yet, I'd like to congratulate you in advance. You are indeed an S-level awakener."

Grace paused for a moment. "Moreover, you're the most powerful awakener I've ever seen."

"Oh, it's nothing," Song Ke modestly waved her hand.

"After the analysis report is ready, Commander He will personally meet with you," Grace added finally.

...

"Commander, the genetic test results for Song Ke are in," Ye Zimei's voice sounded from the private channel.

Commander He Qihong gestured, signaling the ongoing conversation to stop. Ministers quietly exited the room, and she stood up, quickly entering a concealed compartment. As she moved, the terminal gradually lit up, initiating a holographic conference call, with several high-ranking officials from the awakener department eagerly waiting.

Song Ke's awakener report was transmitted, a whopping 34 pages. He Qihong skipped through the complex charts and professional data analysis, swiftly reviewing the final results.

Equally anxious high-ranking officials flipped through to the end. One of them exclaimed in shock, "The level is... S7! If I'm not mistaken, she's the first S7 officially announced by the Alliance since the disclosure of awakeners? And she's a strong attack type!"

Even among awakeners of the same level, there were finer distinctions, only detectable by the R-Type Analyzer. Each awakener level was divided into grades 1 through 9. Currently, the highest publicly disclosed S-level registered by the Central Court was only S6. Yet, out of nowhere, Song Ke, this individual, emerged as an S7 awakener!

The expressions of the high-ranking officials from the awakener department were incredulous. How could such a monster exist in a region they habitually overlooked?

He Qihong's usually serious face showed a rare smile. It was she who proposed recruiting from the lower-tier districts, and Song Ke's arrival, a self-made S7 strong attack-type awakener without any background, was undoubtedly a godsend for the Northern Base at this moment.

Amidst the murmurs, Grace's calm voice interrupted, "Sorry to interrupt, but there's something I must bring to your attention. Please take a look at page 17 of the report."

"According to the Radiomagnetic Spectrum Analysis, the radiation level within Song Ke's body... is twenty times that of a normal awakener."

The holographic image was vivid, Grace saw it clearly, and everyone present gasped in disbelief. The radiation level of an average zombie is only about twice that of an awakener. Twenty times? How... how did she survive? And she hasn't turned into a zombie yet?

This person is the future gold mine of the base; there absolutely cannot be any accidents!

He Qihong pulled out that page from the Radiomagnetic Resonance Imaging report. Song Ke's torso and limbs appeared dirty, as if covered by the shadows of dark clouds.

"Excessive radiation, does it affect her awakened abilities?"

"This is the strangest part; it has no effect. She is no different from other S-levels," sighed Grace.

"What if it's a dual-type awakener?"

He Qihong, as expected, instantly considered another possibility.

However, Grace negated her speculation. “The R-Type didn’t find a second type of awakened ability in Song Ke. Dual-type awakeners are too rare, especially S-levels. Fortunately, we have Punk’s data on hand. By comparison, Punk’s radiation level matches that of an S-level single-type awakener. His distribution also differs significantly from Song Ke’s. So, that’s not the reason.”

As the Alliance’s first publicly known S-level dual-type awakener, Punk’s awakener report was undoubtedly classified information. He Qihong had utilized a significant number of resources and connections, ultimately obtaining it from the Central Court’s Park Jae Woo.

“Besides the radiation level... Song Ke has another serious issue,” Grace became increasingly troubled.

“Pages 22 to 27 are her genetic report.”

“Song Ke has chromosomal abnormalities and parts of the DNA sequence unknown. It’s currently uncertain if it’s hereditary or congenital. I’m not an expert in this field, but I’m concerned... she may have an invisible genetic defect.”

Grace’s concern was not unfounded; genetic defects could lead to various illnesses. If a powerful awakener lost their life due to a genetic disease, it would be a heartbreaking loss.

“Could she have participated in the genetic selection program?” A high-ranking individual speculated uncertainly. “In the early stages, many suffered from genetic diseases due to immature technology.”

He Qihong flipped back to the first page of the report. Song Ke’s original residence was in F177 District.

People from the District F wouldn’t have had any chance to participate in the genetic selection program.

She pondered for a moment and whispered, "Send this report to Dr. Ning. Dr. Ning is an expert in genetic engineering and genetics. He should be able to analyze the unusual reasons behind Song Ke's condition."

"Should we also have Song Ke go there for detailed examinations in collaboration with Dr. Ning?" Grace asked.

"No," He Qihong intervened, "don't inform her until we clarify the situation. Also, modify this report."

\*

At the same time, V587 was popping champagne to celebrate.

Lin Youyou and the others had also finished their genetic tests. Apart from Xu Xing, who had just broken through and landed at A1 level, the rest were exceeding expectations. Lin Youyou was A4, Fang Zhixu was A5, and surprisingly, Su Cha scored an A8!

This usually taciturn person couldn't muster more than three sentences, but this time, he genuinely surprised everyone.

Su Cha, feeling awkwardly restrained, sat on the sofa. Song Ke excitedly patted his shoulder, while Lin Youyou affectionately ruffled his crew cut.

Her soft touch brushed against his short stubble, causing a slight itch that darted from his back to his head. Su Cha stiffened, gripping the canned beer tightly, producing a flattened "crack" as he squeezed it.

"Excuse me," Jia Yi politely knocked on the door. "Miss Song, your awakener report is ready."

Everyone gathered around eagerly as Jia Yi calmly passed the report back to Song Ke using the connector.

"Quick, quick! What's the level? S what?"

“Wow! S7! Sister, you’re amazing!”

“Haha, I guessed it right; Old Fang owes me money!” Lin Youyou boasted proudly.

Fang Zhixu remained silent. Due to his blind trust in Song Ke, he obstinately bet on S9.

“S7 team captain, can you buy me some materials?” Lu Xiaoyu joined in.

“Buy, buy,” Song Ke chuckled foolishly.

Zhuang Qingyan extracted the terminal from Song Ke’s playful hands and meticulously went through the report page by page.

He took his time, reading meticulously. The professional data that He Qihong couldn’t understand posed no challenge for him.

The report consisted of 24 pages, and Zhuang Qingyan took his time, reading it thoroughly.

Then, he removed his glasses, pinched his prominent brow, and a hint of scornful smirk curved his thin lips.

Truly the arrogance of the District B, the awakener department personnel seemed to disregard them too much. Even for an S1-level awakener, a normal analysis report would span over 25 pages, let alone Song Ke, a rare S7.

Not willing to revise at all, they just deleted and glossed over it. It might have fooled the laymen, but trying to deceive him was merely wishful thinking.

Because that R-Type Analyzer capable of genetic analysis came from the Qinglan Research Institute.



Its original purpose was to be used for genetic fusion in the Fire Seed project.

No one understood its functions better than Zhuang Qingyan did.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 138: Fire Seed (7)

Your team failed to enter the rankings

The next morning, V587 boarded the starship arranged by the awakeners department and departed from Qianzhan City, officially heading towards the Northern Base.

The silver-white flight terminal streaked across the sky like a meteor, encountering an automatic clearance through the transparent protective shield.

Song Ke leaned against the porthole, revealing a smile of satisfaction akin to that of an old father. This time, they hadn't relied on deception or manipulation but had entered District B through their own diligent efforts.

As soon as they reached the platform, before the starship even settled, Song Ke jumped down.

A refreshing breeze brushed their faces, the air was invigorating, and the weather mimicry system gradually dispelled the scorching heat of midsummer.

Song Ke and Xu Xing, who entered the city for the first time, excitedly ran to the railing to look ahead.

Unlike the desolate plains that extended for thousands of kilometers on the outskirts, the Northern Base was an incredibly textured city: aerial tunnels, levitating subways, stylish racing cars...

Technological creations born over the past thirty glorious years were ubiquitous here. Clusters of towering buildings, arranged in a layered spatial hierarchy, provided a tremendous visual impact. Among them, one level even featured an infinity pool the size of a football field, where several awakeners

frolicked. A few hydrokinetics mischievously manipulated the water, causing fountain-like droplets to cascade down at a wave of their hand.

Song Ke's eyes sparkled. "Wow~"

Xu Xing imitated, "Wow~~"

Overhead, an armed fleet flew by. Several men and women, clearly awakeners, stood firmly on the deck of the ship. One of them, bare-chested with scars covering his torso, held the freshly severed, still bleeding head of a giant beast, laughing and waving to the crowd on the platform before entering two cylindrical connected towers.

In the distant sky, a holographic projection appeared, numbers continuously flickering, gradually forming a massive leaderboard:

[Blue Flame eliminated Level 4 Mutant Beast: Black Forktooth Fish, real-time score update.]

Song Ke witnessed firsthand as Blue Flame's ranking rose by two positions, now ranked 10th in the Northern Base and 122nd in the New Asia Alliance.

This was... the northern base? Unreasonably exhilarating.

Ye Zimei and her team awaited them on the platform. Gazing at their shining KPI, she laughed heartily, her teeth showing and eyes disappearing. "Your new terminals and the procedures for transferring awakener citizenship will be handled by a dedicated officer later."

"Now, follow me to meet Commander He; she's waiting for you at the awakener department."

The Northern Base's awakener department was precisely the cylindrical high-rise buildings Song Ke had just seen upon disembarking.

Ye Zimei's red-bottomed high heels clicked crisply on the polished floor, the sound echoing.

Song Ke and the other six followed her, observing numerous images of honor on the historical wall. These included global supernatural summits, roundtable forums, genetic elite exchanges, as well as military exercises with the Cario Empire and the Luce Federation.

With the passage of time, the presence of awakeners became increasingly evident. Song Ke keenly realized that this was the disparity between different districts within the Alliance: a D-level awakening might cause immense joy in lower-tier districts, but in the Northern Base or other District Bs, especially among post-apocalyptic awakeners, supernatural abilities were commonplace long ago.

Song Ke also noticed that the people moving around were high-level awakeners, enveloped in a faint aura of awakened energy, yet they remained restrained and subdued.

Along the way, many secretly observed them, seemingly trying to figure out who among them was the rumored S7. The news about the base recruiting an S-level attack-type awakener had been widely spread, and Ye Zimei personally bringing in V587 had revealed their identities.

Amidst the attention of the crowd, the group took an automated scenic elevator up the building.

Song Ke, looking at the building without any visible security measures, had a sudden curiosity and asked, "What if there were awakener terrorists here?"

Ye Zimei smiled slowly, "Believe me, the stupidest way to die in this world is to recklessly use awakened abilities in the building beneath our feet."

She tapped her pearl earring, and a video began playing on the elevator's announcement screen. The top caption read—"Security Manual 014."

"This is footage from eight months ago. At the outbreak of the apocalypse, an A7-level awakener from a lower-level district, along with twenty-three thugs, forcibly entered the awakener department, attempting to kidnap Commander He and take control of the entire Northern Base."

In the footage, the leader, a corruption-type awakener, appeared arrogant, chin held high, spouting commands: “Everyone get down on your knees! Don’t move!” As he advanced, the floor, tables, pillars—everything he passed turned into pus.

Just as he was about to cross the midpoint, the ceiling of the awakener department vanished suddenly, revealing a deep spatial crack. Then hundreds of densely packed energy guns emerged, “Bang! Bang! Bang!” Blinding beams of light instantly turned the thugs into sieves. After the intense light dissipated, only the A7-level survived, but he didn’t have long to rejoice—he was blasted into a pulp.

Literally a pulp—bloody, sticky fragments rained down onto the smooth floor.

The scene was as if silenced by a spell, utterly still and soundless.

The surveillance footage shifted to the transparent corridor on the higher level, where two young individuals dressed in awakener department uniforms appeared. They had similar appearances, tall and slender, both with blonde hair and green eyes, exuding an effortless air of indifference.

The slender hands of the female rested on the railing, observing with interest the remains of the A7-level who had chosen his path to death. The male leaned against the wall, arms crossed, seemingly dozing off, entirely apathetic without even lifting an eyelid.

Ye Zimei cleared her throat lightly, her tone revealing profound sympathy, “Out of the total of 14 malignant incidents in the 47 years since the establishment of the base, this was the most unfortunate criminal. He happened to encounter the Ling siblings’ return for duty reports, the chance for surrender was not even given.”

Song Ke, wearing a surprised expression, asked, “The Ling siblings?”

“Ah, Ling Yan and Ling Yue, a pair of twins, one representing the dragon and the other the phoenix. They are the only two S6-level attack-type awakeners in the Northern Base,” Ye Zimei lowered her voice, slyly blinked, “They are also assimilated awakeners from the Cario Empire.”

Song Ke glanced again at the video. After the Ling siblings resolved the crisis, they left without much enthusiasm.

S-level awakers possess absolute dominance over all ranks below S-level, especially two S6-levels. As Ye Zimei had mentioned, these criminals had indeed stumbled into a really unfortunate situation.

Guided by Ye Zimei, V587 had no hindrances and quickly reached the penultimate floor.

In a spacious conference room, they finally encountered the holographic image of the top official of the awakers department, He Qihong.

The seven individuals exchanged glances without a word. The “personal” reception mentioned by He Qihong turned out to be in this form. However, it was understandable. Facing an attack-type S7 level and an entire A-level awaker team, even if V587 had voluntarily sought refuge, He Qihong didn’t let joy cloud her judgment and maintained the necessary vigilance.

He Qihong wore a dark blue suit, had a bridge nose supporting black-framed glasses, and a stern and dignified countenance, with two deep folds on the sides of her nose.

Song Ke inexplicably recalled the vice principal she had encountered during her brief student days.

“Song Ke, and the rest of V587 team, welcome to the Northern Base,” He Qihong got straight to the point. “Two weeks ago, I watched the finals of the Throne Race Competition in District C72 live. You are an exceptional team, each of you shines with unique qualities, cohesive and indispensable.”

Her appreciative gaze swept over everyone, accurately naming Su Cha, Xu Xing, Fang Zhixu, even Lin Youyou by her real name, and then... very naturally omitted the remaining two.

The two men in wheelchairs glanced at each other in silence. One of them smirked slightly, while the other yawned out of boredom.

Since their arrival at the Northern Base, Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu had concealed their awakened energies flawlessly, seemingly no different from ordinary people. With Song Ke as their cover, their status was openly acknowledged as “accompanying personnel.”

He Qihong had indeed followed the competition, but she watched the official broadcasts, not continuously monitoring V587 for 24 hours. During the Throne Race, Lu Xiaoyu consistently used his mechanical arm, never exposing his hacker abilities to the camera. Zhuang Qingyan was even more discreet; he never followed with the drone, hardly appeared in front of the camera—if he ever flashed by, Lu Xiaoyu swiftly edited him out.

In the Northern Base, strength was the only valid pass. No one intentionally concealed their identity as an awakener. Therefore, He Qihong naturally assumed they were just ordinary people—or rather, disabled individuals—coincidentally teamed up with V587. She didn't bother to spare them a second glance.

He Qihong didn't say anything, not even a disdainful look. Yet, Zhuang Qingyan could read between the lines, sensing her disdain toward ordinary individuals.

“I didn't expect you to break through to S-level in such a short time after the competition and choose to come to the Northern Base,” said He Qihong with an expressionless face.

“...” Song Ke awkwardly scratched her head.

It was nearly impossible to leap from A-level to S7-level in such a short time, but He Qihong didn't expose her. Instead, she went along with the contents of the letter Zhuang Qingyan had fabricated, which indicated that she didn't mind Song Ke hiding her level in Ferrara.

“On behalf of the Northern Base, according to the recruitment notice, I offer you ownership of five sets of apartments in the central area, full access to District B for awakeners, along with monthly allowances and corresponding living benefits.”

He Qihong was generous, changing the original “free apartment stay” to “gifting five sets of apartments,” providing both housing and financial support, making V587 feel warmly welcomed. She then introduced the basics of the awakener department and the current vacant job positions, captivating her audience.

Finally, He Qihong turned to Song Ke. “You can make any requests, and after the probationary period, I will prioritize their implementation.”

“Probationary period?” Song Ke seized upon the keyword.

“The survival rule of the Northern Base is absolute strength,” He Qihong nodded slightly. “We operate on a last-place elimination system, updating the ranking points monthly. The bottom 1% of the teams, unfortunately, cannot stay here.”

“Of course, I believe you will definitely pass the probationary period. I look forward to seeing you again in a month,” He Qihong smiled. “By then, perhaps we can sit down for a cup of tea face to face.”

The words carried a hint of deeper meaning, suggesting that V587 might meet her in person next time.

Even in the presence of an S-level awakener, He Qihong didn’t exhibit an eager attitude to retain them. She perfectly embodied the calm and rational demeanor expected of someone in a high position. Yet, she showed considerable attention to Song Ke, conversing calmly and clearly invested in her thoughts.

Song Ke felt that He Qihong seemed like a contradictory person.

“Additionally, this is specially prepared for you,” He Qihong turned and quietly instructed a few words.

At that moment, there was a firm knock on the conference room door. Two staff members wheeled in a mobile desk, adorned with various colorful terminals, covering nearly all popular styles in District B.

“We were planning to purchase these collectively,” Song Ke politely declined, thinking there might be discounts for a group purchase.

He Qihong simply stated, “All S-level terminals are directly provided by the awakener department.”

Song Ke was taken aback, staring at her intently.

He Qihong didn't mince words. "S-level awakeners carry inherent risks. We need to ensure constant contact with you 24/7. These terminals are pre-equipped with locator devices and exclusive communication channels. Once bound to you, you can use them."

Song Ke shifted her gaze away, took a couple of steps forward, and silently selected one.

...

As they left the awakener department, Lin Youyou grumbled discontentedly, "What's this? Surveillance?"

Fang Zhixu rubbed his chin, "I feel like this Commander He's actions and words don't quite align. Something's off."

"She's an outright pragmatist," Zhuang Qingyan's calm voice echoed.

Others turned to look at him.

Zhuang Qingyan continued, "She talks about nothing but the interests of the Northern Base. In her eyes, awakeners are just the best tools to maintain those interests. When she needs you, she'll cater to you and support you. But in case of conflict or contradiction with her pursued interests, she won't hesitate to discard you."

"However, at least for the Northern Base, she's a dutiful superior," Zhuang Qingyan sarcastically chuckled.

"That terminal, do I still need it?" Song Ke had picked a pin-shaped one, resembling a small bee.

Zhuang Qingyan shrugged it off, "Sure, why not? We haven't done anything wrong. What's there to fear? When the time comes for mischief, we'll find a way to outsmart it."

Song Ke: "... Why does doing wrong feel justified like this?"



The first activation of the terminal required binding. Song Ke lightly released her awakened energy, feeling a momentary looseness in her consciousness. Suddenly, she sensed a subtle feeling of being observed. She paused for a moment. If it weren't for her experience with the Crime Record in the Death Prison, she might have ignored this sensation.

But the Crime Record was something Lu Xiaoyu had concocted out of boredom in prison. Why would the terminals in District B behave similarly?

Song Ke shared her discovery with her teammates.

Lu Xiaoyu's pale fingers took the terminal, examining it with a gaze that hinted at a mechanical indifference in his icy eyes.

"A mild thought connection... indeed, 'her' doing," Lu Xiaoyu spoke cryptically. But he didn't plan to explain further. Swiftly, he input a string of anti-snooping codes. "Making too many moves might lead to detection. Just wear it for now and try to minimize using the 'permissions.'"

"Permissions?" Song Ke was puzzled.

"Yeah, accessing information not in your mind, actively gaining knowledge you've never had, that's 'permissions.' While it can be convenient, every use is essentially a request to 'her', deepening the thought connection gradually."

"Oh," Song Ke nodded obediently. "I won't use it then. I'll just ask Zhuang Qingyan."

What information, what knowledge? The rigid terminal can't compare to Zhuang Qingyan's expertise. This "Encyclopedia of the Alliance" not only shares everything with her but also adjusts the language to ensure she comprehends it.

Zhuang Qingyan suddenly chuckled, a smile so genuine it could melt ice, the curvature of his lips revealing a visible sense of joy.

“Wait a moment, when you said ‘her’...” Lin Youyou asked cautiously.

“Lu’s supercomputer,” Lu Xiaoyu’s tone remained flat, devoid of ripples. “It infiltrated the terminal network in District B. She sees everyone.”

Everyone felt a shiver down their spine.

Before, they merely found the terminals in District B impressive and cool. But as Lu Xiaoyu spoke, the constant feeling of being watched became unsettling.

However, the provided terminal had its advantages, like direct access to the commission system.

The seven gathered around. Song Ke opened the interface eagerly. Even after deducting the 500,000 points for the entry threshold, they should have had a comfortable 200,000 points left. The landlord’s family was still very wealthy, and it should be more than enough to get on the ranking list.

Then came the cruel reality.

After the real-time update, the projection displayed: [V587 current points: 220,050, Monthly Ranking: 99.99%.]

“Unfortunately, your team failed to enter the rankings. Please continue to work hard.”

Song Ke stubbornly scrolled upwards. The top scorer had 448,888 points.

Twice as many as V587.

Song Ke’s expression fell.

Goodness, was the competition among the awakeners in the Northern Base this intense?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 139.1: Fire Seed (8)

Niu Hulu Qingyan

Perhaps at the explicit request of Ye Zimei, the commissioner arranged by the awakeners department was exceptionally considerate, exuding enthusiastic attitudes. Not only did they swiftly handle the household registration transfer procedures, but they also drove them to buy terminals. Aside from the two “ordinary people,” all four A-level members of V587 switched to District B terminals. After finishing, they proceeded to update the awakeners information and select a property. From the locals’ perspective, they provided suggestions:

“Avoid the ground floor; poor lighting. Also, steer clear of the top floor; too many flying terminals causing a lot of noise.”

“I like this one!” Xu Xing took a liking to a set in the blue community. The holographic was extravagant, boasting a 360-degree immersive jellyfish-shaped lamp, algae floorboards that change shape with mood, an immersive orca-themed bedroom with sound effects as the highlight, all full of gimmicks.

The commissioner shook their head repeatedly, “Many awakeners in this community have become emo due to living in a deep-sea environment for long periods. It would be better for you to choose a garden-style small villa with better sunlight exposure, where you can bask in the sun regularly, and even connect between two households.”

Though no one explicitly stated it, the attentive commissioner noticed the harmonious interaction within the V587 team; undoubtedly, they preferred to live closer to each other.

Amidst the commotion, Song Ke found herself idle and took out her terminal for a glance.

Then... she watched helplessly as V587’s ranking dropped once again.

Today was supposed to be a designated rest day for the Alliance, but were these people not resting or sleeping at all?

No, she had to get involved too!

The concerned team captain promptly opened the commission system. Xu Xing ran over for her to choose a house, and she waved her hand in a perfunctory manner, saying, "You choose what you want to buy."

The list scrolled rapidly, new tasks appearing only to be overlapped right away. Coupled with various restrictions like rank, distance, and application conditions, Song Ke became increasingly engrossed, and completely absorbed in selecting tasks.

“ ‘C-level Commission: Clear the rampant mutated Turban snails along the Silver Bay (District C44). Point Reward: 80000.’”

This one seemed promising. Song Ke eagerly clicked on it, only to be greeted with a prompt stating, "This task has expired."

Before she could lament, a batch of new tasks appeared on the interface:

“ ‘B-level Commission (Urgent): Medium-sized zombie tide has emerged in the coffee tree plantation area of Mandelin (District C43). Please clear within 4 hours.’”

Below, in small red scrolling text, the tone was urgent: "All coffee enthusiasts, please save Mandelin! This area is the primary producer of Mandeheling coffee. Once invaded by the zombie tide beyond the deadline, it will affect the Alliance's coffee production!"

Song Ke took a small breath, realizing the seriousness of the situation. Even though she didn't drink coffee, she had a sense of justice!

She swiftly tapped on the virtual panel with her fingers. Perhaps due to an abundance of coffee enthusiasts, Song Ke's fingertips tingled, and the prompt that popped up stated, "The maximum number of accepted tasks has been reached."

Song Ke: "?" How could it be at its limit? She hadn't even started her duty as a coffee defender!

Feeling disheartened, Song Ke swiped the panel twice more. Surprisingly, she managed to fish out a task worth 200,000 points, and guess what? No one had taken it!

With quick reflexes, she crazily tapped away regardless. But the result...

"Apologies, your team doesn't meet the acceptance criteria."

What was this now? What didn't meet the criteria? Song Ke scrutinized it: "B-level Commission: Reconstruction of an open-air hot spring bath in Tokushima (District B15), requires abilities in engineering. The higher the level, the better!"

Song Ke: "...". She still chose not to give up today!

Song Ke immersed herself in her work again, frantically trying to snatch up commissions. Hey! She couldn't snatch even one!

She was so engrossed in snatching that she didn't even notice her teammates had moved ahead. Zhuang Qingyan, stopping in his wheelchair, didn't catch her attention either.

"Thud!" Her toe hit the wheelchair, causing her to lean and lose balance, falling forward like a swallow returning to its nest, straight into someone's arms.

Zhuang Qingyan leaned his wheelchair back slightly, opening his arms to catch her firmly.

As Song Ke lifted her head, she found herself face-to-face with his perfectly curved jawline.

Today, he was dressed in a light-colored suit, the open collar revealing a clear view of his collarbones. A straight and slender nose, a faint smile tugging at his thin lips, and with those gold-rimmed glasses held by two delicate chains, he looked like the epitome of a handsome and sophisticated superstar from a street billboard.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his head, his sensual Adam's apple moving slightly with his breath. He pinched Song Ke's cheeks, gently shaking them left and right, causing her head to follow suit.

"Shqueezing cheeks makes drool..." Song Ke mumbled incoherently.

Zhuang Qingyan lightly chuckled, a deep resonance coming from his throat. As Song Ke rested her fingertips against him, she felt a slight numbness in her heart.

Her ears felt like they were on fire. She extended two fingers, pressing a few inches below Zhuang Qingyan's chest and then pushing against his thigh, swiftly standing up.

Zhuang Qingyan's expression subtly changed: "Song Ke, if you keep poking around like this, it might cause trouble."

Song Ke defended herself: "I didn't... poke around." It was just using a support to stand up, so stingy.

She glanced at Zhuang Qingyan's legs in discontent. What was so precious about those thighs? Couldn't even touch them.

Zhuang Qingyan somewhat uneasily placed his right hand on his knee, changing the subject, "What are you so focused on?"

As soon as he asked, Song Ke felt indignant and started complaining, "I can't grab any commissions!"

Zhuang Qingyan reached out, "Let me have a look."

They were used to sharing a terminal, so Song Ke handed it over without a second thought. But coincidentally, the commissioner in front turned around and saw this scene, eyes almost popping out.

In District B, terminals were extremely private, as significant as undergarments. They were devices projecting real-time thoughts from your mind. How could one casually show it to others?

The stunned commissioner's gaze landed on Zhuang Qingyan's face that was blessed by heaven. Gradually, disbelief turned into enlightenment. This pretty boy... with such a gentle, breath-taking smile, indeed had the qualities to live off someone else. No wonder he's in a wheelchair and still charms an S-level...

The commissioner sighed, turned away, and accidentally caught sight of Lu Xiaoyu. Their mind went blank. What, one's not enough, there are two? Even the chair is saved, sit down and fight the landlord directly? This new S-level seemed to have... some unique quirks?

Unaware of the commissioner's complex thought process, Song Ke was solely concerned about V587's ranking, "Can you snatch them?"

Zhuang Qingyan swiped his fingertips a few times, "At this speed, it seems like they're using an automatic commission snatching plug-in."

"Commission snatching... plug-ins?" Song Ke's voice trembled. Was it necessary to go this far? No wonder her fingers were numb from not grabbing a single task.

"What plug-in? What are you all talking about?" Lin Youyou curiously leaned in.

Song Ke explained their situation, and everyone seemed eager to join in.

"This intense? Then we have to participate too!"

"This is the very first commission after coming to the Northern Base. It has to be completed splendidly to make a strong start."

Su Cha was more direct: "It's still early, let's handle the commission and then go back."

Zhuang Qingyan tossed the terminal to Lu Xiaoyu, hinting at something as he said, "The captain is about to take on a commission, can you handle it?"

'My god!' The commissioner, whose worldview shattered, bit their finger, their expression becoming even more indescribable: 'Sharing a terminal between three people? Isn't that too intense?'

This was just a piece of cake for Lu Xiaoyu. He had never lost in snatching classes at Liuboni. With swift finger movements, Lu Xiaoyu entered a long string of code. The freshly made 'Commission Random Interception Cheat' operated in the vast sea of data. A few minutes later, the terminal made a 'ding' sound, displaying a prompt: [Mission accepted successfully. Please complete it within the specified time limit.]

"What did you snatch?" Others crowded around, preparing to welcome V587's first commission at the Northern Base.

[B-level Commission (exclusive to District B10): Fishing Master. The Base's Marine Biology Research Institute is preparing to add new display specimens. Please go to Silver Bay (District C44) within 24 hours to capture the mutated species listed. The better the quality and the more intact, the higher the points earned.] [Reminder: This task is not suitable for all those with ichthyophobia.]

Song Ke was puzzled. Huh? What ichthyophobia...?

But time was running out, there was no time to explain. She quickly called out to her teammates: "Let's go, do the commission."

Fortunately, all the necessary procedures had been completed. The expressionless commissioner stared at V587's hurriedly departing figure and silently opened the gossip channel: Crooked Anecdotes of Awakeners

[I want to anonymously expose an S-level Sea King who keeps two pretty boys around and frequently shares a terminal when there's nothing else to do...]



Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 139.2: Fire Seed (8)

Niu Hulu Qingyan

Silver Bay was only a two-hour journey from the Northern Base by a starship. However, when V587 arrived, there was no place for them to step foot on the beach. Like Qianzhan City, this place was filled with awakeners, resembling a chaotic marketplace.”

“Make way, make way, we were here first... Get out of the way, don't you understand human language?”

“Who the hell do you think you are, motherf\*cker? If I've grabbed it, it's mine. If you have the guts, try to snatch it back, hahaha!”

“You @#%&\*! Get lost, you @#&.....”

A wind-elemental awakener took advantage and stirred the sea, causing the water to surge and churn, forming huge waves crashing ahead. The mutated creatures hiding below were overturned, and Song Ke witnessed a scene she never wanted to recall in her lifetime.

Uncountable monstrous ribbonfish, three-headed deformed eels, mudskippers as thick as arms, and thousands of ferocious octopuses and squids rained down like hail, their pungent stench and sea smell assaulting everyone's senses.

The awakener rushed in, frenetically grabbing, their dazzling array of skills almost blinding the onlookers nearby.

But Song Ke and her group couldn't even make a move, not even scraps were left for them.

Well, maybe there were scraps to pick up.

“Pap—” a thorned eel fell by Song Ke’s feet, its jagged teeth clamping onto her shoe, pierced through expressionlessly by her.

“Pap—” a ribbonfish slammed onto Lin Youyou’s shoulder, its wriggles delivering a hefty slap.

“Damn it.” Lin Youyou was dumbfounded, experiencing the first time in her life getting slapped by a fish.

Su Cha swiftly grabbed the ribbonfish with one hand, dispersing a poisonous mist and promptly snapped its neck.

“Are... are you okay?”

Lin Youyou turned her head dazedly, then gritted her teeth: “If I don’t exterminate the ribbonfish clan today, my last name isn’t Lin.”

However, bold words came easy, but tackling the monsters was not as simple.

Song Ke fired an arrow, pinning down a Level 3 mutated razor clam. Before she could rejoice, a sand-elemental awakener swiftly enveloped it in quicksand, cleanly snatching away her trophy.

Song Ke exclaimed in shock and anger, “Thief!”

Looking around, it was a sea of either human or monster heads, making it impossible to spot any thief.

Others weren’t faring much better. Most were dignified individuals not willing to lose face, dividing their focus between fishing and protecting their own catches. But other awakeners had no qualms, shamelessly seizing anything, theirs or not, stuffing it all into their own pockets.

Su Cha and Lin Youyou, busy cutting ribbonfish, had their loot stolen by someone else.

Xu Xing froze an area with his awakened ability, but before he could rush over, a spatial awakener swooped in and vacuumed his catch, leaving him infuriated.

As for Lu Xiaoyu... he was the only one putting up a fight, utilizing all six arms to specifically snatch other people's monsters.

And then there was Zhuang Qingyan, struck by his germaphobia, who had long distanced himself, wearing an expression of complete disdain.

Song Ke locked eyes with him, Zhuang Qingyan leaning weakly against his wheelchair, his gaze filled with accusation: You have the heart to make me catch fish?

Alright, alright, Song Ke couldn't bear to let him do the work.

After toiling away the whole day, they barely scored 50,000 points. Checking the rankings, she chuckled bitterly—they had slipped back two spots again.

When V587 returned to the Northern Base, everyone wore sour expressions; the starship reeked of a strong stench of decay.

Their opening move had obviously fallen flat.

Song Ke sighed inwardly. If things continued like this, would she become the first S-level eliminated due to lagging rankings in the Northern Base?

...

"I heard you went to snatch fish. Hahaha, still not successful?" Ye Zimei's laughter came through the terminal.

“Don’t mention it,” Song Ke groaned, massaging her temples.

“Song Ke, do you know anyone at the base?”

Ye Zimei laughed at her for a while before getting serious: “The top-level awakeners have their own circle. I heard that the teams at the forefront of the rankings have created an exclusive channel. Those S-level and A-level commissions with high return rates are basically monopolized by them and cannot fall into the hands of outsiders.”

“If you have connections, get them to invite you into the channel. It’s definitely more efficient than snatching fish—hahaha!”

…Connections?

A face slowly surfaced in Song Ke’s mind: wearing sniper goggles, black sniper gloves while handling guns, with untamed features, a sparkling ruby earring on the right ear.

It seemed like she did have someone.

“And another thing, your… um, family member from before wanted to meet Professor Ming Gang and his wife, right?” Ye Zimei said, “Their visitor appointment channel was closed many years ago, and they haven’t appeared in public for a long time. I found Professor Ming’s current address on Middle Ancient Street. Whenever you guys have time, I’ll accompany you there.”

“Alright, I’ll ask first.”

\*

An experimental laboratory filled with instruments.

The sound of machines beeping intermittently echoed, gene sequences slowly rotating in the air.

Two corpses lay in observation chambers, their skin extensively decayed, their pupils a murky gray—these were the Fallen captured from Haimen. An invisible shadow was corroding their bodies, one of them having already lost all signs of life.

“Radiation levels report.”

“47.75%, nearing critical threshold!”

“Awakened energy levels.”

“...0.”

The upper body of the living corpse suddenly stiffened, arching into a bridge-like form, emitting a hoarse, mournful groan from its throat before collapsing heavily, breathless.

“Confirmed... the subject is deceased.”

The surrounding assistants remained silent as the weight of failure lingered in the air.

After a full two minutes, a hoarse voice broke the silence, slowly uttering, “Record: radiation exceeds 47.75%, DNA double-strand breakage, chromosome deactivation, organ dissolution... Primitive cells have lost regenerative capabilities. The fourth awakening experiment, unsuccessful.”

“Dr. Ning, how do we dispose of these two discarded experimental subjects?”

“Destroy them,” a man with graying temples and a gaunt face spoke softly.

Another failure, countless failures that had left the faces in the laboratory drained and the atmosphere heavy.

A lab-coated assistant entered from outside, holding a screen of light.

“Dr. Ning, the awakener department sent a file. They say the subject in the file may have a genetic condition, they want you to take a look.”

“Do you think I have nothing else to do?”

The man’s expression showed embarrassment. “This is Commander He’s instruction.”

He Qihong was the financial backbone of the entire laboratory. Dr. Ning stayed silent for a moment, not refusing further, taking the screen and examining its contents.

Initially casually browsing through it, gradually, his pace slowed, his expression grew more solemn. Finally, he lingered for a long time on page 17—a massive shadow completely engulfing the body. Compared to this image, the Fallen who had just died from excessive radiation seemed utterly laughable.

“What is this? A newly discovered mutated zombie?”

“No,” the assistant was startled, hastening to explain, “It’s an S-level newcomer at the base.”

“An awakener...” Dr. Ning flipped back to the report’s cover, reading aloud the name written on it: “Song Ke.”

“The report stays with me. Please, have Director He find a way to bring this... Song Ke to the lab.”

“Huh? For what reason?” the assistant hesitated to ask.

“For further genetic examination.” Dr. Ning gestured to the section of the genetic report towards the back.

...

In the Central District's Garden Apartments, a tall, slender figure stood by the French windows.

The man, nearly 185 cm tall, had elongated limbs and a graceful posture. His facial features were defined and smooth, with deep-set eyes and a straight lip line when not smiling. Gazing down at the world, he seemed like an impassive and distant deity.

Fang Zhixu sighed while stroking his chin, "Truly living up to the S-level, huh? Half a month earlier in recovery time than I anticipated."

Hearing this, Zhuang Qingyan turned around. Broad shoulders and a straight back, a slender waist tucked neatly under the tailored pants, encasing two extraordinarily long legs.

"Thank you, Dr. Fang, for your miraculous recovery skills, which prevented any lasting effects."

"When do you plan to inform the captain?"

"No rush," Zhuang Qingyan smiled, his glasses' chains gently swaying with the motion, exuding an air of grace and elegance.

Being in a wheelchair wasn't bad at all. His carefully crafted image of being a fragile and delicate "little white flower" could always get some unexpected care from Song Ke.

"Zhuang Qingyan!"

The door was pushed open forcefully, and Song Ke stormed in, "Ye Zimei said she'll accompany us..."

Zhuang Qingyu: "... Facepalm.

He sighed in resignation, "Song Ke, can you please knock before barging into my room?"

Song Ke didn't hear a word he said, her mouth forming a perfect 'O' shape.

It was the first time she had seen Zhuang Qingyan standing so relaxed, without the aid of a cumbersome cane, without the urgency of a sealing injection. He stood there, using his two perfectly normal legs that belonged to him.

Outside the window, the golden dawn of early morning painted the sky as numerous aircraft moved about.

Zhuang Qingyan's superior silhouette stood backlit, seeming to carry an immense radiance upon his shoulders.

The feeling it evoked was both familiar and strange.

It was as if he had become someone else, yet still Zhuang Qingyan, yet not quite him.

In Song Ke's mind, a line from a palace intrigue drama that Aming loved watching surfaced at an inappropriate moment:

“The former Zhuang Qingyan is already dead. Now standing before you is—Niu Hulu Qingyan.”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 140.1: Fire Seed (9)

I asked you to hold him back, not to disable him

The members of the V587 were called for an impromptu meeting in the apartment's living room.

“Captain, what's the matter?”



Song Ke puffed her cheeks, crossed her arms, and sat on the circular bar, nudging the corner of her mouth towards a lazy figure in a wheelchair.

Everyone turned their heads to look, except for Fang Zhixu, who awkwardly scratched his head, not daring to say a word.

“Stand up,” Song Ke ordered coldly, looking down from her high position.

Under everyone’s gaze, Zhuang Qingyan awkwardly coughed twice in a “fragile” manner, supporting himself on the wheelchair with both hands. He slowly stood up, trembling as he took a step forward. His knees weren’t accustomed, causing a slight delay in his movement, resulting in a sway in his body.

Su Cha instinctively reached out to help.

Expressionless, Song Ke said, “Stop pretending.”

Zhuang Qingyan straightened his back and immediately stopped swaying.

Su Cha muttered to himself, “...6,” and quietly retracted his arm.

Zhuang Qingyan’s hand awkwardly hovered in the air, seeing Song Ke had no intention of assisting him. He casually put his hand in his pocket, adjusted his muscles to their best condition, moved smoothly and naturally, his demeanor lazy and casual. Crossing his long legs, he walked back and forth like a male model in a poster, and then confidently sat back down.

V587: “...?”

In the silent air, they witnessed a free top-notch runway show, then indignantly accused him:

“You big liar, just the day before yesterday, I was pushing you!” This was Xu Xing, the fooled free labor.

“Tch, boring.” This was Lu Xiaoyu rolling his eyes.

“You kid, why didn’t you tell everyone in advance? Now look...” Fang Zhixu tried to shrink, attempting to avoid responsibility.

Lin Youyou suspiciously glanced at him, “Old Fang, you’re his attending physician, wouldn’t you know if his leg got better?”

Fang Zhixu stammered, “Uh, well, I... I...”

Lin Youyou covered her mouth dramatically, looking pained, “Wow, you two colluded to deceive us... to deceive the captain’s pure feelings!”

Song Ke nodded seriously, “Yeah! Huh?” What feelings?

She quickly brought the conversation back on track, “So, what are your plans for the future?”

“Everyone within the team knows about the recovery; I’ll continue using the wheelchair for a while.” Zhuang Qingyan lifted one leg, the suit pants outlining a clear silhouette. With his hands clasped in front of his abdomen, his expression open and without a hint of embarrassment, he said, “Anyway, I’m used to sitting, quite comfortable, actually.”

“Ah, yes, yes.” Everyone rolled their eyes but went along with it, showing kindness.

Despite teasing Zhuang Qingyan, everyone had a sense of understanding and wouldn’t spread rumors around.

After Lin Xiu woke up, they all more or less guessed that Zhuang Qingyan had an unusual identity but never questioned him. Each person had their own unspoken secrets, and among teammates, there should be mutual respect.

Song Ke took the opportunity to discuss with Zhuang Qingyan about accompanying them to meet Ming Gang and his wife, allowing him to choose a suitable time.

Zhuang Qingyan hesitated for a moment. "The sooner, the better. How about tomorrow?"

"Okay," Song Ke nodded. "I'll go with you."

"Sure," Zhuang Qingyan's eyes curved into a charming smile. "District B is in crisis step by step, all because of my poor health. Cough, cough. I've caused trouble for everyone. Only the captain doesn't mind that I'm a burden and is willing to accompany me. What more could I ask for?"

Song Ke: "..."

Song Ke's forehead twisted in frustration. She turned half of her body away, no longer looking at his fake smile, quietly pulling out her own communicator terminal.

She still had to worry about the task she had been entrusted with.

Searching through the contacts, she found the profile of Yin Xiao and earnestly composed a message to send.

The gist of it was that she and her teammates had arrived at the Northern Base and heard about an exclusive channel for accepting missions. Could they be added to it?

As she typed away, Zhuang Qingyan stood up by himself, using one hand to support himself on the bar counter while resting his chin on her shoulder, staring fixedly at the content on the terminal. From behind, it seemed like a possessive half-embrace posture.

After waiting for about a minute, Yin Xiao's reply finally arrived.

Song Ke opened it, finding only a location pin and an exclamation mark.

Just as she was forming a question in her mind, the next message from Yin Xiao popped up: "Come."

"Two people, alone at night, making plans. He's aiming high, huh?" Zhuang Qingyan's smile carried a chilling undertone.

Before Song Ke could respond, another message arrived from Yin Xiao. Perhaps realizing the ambiguity in their conversation or acknowledging the sensitive timing, this time the message was more detailed: "Help rescue a situation. You alone will do. There's an S-level threat on-site. Dangerous."

With Zhuang Qingyan's warm breath on her right shoulder, Song Ke felt the weight. She tilted her head slightly. "So, should I go?"

"Go where? Forget about it," Zhuang Qingyan coldly snorted.

Observing the thickness of Zhuang Qingyan's eyelashes, Song Ke spoke earnestly, "We owe him a favor. It's a matter of reciprocity and social etiquette."

After some thought, she articulated, "Courtesy demands reciprocity."

Zhuang Qingyan couldn't help but smile. He found it interesting how much a person could learn in just a few days. The girl seemed to understand the intricacies of social interactions now.

"Must you go?" His deep eyes seemed to probe into her soul, his tone soft and slow, tinged with a hint of sorrow.

"I have to," Song Ke said earnestly.

They locked eyes for a few seconds, and inexplicably, a sense of guilt, akin to the feeling of a disloyal man secretly meeting someone else while having a wife, surged within Song Ke.

What's this? She shook her head, dispelling this baseless and terrifying notion.

"It's fine to go, but find someone to accompany you," Zhuang Qingyan finally relented, sighing, "It's just an S-level threat, after all."

"Go early, come back early. Don't get involved in things you shouldn't, or else I won't let you in," he added, patting Song Ke's head with one hand, as a reminder.

Because of his "unsuitability for the occasion," he couldn't show up openly and had to rely on the team.

Lu Xiaoyu had bought a bunch of new parts from the black market and was currently busy adjusting them up and down.

Zhuang Qingyan stopped in front of Lu Xiaoyu, casually kicking the yet-to-be-installed new mechanical arm. "Hey, driver, accompany our captain on an external mission."

Lu Xiaoyu didn't hesitate to refuse, "No time."

Zhuang Qingyan dangled a bait, "Within reasonable limits, an extra chance for procurement."

Putting down the parts he was holding, Lu Xiaoyu considered and spoke slowly, "I want rhenium blocks, nothing else."

"100 grams," Zhuang Qingyan stated.

"500 grams," Lu Xiaoyu countered.

Zhuang Qingyan turned to leave.

Lu Xiaoyu hissed and quickly compromised, "300!"

Zhuang Qingyan calmly negotiated, "250."

Lu Xiaoyu coldly stated, "I don't accept that number."

Zhuang Qingyan smiled faintly, "Then it's 270, no more."

Quickly calculating, Lu Xiaoyu realized that the amount offered by Zhuang Qingyan was just enough to modify a mechanical arm, without any waste or loss. It was clear that he had calculated this beforehand, intentionally setting the limit at the edge.

Internally cursing, Lu Xiaoyu agreed on the surface, "Deal."

...

The coordinates sent by Yin Xiao were on the border between the Northern Base (District B10) and Tokushima (District B15). These two districts often clashed with deep-seated grievances. Song Ke had heard of the famous "North-Toku Enmity Record" in Qianzhan City: it involved disputes where one day someone would steal another's top-tier awakener, the next day someone would dare to snatch an S-level commission, and the cycle of retaliation continued.

Driving an armed spacecraft (a public vehicle obtained through S-level authorization), Lu Xiaoyu arrived at the location to find an intense battle underway. Both sides, around twenty to thirty people each, faced off, utilizing different-colored abilities that shimmered and clashed in the air.

The night offered poor visibility, but from the obscure ground contours and the sound of waves crashing against rocks, it was discernible that this was a tidal flat.

Taking in the surroundings, Song Ke felt overwhelmed. The shadows of the day hadn't completely dissipated, and she couldn't believe they were going to ask her to fish again!

The spacecraft hovered low, and among the individuals present, Song Ke quickly spotted Yin Xiao. However, it was apparent he didn't have the time for greetings at the moment.

Under the pitch-black night sky, a lightning-type awakener's hands flashed with electricity, hurling numerous pulsating orbs swiftly forward like darting serpents.

Amidst the thunder and lightning, Yin Xiao swiftly maneuvered, dodging and rolling. If it were someone else, they would have avoided being turned to ashes from the bombardment. Yet, despite evading and rolling, he managed to find opportunities to counter-attack. Each time he raised his wrist, a precise shot was fired, the light explosive angle cunningly aimed. Even if the lightning-type awakener managed to dodge, the shot found its mark on other opposing awakeners, gradually carving out a vacuum in the chaos.

Song Ke's gaze narrowed slightly as she assessed from the projected awakened energy – the lightning-type awakener confronting Yin Xiao was an S-level.

Amidst the chaotic volley of electric spheres, the muscles from Yin Xiao's shoulder to back were taut, but instead of retreating, he surged forward suddenly. Wherever he went, intense flames ignited, and Jennifer promptly supported, using her abilities. The members of the "Tustan" team also freed up their hands to assist.

With a swift slide, Yin Xiao's abdominal muscles tensed into a straight line as he dodged a series of electric spheres aimed at his face. Moving in close, he suddenly fired his gun. His opponent attempted to evade, but Yin Xiao's lips curled slightly, seemingly anticipating their reaction. In a flash of electricity and sparks, he shifted his attack to using the butt of his gun towards the opponent's solar plexus.

Just as success seemed within reach, crack! Suddenly, four black barriers descended on their location, followed by an endless tide of darkness rapidly engulfing and swallowing everything. Whether within the dark void or observing from the outside, everyone lost their vision instantly. An eerie, slender figure cloaked in black materialized slowly from the air, their icy eyes fixed firmly on Yin Xiao.

Song Ke was slightly taken aback. Another S-level? A spatial-type awakener? No, Yin Xiao's awakened energy was still there; it hadn't vanished. He was trapped in absolute darkness, deprived of his sight.

The lightning-type awakener was pulled out of Yin Xiao's attack range by a pair of thin, aged hands. In retaliation, a burst of lightning struck back. Yin Xiao, deprived of vision, relied on his instincts to evade but ultimately took a harsh blow. His military boots left deep imprints in the mud as he dropped to one

knee, clutching his abdomen with his left hand, veins bulging on the back of it amidst a gush of fresh blood.

Yin Xiao was an A9 level, facing an S-level opponent who already had a hierarchical advantage, not to mention it was a two-on-one situation.

The usual casual smile on his face disappeared, replaced by a solemn and cold demeanor.

“Lei Zhao, why turn hostile when you arrived at Tokushima? Being so ruthless against former colleagues?” he questioned.

“We’re on different paths,” the lightning-type awakener responded in a deep tone.

Finally, as the two paused, Song Ke found an opportunity to intervene. She and Lu Xiaoyu exchanged a glance before leaping down from the spacecraft.

Thud—!

Dust flew up in the air.

Song Ke landed amidst the two opposing groups, her hands empty, appearing like an innocent bystander who had accidentally wandered into a battlefield while taking a stroll after a meal.

Yet, no one dared to underestimate her. Lei Zhao and the slender woman remained vigilant, assessing her as if facing a formidable adversary.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 140.2: Fire Seed (9)

I asked you to hold him back, not to disable him



“Yo, here already?” Yin Xiao’s smile brightened. He extended his free right hand. “Could you lend me a hand?”

Song Ke helped him up, and as she glanced down, she noticed a severe electrical injury on Yin Xiao’s lean and flat abdomen, with torn flesh and continuous bleeding.

However, he casually patted the wound as if nothing had happened, whispering to Song Ke, “Those on the opposite side are all from Tokushima. The guy is Lei Zhao, S4 with lightning ability, and the woman is Yuko Noguma, S3 with mystic-type ability, capable of depriving others of their powers using darkness.”

“—Help me keep them occupied, don’t let them take the creature.”

Creature? What creature?

Before Song Ke could inquire, the pitch-black background around them rapidly receded like a tide, revealing a bizarre sight.

On the mudflat, a massive stranded body of a giant sperm whale lay on its side, with a length exceeding fifty meters, a cylindrical and sturdy head, and two small dead white eyes. A crimson crystal floated slowly in mid-air, surrounded by faint blue water vapor. No one dared to approach—it turned out to be a rare Level 4 mutant beast.

After the darkness dissipated, several Tokushima awakeners were thrown out soaked and wet. Standing in the middle was a lightly dressed woman in a blue skirt.

Song Ke took a surprised breath. Another S-level, what’s going on tonight? An S-level beach party?

Fortunately, Yin Xiao spoke up in time, explaining the woman’s identity, “She’s one of us, Zhao Yuqing, S2 water controller.”

Zhao Yuqing nodded lightly at Song Ke.

“We killed this mutated whale, but they insist it’s in their territory and demand we leave the things behind,” Yin Xiao said.

“Purely thuggish behavior, twisting the facts. Not only do they want to steal the creature, but they also want to challenge the Northern Base,” Song Ke commented.

Growing up in a fishing village, Song Ke vaguely heard that whales were praised as “treasures all over the body” in marine life. Even in the apocalypse, its edible, industrial, and research value was higher than that of ordinary creatures, especially as a Level 4 mutant beast.

The Northern Base and Tokushima fought fiercely for the ownership of the mutated whale, which made sense.

Yuko Noguma’s voice was hoarse as she threatened in a non-standard Alliance language, “Mutated whale, ours. Get lost.”

Yin Xiao sneered, “Sorry, when we killed it, it was still in the waters of the Northern Base.”

Negotiation was impossible, and it would never be possible in this lifetime. Since things couldn’t be explained, they could only resort to action.

However, the mystic-type Yuko Noguma was easy to deal with, while the attack-type Lei Zhao, with his S4 abilities, was quite formidable.

He used to be an awakener in the Northern Base, but Tokushima offered him better conditions and managed to recruit him. It’s natural for water to flow downhill, and people seek higher ground. Originally, there wasn’t much to say about this matter, but unexpectedly, Lei Zhao turned around and targeted his former colleague. Truly, there was no sense of loyalty.

Tokushima had more than one strong attack-type awakener, and as an S-level, he had the right to refuse.

Yin Xiao whispered to Song Ke, "You hold off Lei Zhao. Zhao Yuqing and I will deal with Yuko Noguma? Is that okay?"

Song Ke made an "OK" gesture behind him.

"Lei Zhao, do you think the base won't function without you?" Yin Xiao intentionally raised his voice, attracting attention from the opposite side. "Let me introduce you. This is our new S-level."

"Hello, please give me some advice." Song Ke politely bowed to the two people opposite and casually picked up a collapsed power line pole.

Lei Zhao: "..."

Yuko Noguma: "?" What was this new S-level doing? Mocking them on purpose?

"It seems, it's a bit big," Song Ke muttered dissatisfied. "Forget it, let's just use it."

Lei Zhao raised both hands, and the high-voltage electricity caused by his ability instantly changed the color of the night sky. Yuko Noguma rushed towards Song Ke, but halfway, she was forced to stop by water arrows and sharp bullets, forcing her to engage in battle.

"Your opponent is me," Zhao Yuqing said coldly.

In the illuminated high sky by the lightning, thousands of sharp lightning bolts came towards Song Ke. Dragging the power line pole, she stepped on the body of the sperm whale, used the momentum to soar into the air, and swung her right hand.

A blue twelve-section soft whip went through the air, absorbing most of the lightning along the way, emitting a sizzling electric light, and lashed towards Lei Zhao with bone-chilling malice.

"I'll return the favor!" Song Ke understood the principle of reciprocity.

Lei Zhao's pupils contracted, hastily gathering electric currents into a fan-shaped shield to block the rebounded attack. The lightning crackled and struck the decaying skin of the whale, and bits and pieces of tissue scattered everywhere.

Song Ke whipped the whip again, the heavy head of the whip moving astonishingly fast in her hand, like a rattlesnake. Snap! It hit Lei Zhao's wrist!

Lei Zhao couldn't avoid it, and he distinctly heard the bone "crack" and shatter.

As a long-range awakener, he was already at a disadvantage in close combat, and Song Ke's soft whip seemed to be an extension of herself, moving effortlessly. One moment it swung horizontally, the next it flicked diagonally, occasionally drawing an eight-shaped figure at a 720-degree angle.

Faced with Lei Zhao's lightning, she seemed extremely casual, dodging when she could, and enduring when she couldn't. Her physical fitness was so strong that it seemed she couldn't feel any pain at all!

Crack—! The lightning struck Song Ke's shoulder, and a faint scent of burnt flesh reached her.

Smack—! The sharp whip came down, hitting Lei Zhao's back hard, causing him to shudder in pain.

The two danced and maneuvered on the corpse of the sperm whale, pouring out their formidable awakened energy without reservation.

Distracted by the blurry vision from being whipped, Lei Zhao suddenly found Song Ke gone! Oh no! Lei Zhao raised his head abruptly, almost simultaneously, Song Ke descended diagonally from the head of the sperm whale in a cross-shaped leap. Lei Zhao's face changed drastically, focused only on her elusive whip techniques, completely unaware that she was closing the distance between them.

Song Ke descended like a projectile, grabbed Lei Zhao's neck with one hand, and swung him forcefully toward the ground!

“Bang—!” Lei Zhao was smashed into the sandy soil, and the turbulent airflow stirred the remnants of the sperm whale’s skin.

Song Ke acted swiftly, the whip circled around his hands, forming a knot. Then, she flexed her arm muscles and twisted in the opposite direction.

First came a clearly audible “crack.”

“Ahh—!” Immediately followed by a piercing scream, Lei Zhao’s hands were forcibly twisted.

The S-level’s screams silenced the ongoing battle for two seconds.

“Damn,” Yin Xiao stared blankly, “I asked you to hold him back, not to disable him directly.”

With one hand, Song Ke lifted Lei Zhao and threw him forcefully towards Yuko Noguma. The female awakener, who was already trapped by Zhao Yuqing and Yin Xiao, had no chance to dodge and was hit like a bowling ball, tumbling and colliding with the whale carcass.

Tokushima’s two S-levels were defeated. After this round, the Northern Base emerged victorious.

Yin Xiao and the other awakeners behind Zhao Yuqing burst into laughter without mercy. Song Ke clapped her hands, about to turn back, when she suddenly saw the faces of the opposing group turn pale, pointing in terror towards a certain direction.

She turned around abruptly—

The stranded mutated whale’s body was rapidly swelling from its belly. Due to excessive radiation and the impact of S-level awakened energy, the accumulation of decomposed gases within its body exceeded the critical point. It reached the maximum capacity the skin could endure, and the people on the mudflat could vaguely smell a nauseating stench.

“Whale explosion! It’s a whale explosion!! Run!!!” Heart-wrenching shouts echoed.

Whale explosion, also known as nature's bomb, is the world's foulest biochemical weapon. The power generated by the explosion of a normal adult whale is equivalent to ten thousand hand grenades. Currently, lying on the beach is a Level 4 mutated sperm whale with a length exceeding fifty meters.

Both groups of awakeners snapped out of their trance, abandoning the fight without hesitation, and sprinted away.

On the Northern Base side, Yin Xiao ran over, grabbing Song Ke's hand and shouting, "Run!"

In the sky, Lu Xiaoyu sensed the impending danger. The flying ship dove down, its tailgate opened, and the Northern Base awakeners scrambled to climb aboard.

Amidst the endless chaos, Song Ke suddenly thought of something, broke free from Yin Xiao's grip, and pushed him away. "You go first!"

"Hey! Don't run around!" Yin Xiao turned to stop her, but the putrid smell in the air was too unbearable. He couldn't help but turn aside to dry heave, and when he turned back, Song Ke had already disappeared.

"Song Ke!" After Yin Xiao's shout, he also gagged, "Ugh—"

The sperm whale's body had swollen to cover the sky, and the surrounding radiation energy surged, reaching the edge of detonation.

A distant, tiny figure dashed towards them. Song Ke desperately waved her hands towards the sky. "Lu Xiaoyu, fly!"

The flying ship ascended abruptly without any warning, nearly causing the awakeners in the back cabin to fall. The tailgate gradually closed, Yin Xiao hung onto the handrail with one hand, half of his body suspended in the air. He reached out to Song Ke. "Quick!"

Boom—!!!

The swollen abdomen of the sperm whale burst open directly.

Undigested, putrefied food, vast amounts of gaseous methane, ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and countless microorganisms and bacteria scattered in the air with the bloody water, and the debris of tissues fell like a torrential rain.

Song Ke flicked the long whip in her palm, firmly locking onto the tail wing of the flying ship. Lu Xiaoyu rapidly ascended again, using the force to pull her up. Like a sharp arrow, Song Ke maneuvered through the foul wind, blood rain, and toxic air, rolling into the flying ship's cabin with agility.

The tailgate finally closed, and the strong airflow generated by the explosion caused the entire flying ship to shake violently. The portholes were completely covered with black, rotten substances.

“Why did you go back?” Yin Xiao asked sternly, “Do you know how dangerous that was?”

Song Ke opened her palm, and a crimson crystal sparkled brightly.

“I went... to get the crystal,” Song Ke said matter-of-factly, then looked at them reproachfully, “You guys, what a waste.”

As a captain who had once experienced poverty, frugality was a virtue she took pride in. While the Northern Base enjoyed abundant resources, she was not one to indulge extravagantly; she would refuse even precious Level 4 crystals if she deemed them unnecessary.

Yin Xiao choked for a moment, “...”

“Uh... you...” Someone looked at the oblivious Song Ke and cautiously spoke up.

However, before he could finish his sentence, people in the cabin suddenly began to vomit one after another.

Song Ke wiped her face, only to find a piece of rotten whale flesh falling down.

She lowered her head in shock and looked, realizing that her coat had collected a considerable amount of debris from the whale explosion due to her vigorous flight.

A shake made one piece fall.

Another shake made two or three pieces fall.

Song Ke: "..."

Oh no, oh no. The first thought that flashed through her mind was: With Zhuang Qingyan's cleanliness, would she be allowed to enter the door when she went back?