

Doomsday 141

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 141: Fire Seed (10)

Yes! I just like him!

“Here, crystal.” Song Ke handed over the level 4 crystal she had rescued.

Neither Yin Xiao nor Zhao Yuqing wanted it. Although the mutated whale was not captured, at least it wasn't taken by Tokushima. All in all, everyone considered it a draw.

The crystal was retrieved by Song Ke, rightfully hers because of her violent intervention. Lei Zhao and Yuko Noguma were both pinned under the whale, making it unlikely for them to escape easily. Although with S-level physique, they wouldn't lose their lives, the scene of the explosion with a foul stench was definitely something they had to endure.

“You take it, thanks for your help. This is an A-level commission, and I'll transfer the mission points to you.”

Yin Xiao wanted to help her tidy up a bit. However, after lifting his arm for a while, he was at a loss.

Song Ke was oblivious to his dilemma and felt delighted inside: 200,000 points credited at once. This trip was not in vain!

The cockpit door opened, and Lu Xiaoyu slid out from inside. “Captain, our trustworthy captain, please fulfill your promise and take me to buy...”

The rear compartment was filled with various unbearable smells. Exhausted awakens lay scattered on the floor. Lu Xiaoyu slammed the brakes, revealing a clear expression of disgust on his face. The wheelchair slid back again without stopping.

Not only that, he even reached out and slammed the door shut with a bang!

Ah! Song Ke gritted her teeth secretly. What a great team member she has – not only did Lu Xiaoyu not help when the captain was dirty, but he also slipped away faster than anyone else.

Zhao Yuqing smiled on the side. With her gentle and plain temperament, no one would have thought she was an S2-level awakener.

She moved her fingertips slightly, and the water vapor in the rear compartment gradually condensed into two elastic water balls. Rubbing against Song Ke's face and coat, the balls absorbed most of the dirt and debris. Then Zhao Yuqing lifted her slender arm, swish—single-handedly opened the thousands of kilograms heavy skylight. With a snap of her fingers, the dirty water balls obediently flew outside.

Song Ke lowered her head and smelled herself. Much better, at least not as foul as before.

“Thank you.”

“It's me who should thank you for your help. I'm not good at fighting. Without you today, we might have suffered a loss,” Zhao Yuqing's voice was also light.

As an S-level awakener, Zhao Yuqing had pushed the ability to control water to its extreme. When water met a square, it'd become square, and when it met round, it'd become round. Versatile and inclusive of all things, but lacking the domineering attack of the metal element.

Strictly speaking, Zhao Yuqing's ability leaned more towards a mixed element. Ice arrows were her only effective means of attack, so she usually played the roles of control, flank, and support. Before, Lei Zhao was her partner in fighting side by side. However, circumstances had changed, and they now stood on opposite sides.

Song Ke and Zhao Yuqing's abilities were similar in terms of transformation, and the two exchanged some insights and experiences, learning from each other.

After they finished speaking, Yin Xiao poked Song Ke's shoulder with his finger.

“Captain Song Ke, done chatting? Is it my turn now?”

“What?”

Yin Xiao sat cross-legged in front of Song Ke, his abdominal wound hastily bandaged. His eyes, tinged with a deep gray, stared intently at her.

“Why didn’t you tell me when you came to the base?”

“Uh...” —Zhuang Qingyan didn’t allow her to say.

“And why didn’t you tell me about being S-level?”

“It’s a long story.” —Also Zhuang Qingyan didn’t allow her to say.

“If I hadn’t heard about the new S-level with the same name at the base, I would still be in the dark.”

Yin Xiao moved forward, his knee touching Song Ke’s shin, relentlessly asking, “During the Throne Race, I thought we had a camaraderie of fighting side by side, at least we were friends. Did you plan from the beginning to make me do the dirty work?”

“Of course not!” Song Ke hurriedly defended.

“Then why didn’t you tell me? Were you planning to take advantage of me?”

Yin Xiao’s words became more and more absurd.

“Don’t, don’t talk nonsense,” Song Ke warned him, holding her fist.

Yin Xiao narrowed his eyes slowly, “Could it be... because I confessed to you, you deliberately avoided me?”

Zhao Yuqing had a surprised expression, as if she had just tasted a delicious melon: “!”

Yooooooooo~

Members of the Tustan team whistled, enjoying the spectacle.

In the rear compartment, except for Tustan, other awakeners whispered to each other, “Damn, Yin Xiao is really bold...”

“He dares to pursue an S7. Isn’t he afraid of getting his head blown off?”

“I misunderstood Yin Xiao. He’s simply a role model for our generation, the wildest wolf in the Northern Base...”

Song Ke didn’t forget the purpose of her trip, facing the constant teasing. She calmly said, “First, bring me into the channel.”

Without a second word, Yin Xiao lightly touched the ruby earring, pulling her into the channel of the “B10 District High-level Ability Matching Conference”.

Song Ke then realized that the earring was his terminal, quite in line with Yin Xiao’s personality, flashy and arrogant.

After confirming the channel name several times, she spoke with emphasis, “Focus on your work, don’t think about it. There’s no chance between us.”

Yin Xiao, dissatisfied, asked three times in a row, "Why no chance? Why reject me? Because of that guy in the wheelchair?"

Yin Xiao, dissatisfied, flexed his fist, "He's sick, what makes him better than me?"

Yin Xiao, dissatisfied, rubbed his hands, "Why is the coward not here today? Let me compare with him!"

"Or is it that you just like someone like him?" Yin Xiao hesitated for a second, then disdainfully sneered, "But his face isn't even his own, he stole it from Vincent..."

Seeing him becoming more and more uncontrollable, Song Ke didn't care about the details. Her only thought was to shut Yin Xiao up.

"Yes! I just like him!"

"..." Yin Xiao indeed shut up.

"He is my person. Don't mention the matter of his face again."

Song Ke lied with her eyes wide open, "Also, he's physically weak. In the future, don't bully him when you meet him."

"... Bully him?" Yin Xiao incredulously asked, covering his abdominal wound, feeling a chill in his heart.

He was so angry that every part of his body hurt. When he turned his head, countless pairs of prying eyes in the rear compartment were staring at him without blinking.

"What are you looking at?" Yin Xiao roared, "Are you all happy to see me rejected?"

The awakeners on the scene quickly averted their eyes, afraid to breathe loudly.

Damn, witnessing Yin Xiao's failed confession, they won't be silenced, right?

...

The flying ship, traveling at a steady speed, brought a group of people back to the Northern Base, and the time was nearing midnight.

After bidding farewell to Lu Xiaoyu at the elevator entrance, Song Ke took off her shoes, carefully held them in her hands, and tiptoed towards the bathroom.

To her surprise, even at this late hour, there was someone inside. The warm yellow light cast a hazy shadow, and the sound of the showerhead echoed. Through the steamed frosted glass, a tall figure was faintly visible... taking a shower.

Song Ke silently turned around, preparing to exit silently.

But it was too late.

The water abruptly stopped, followed by a "click" – the bathroom door opened from the inside.

"Back?"

"...Ah." Song Ke's back stiffened, and she dared not turn her head.

"Did you settle it?"

"Settled."

A low, faint laugh sounded, "What are you hiding for? Turn around and talk."

Song Ke turned around clumsily, and Zhuang Qingyan pushed his wet hair back behind his head. His features were clear and handsome, with deep and charming eyes.

He was dripping wet from head to toe, only wearing a towel around his waist, revealing well-defined abdominal muscles and a narrow mermaid line.

Zhuang Qingyan casually wiped himself with a towel and asked, "Do you need the bathroom?"

"It's fine. I don't need it."

Perhaps due to the steam, Song Ke's cheeks felt like they were burning, and her heart pounded uncontrollably.

Zhuang Qingyan took a step forward, his imposing body slowly lowering, his hands supporting the sink, enclosing Song Ke in his arms.

"There's only one bathroom. You don't need this..."

His expression suddenly froze, and he delicately lifted a strand of Song Ke's hair, sniffing it, "What's this smell?"

Immediately, Zhuang Qingyan's face changed dramatically as he realized something. He kept stepping back, repeatedly retreating, "Did you roll in the zombie pile again?!"

Song Ke: "... What kind of nose is this? It's even more sensitive than Taotao's! She had been outside in the wind for half an hour!

Zhuang Qingyan furrowed his brows tightly, endured for a moment, endured again, couldn't hold it any longer, and began to meticulously wash his hands.

Song Ke: "...” I’m very angry.

The romantic atmosphere dissipated instantly. Song Ke’s face puffed up like a bun. She walked over arrogantly, deliberately bumped into Zhuang Qingyan’s shoulder, then rubbed her head against him a couple of times, pushing him out of the bathroom, closing the door, and locking it.

There’s only one bathroom anyway. If it’s going to smell, let’s both suffer!

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The next morning, Ye Zimei, accompanied by Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan, went to Central Antique Street.

Central Antique Street was a street reconstructed in the style of an old civilization, with a variety of antique shops, specialty restaurants, fortune-telling stalls, and rows of yellow taxis on both sides of the road. Normally, it was bustling with people, and the residents were ordinary people with District B household registration.

The three of them meandered through the winding streets until they almost reached the end. The continuous noise finally quieted down, revealing a large and tranquil three-story villa area in front of them.

After confirming the house number, Ye Zimei spoke to the visitor system, “Hello, I’m Ye Zimei from the Awakener Department. I’d like to visit Mr. and Mrs. Ming Gang.”

She scanned her ID in front of the camera.

The mechanical electronic tone sounded flatly, “Verification in progress, please wait.”

Ten minutes later, the gate opened automatically with the owner’s permission: “Please come in.”

The three of them climbed the stairs and passed through a quiet little garden. When they reached the living room, a couple was already sitting there.

Perhaps well-maintained, the two of them looked like they were in their early fifties. Lucia had a bun on her head, wearing traditional Chinese clothing, elegant and dignified. Ming Gang wore glasses, and numerous holographic screens floated around him, displaying dense papers and academic reports.

Seeing Ye Zimei and the others entering, Ming Gang put down the paper he was correcting, raised his head, and with a mature and wise look, he scrutinized the three of them:

“I don’t recall the Ming family having any dealings with the Awakener Department.”

They were an ordinary couple, immigrants from early years, leading a secluded life. Minimally affected by the apocalypse, they usually didn’t interact with awakeners.

Ming Gang had a serious and reserved face with graying hair. When he looked at people, there was a unique sense of scrutiny typical of intellectuals.

Song Ke, pushing the wheelchair, was momentarily stunned. She was certain she had never seen Ming Gang before, but somehow... he seemed somewhat familiar.

This feeling arose for no apparent reason and was quickly pushed aside.

Ye Zimei respectfully said, “Professor Ming, sorry to disturb you. At the request of someone, a gentleman wishes to meet you.”

Lucia politely added, “Miss Ye, please leave. We don’t entertain visitors.”

Zhuang Qingyan wheeled forward, nodding politely to the two of them, “Senior, I’m Zhuang Qingyan, a colleague of Ming Zhi. We used to work in the same project group at the Qinglan Research Institute.”

Upon hearing Ming Zhi's name, Ming Gang and Lucia's faces flashed a slight surprise, but they didn't utter any words to ask them to leave.

"You go ahead and chat. I'll wait outside," Ye Zimei tactfully withdrew.

Since guests were being retained, proper hospitality was necessary. Lucia raised her hand, and immediately a robot butler pushed a tea cart, took out delicate tea sets and snacks, skillfully brewed tea, and served it one by one to everyone.

Taking a sip of the hot tea, Lucia's voice carried an indescribable nostalgia, "It's been a long time since I heard Xiao Zhi's name. You're his colleague? Coming here to see us, is there something on your mind?"

Zhuang Qingyan, keeping an eye on Ye Zimei's departing figure, got straight to the point, "Do you two know Ming Zhi's current whereabouts?"

Song Ke's eyes widened slightly, her face showing surprise. Wasn't that too direct? No buffering at all?

But what Zhuang Qingyan wanted was a lack of buffering. Subconscious reactions are challenging to hide, even for an outstanding psychologist like them.

He focused intently on the two, not missing any subtle expressions.

Ming Gang showed a momentary surprise, followed by a displeased look.

Lucia's grip on the tea cup paused imperceptibly, but she quickly recovered.

Zhuang Qingyan's mouth slowly curved into a smile, a hint of understanding crossing his mind.

It seems like this trip was the right choice.

Ming Gang's tone was direct and sharp, "Ming Zhi has been dead for a full fourteen years, blown to pieces in Loak by the explosion. The news of his death was personally sent to us by Qinglan. As his colleague, shouldn't you be aware?"

"What's the meaning of bringing up these things now? Are you deliberately trying to provoke us?" Ming Gang's chest heaved, and his breathing became rapid.

"Professor Ming, please calm down. Initially, I also thought Ming Zhi had perished," Zhuang Qingyan remained calm and explained slowly, "But due to some coincidences, I encountered another surviving member of the project group. She witnessed it herself—Ming Zhi did not die."

"According to the witness's account, before the accident occurred, Ming Zhi left the research institute alone," Zhuang Qingyan's expression gradually turned colder, "And, he took away an important experimental subject."

"Impossible! Ming Zhi would never do such a thing!" Ming Gang erupted in anger, "He is already dead, you can't slander him."

Lucia almost lost her grip on the tea cup, and a few drops of hot tea splashed out, "Could there be a mistake... Xiao Zhi is an honest and upright child. Stealing an experimental subject would constitute a crime, and he wouldn't do that."

The tea used for hospitality by Lucia emitted a fragrant aroma, making Song Ke salivate. Taking advantage of the distraction in the conversation, she stealthily reached out, grabbed a tray, and attempted to taste a bite.

"This matter is indeed unbelievable, so I brought the witness from back then," Zhuang Qingyan sighed slightly, taking out a holographic screen from his bag, "If you two don't believe it, you can confront her face to face."

Witness? In the spacious living room, besides them, there was only one person left.

Ming Gang and Lucia both looked at Song Ke simultaneously—one with a stern gaze, the other with displeasure.

Ming Gang slammed the table suddenly, the powerful force knocking over the tea cup, and the golden tea spilled all over the table.

Pointing at Song Ke, he exclaimed, "Are you the witness? Fourteen years ago, you were so young. Why would you slander Ming Zhi?"

Song Ke stuttered, "...Huh?"

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 142: Fire Seed (11)

It said "pain" to me

At a critical moment, Zhuang Qingyan cleared his throat twice, saving the innocent Song Ke who was wrongly accused.

"Professor Ming, she is the witness."

At the right moment, the holographic projection cut in on the screen, and a woman in a researcher's white robe appeared in front of the three, it was Lin Xiu.

Perhaps Zhuang Qingyan had instructed her beforehand, Lin Xiu was not as eccentric today. She sat upright, with a serious expression.

"Fourteen years ago, Ming and I were both researchers in the G team of the Fire Seed project. At that time, Ming Zhi was a cultivator, and I was a recorder. The day before the accident..." Lin Xiu narrated in a calm voice.

Ming Gang and Lucia listened attentively.

Song Ke, feeling down for not having tea, suddenly saw a cup of hot tea appear in front of him—Zhuang Qingyan discreetly pushed it towards her.

She picked up the tea cup, sipped it happily, and squinted his eyes with enjoyment.

Lucia, seeing the pitiful look on the girl, turned her head and had the robot brew another large pot of tea, placing it in front of her on purpose.

After Lin Xiu finished speaking, the living room fell silent for a long time.

“You didn’t lie?” After a while, Ming Gang asked coldly.

Lin Xiu looked up, meeting Ming Gang’s gaze. Her sharp eyes were full of scrutiny, as if she could see through any lies in her heart.

“No,” Lin Xiu shook her head firmly.

“How can you be sure you haven’t been subjected to hypnosis or psychological manipulation by others? What if you are just fabricating facts based on your imagination?” Ming Gang questioned with a cold tone.

Lin Xiu sighed softly, “Professor Ming, I have died once. What you are seeing now is my backup memory. Even I never thought I could revive, and I don’t think anyone would go to great lengths to tamper with my memory. So, I am very clear-headed now and speaking the truth.”

“Ming Zhi is not only my colleague but also a friend. I, like you, want to know why he did this.”

In the long silence, even the air seemed heavy.

Ming Gang slowly took off his glasses, rubbed his temples wearily, tears shimmering in the corners of his eyes. He was an upright and serious person, and the sudden revelation of his child’s crime shook him, making it difficult for him to accept.

“This question, forgive me for not being able to answer. My son, Ming Zhi, was intelligent and outstanding. He obtained his Ph.D. at the age of 20 and was selected to join Qinglan, a one-in-a-million opportunity. After he started working, due to the confidential nature of his work, our contact gradually diminished. However, every time we spoke, his mental state was stable.”

“No matter what he did, he’s no longer here...”

“Professor Ming, allow me to correct you,” Zhuang Qingyan interjected, “Ming Zhi did not perish. He took the experimental subject with him, and it’s highly likely that he is still alive. I need to know his whereabouts.”

“Why, if he’s alive, hasn’t he come to see us? For a whole fourteen years, we haven’t moved, and he couldn’t bear to come back even once?” Ming Gang asked with pain and frustration.

“What about Professor Lucia?” Zhuang Qingyan suddenly changed the subject, “I think... you know where Ming Zhi is, don’t you?”

As soon as these words were spoken, everyone was shocked. Even Ming Gang looked at his wife beside him in speechless astonishment.

Lucia put down her tea cup and sighed, “Before you entered, I always thought my child was dead. How could I know?”

Zhuang Qingyan spoke seriously, “Senior colleagues, I have no ill intentions towards Ming Zhi himself. However, the Fire Seed project is the Alliance’s highest-level classified project. From Qinglan’s perspective, that experimental subject must be traced back.”

Ming Gang and Lucia were not naive people. Upon hearing this, they both fell into silence.

“In your eyes, what kind of person is Ming Zhi?” Zhuang Qingyan looked at Lucia and gently asked, “What do you think his motive was for taking the experimental subject?”

Lucia didn't like being manipulated in a conversation. She calmly glanced at Zhuang Qingyan and then turned her head.

"Child, do you like tea?" she suddenly asked, changing the topic.

"Huh?" Song Ke held the tea cup in her hands, enjoying it with her eyes closed. Not understanding why the topic shifted to her, she stammered, "Y-yes, I like it."

"Few people drink tea nowadays," Lucia smiled affectionately.

Tea was a unique cultural symbol of the old era. Tea trees were precious and hard to cultivate, and tea production was scarce. Gradually, it was phased out in the tide of development.

"My grandfather also liked tea, but not the kind you brew. Yours is delicious," Song Ke said earnestly.

"This is my self-created health tea, with a mix of small soup golden chrysanthemum, Yunshan Pu'er, dried dandelion, and a little bit of rock sugar. Xiao Zhi also loved drinking the tea I brewed for him."

Zhuang Qingyan did not urge, patiently waiting in silence.

Lucia seemed to be lost in distant memories. "When Xiao Zhi was young, he loved small animals. He would always bring back stray kittens or puppies, looking at me with eager eyes, asking, 'Mom, can I keep them?' I'd say, 'Sure,' and he would be so happy. But his luck was often not good; those little things would die one after another due to fragility and illness, and Xiao Zhi would cry heartbreakingly."

"Later, he stopped keeping anything, saying he needed to focus on studying and find a way to make those little beings live longer."

"On the day he officially started working, he smiled and said to me, 'Mom, I'm going to raise something again. This time, they won't die for sure.'"

“Sometimes, I wish he wasn’t so kind, sensitive; it wouldn’t hurt for him to be a bit indifferent to the world...”

Lucia wiped away the tears from the corners of her eyes and sighed softly.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his voice, “So you have seen him, right? After the accident, you saw Ming Zhi.”

Ming Gang’s face showed astonishment. “Lucia, you...?”

“I haven’t seen him. I’m not sure if it was him,” Lucia denied.

“After the news of Xiao Zhi’s death came, I fell seriously ill, almost bedridden. On the anniversary of our marriage the following year, there was a bouquet of longevity flowers at our doorstep, with an unclear signature. I asked the delivery person; it was an anonymous sender, and the address was encrypted, untraceable.”

Lucia held Ming Gang’s hand, “Your heart wasn’t well those years; I was afraid you’d worry, so I didn’t tell you.”

Ming Gang tightened his grip, “It’s okay, it doesn’t matter. I know now.”

“On the same day the next year, the same longevity flowers. Then the third year, the fourth year... I never knew who sent the flowers.”

“Until one year, the bouquet didn’t appear. I waited for a year, still nothing. Year after year, I gradually realized that the person who sent the flowers might not be there anymore.”

Zhuang Qingyan asked calmly, “From which year did the flowers stop?”

Lucia thought for a moment, “In the year 40 of the new calendar.”

Her tone then softened, “Child, I know Xiao Zhi made a mistake, but as a mother, I believe he had his reasons...”

“Rest assured, both of you. Finding Ming Zhi and bringing back the experimental subject is my personal will. This matter will not be made public,” Zhuang Qingyan solemnly promised.

...

After leaving the Ming residence, Lin Xiu couldn't help but ask in a hushed tone, “Professor Zhu—uh, Brother Yan, was that person who sent flowers Ming Zhi?”

Zhuang Qingyan strictly prohibited her from calling him “Vincent” or “Professor Zhuang.” In the end, Lin Xiu could only timidly address him as “Brother Yan.”

“Most likely,” he replied.

“So, Ming Zhi... if he's still alive, wouldn't he continue sending flowers to his parents?”

“Not necessarily. Go back and try; see if this virtual address can dig up anything.”

In the end, Lucia gave Zhuang Qingyan the information about the flower sender. With Lu Xiaoyu around, they could always find some clues.

Lin Xiu murmured to herself, “My feelings are complicated now. If Ming Zhi didn't take the experimental subject, he might have been blown up with me. But he ran away, escaped the accident. From a professional ethics standpoint, I strongly condemn him! But deep down, I feel it's good that he survived.”

“Brother Yan, Brother Yan, tell me, when Ming Zhi ran away, why did he take the experimental subject? Why didn't he take the ones scheduled for destruction, LAK0117 and LAK0366, and specifically chose LAK0017?”

Lin Xiu chattered away; in terms of psychological age, she was just a 23-year-old girl.

“Ming Zhi was a cultivator,” Zhuang Qingyan said.

Lin Xiu nodded, “Oh, right, right.”

“Do you know what specific experiments the Fire Seed project conducts?”

“Not very clear.” As a recorder, Lin Xiu had the lowest level of access. She was not a core member of the Fire Seed project, but she had heard bits and pieces, some of which involved brutal genetic experiments.

“Ming Zhi knew,” Zhuang Qingyan said casually. “Cultivators have the authority to participate in some gene fusion experiments. According to what Lucia said, Ming Zhi was a person with extremely strong empathy. What if, like with little cats and dogs, he felt ‘sympathy’ for LAK0017?”

“But that’s... that’s an experimental subject!” Lin Xiu exclaimed.

Experimental subjects were consciousnessless, thoughtless, artificially created alien organisms. How could they be compared to little cats and dogs?

Lin Xiu was at a loss for words. She suddenly remembered a time during lunch break when the handsome young man was standing alone in the corridor, lost in thought.

At that moment, Lin Xiu lightly patted his shoulder, “Hey, why are you hiding here slacking off?”

Ming Zhi turned his head, and Lin Xiu only then noticed that his eyes were slightly red.

“What’s wrong with you?” she asked.

Following Ming Zhi's gaze, Lin Xiu looked into the empty laboratory. The observation chamber door was tightly closed, and there was nothing unusual.

"It... today, it said 'pain' to me," Ming Zhi's voice was barely audible.

"Who?" Lin Xiu inquired.

"Mmm, you know, what the Fire Seed is?" Ming Zhi asked.

"The Fire Seed is hope, the hope of all humanity."

"Yeah... the hope of all humanity, but not its own."

"For the Fire Seed itself, burning over and over again, reduced to ashes, it clearly has always been in despair."

At that time, Lin Xiu didn't understand the meaning of these words, but now, looking at Zhuang Qingyan's statue-like profile, she fell into a long silence.

Before reuniting with Ye Zimei, Lin Xiu retreated into the holographic screen. The three of them traversed the medieval street again, heading towards where the floating car was parked.

On the way, Song Ke's terminal rang.

She stopped and took a look.

The message was from the official channel of the Awakener Department, filled with lengthy bureaucratic language praising her excellence. After condensing the message, it requested her to undergo further genetic testing as she was a rare S7-level awakener. They wanted her to provide some indicators for record-keeping, contributing to more accurate awakener detection in the future, and so on.

Song Ke read through it twice, still unsure about the true intention of the Awakener Department. She decided to discuss it with Zhuang Qingyan.

“Ahhhhh—!”

Suddenly, a horrified scream erupted at the street intersection ahead, catching Song Ke’s attention.

She abruptly looked up.

A double-decker public bus went out of control, careening wildly towards them. The rear of the bus shattered the glass of the nearby shops. Pedestrians who couldn’t evade in time were rolled over by the wheels. In the driver’s cabin, the driver convulsed with an unnatural expression, pupils covered by a layer of dead-white shadow.

It’s a zombie! The apocalypse was still ongoing. Radiation was everywhere, and with its continuous accumulation in the body, ordinary people exposed to sunlight were highly likely to lose their sanity one day, turning into flesh-eating monsters.

The previous message was overridden, and a new task appeared on the terminal: “C-level Emergency Commission (Exclusive to District B10): Zombie suicide attack incident reported in the medieval street. Please eliminate the source promptly, protect civilians at the scene, and contain the situation as quickly as possible.”

Surrounding awakeners rushed forward, attempting to intercept the zombie driver of the careening double-decker bus.

However, the swaying bus drifted around the corner and collided head-on with a floating subway train that was traveling at high speed and was more than ten sections long!

Boom—!!

The several-thousand-ton car soared high into the air. In that moment of mass acceleration, a catastrophic explosion ensued.

Ye Zimei dashed forward and suddenly acted. An invisible psychic wave, like a stop button, froze both the double-decker bus and the floating subway train in mid-air. Passengers inside the two vehicles had terrified expressions, their eyes rolling, mouths opening and closing as if in slow-motion playback, screaming in silence.

She turned out to be a gravity-type awakener!

However, relying solely on her power was not enough to counteract the force. In a matter of seconds, cracks began to appear under Ye Zimei's feet, and she was pushed backward by the tremendous force, appearing as though she would stumble and fall—

The floating subway train teetered, and from the sky, it came crashing down at high speed!

Unfortunately, Zhuang Qingyan happened to be directly under the front of the train. Even if he stood up and ran frantically, it would be challenging to escape the area in an instant.

Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair swiveled abruptly but was unexpectedly bumped by the chaotic crowd around him. His glasses with golden rims flew off and rolled on the ground.

Bang!

Just at that moment, a slender figure shot out like an arrow. Both hands emitted a blue light, and instantly covered with metallic knuckle-dusters, fiercely intercepting the plummeting floating subway train mid-air.

Boom! Boom!!

With the gravitational support from Ye Zimei, Song Ke hammered the front of the train, each strike creating a powerful and domineering force. Yet, her posture remained very relaxed, as if she were not smashing a few thousand tons of scrap metal but merely tossing around a sandbag.

Under the formidable reactive force, the floating subway train was forcefully pushed back, coiling like a snake with its tail raised, slowly collapsing to the ground. Song Ke leaped onto the roof, grabbing the floating double-decker bus with one hand, and with a powerful mid-air shoulder throw, slammed it together with the subway train.

Crash—!

The smoke and debris scattered in all directions, and a tragedy that almost destroyed the ancient street was effortlessly resolved by Song Ke.

Next, Song Ke shattered the driver's seat glass, pulled out the convulsing zombie driver, and with a "snap," broke his neck.

The bustling market street fell into silence. Whether they were awakeners or ordinary citizens, everyone stared in astonishment at the savior who descended from the sky.

Song Ke turned back, and Ye Zimei excitedly gave her a thumbs-up.

In the midst of all eyes, Song Ke bent down to search on the ground, picked up the golden-rimmed glasses that had fallen in the chaos, wiped them clean with the edge of her clothes, and then walked back to Zhuang Qingyan. She bent down to help him put on the glasses.

Two tiny dimples appeared on her cheeks, and she smiled as if seeking praise, "Was Captain impressive?"

Zhuang Qingyan graciously played along, "Of course, very impressive. Our captain is the best. This family... cough cough, V587 can't do without you."

Song Ke was flattered by his sweet words, and with great enthusiasm, she declared, "When we get back, let's take on some missions and climb the rankings! Captain will be aiming for the top!"

As for the message from the Awakener Department—it had long been tossed aside by her.

...

The news of an S7-level powerful attacker appearing at the Northern Base quickly spread.

The first to react was Tokushima.

Videos of Song Ke saving people, stopping the bus, and beating up Lei Zhao and Yuko Noguma were laid out on the conference table of the B15 District's high-level meeting.

“Let's hear everyone's thoughts.”

“So far, she's the first publicly known S7-level in the entire Alliance. Both her reaction speed and explosive power are top-notch. But I have a question: if the information is correct, she's a powerful attack-type, right? But her physical abilities are unusually off the charts? She single-handedly caught a subway weighing several thousand tons, almost comparable to the strength of an S-level physical enhancement-type awakener.”

“Can we get a report on her awakened abilities?”

“It's quite difficult. Reports on S-level awakeners are well-hidden by that old witch.”

“Send a spy to try. Also, I heard she came from a lower-level district and doesn't have much attachment to the Northern Base. It's best to recruit her.”

“Yes!”

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District A1, Central Court.

The reporter in front of the projection was systematically analyzing the top awakener resources in each district.

“... The overall number of awakens is showing a steady increase... Resource distribution in each district is uneven. Currently, the highest-ranked is the S7-level awakener from B10, Northern Base...”
The scene of Song Ke punching the floating subway and kicking the double-decker bus flashed across the screen.

“Stop.” The official sitting below suddenly spoke.

“Director Park, do you have any instructions?” The reporter asked nervously.

Park Jae-woo, rubbing his chin, began to contemplate. “This awakener looks very familiar...”

He gradually revealed a realization. Oh, isn't this the one from the time when Bloody Hunter Punk was killed in Mu City? The owner of that rabid dog, who still acts like he has rabies, is now chasing him down, insisting that he hand over the footage from that time.

“I want to have a conversation with the person in charge of District B10,” Park Jae-woo instructed.

“Is it General Ye?” The secretary beside him instinctively asked.

Park Jae-woo smiled faintly without answering.

The secretary realized and said, “Alright, I'll contact Commander He right away.”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 143.1: Fire Seed (12)

V587 escorts you

With a deadline of one month, as long as the ranking is not in the last 1%, one can stay—though this applies to ordinary teams.

V587, as a lively, free-spirited, united, and friendly rising star team, not only had the wise leadership of an S-level captain but also the strong support of four A-level backbone members and two talented and mysterious family members. Their goal was to charge to the front row!

However, before being the “wise leader of the team,” Song Ke had to settle some debts.

For example—owing Lu Xiaoyu 270 grams.

Lu Xiaoyu had set his sights on a rhenium block with a purity of over 90% in the black market, and because it was a rare item, it was currently being publicly auctioned online. Bidders needed not only substantial financial resources but also exceptional speed.

Song Ke crouched beside him, reluctantly clutching her money pouch. It was the first time she had seen Lu Xiaoyu so busy. Six mechanical arms simultaneously controlled six screens displaying densely refreshing data. Lu Xiaoyu was constantly tapping on the terminal with a clattering sound. According to Lu Xiaoyu himself, he had implanted an automatic bidding system in the background, capable of jumping thousands of times in a minute.

In the ultra-high-definition projection, the auctioneer eloquently introduced the item.

Song Ke paid no attention to what he was saying, staring intently at the large screen with continuously jumping numbers: 1 million, 2 million, 3 million...

“Ding—” The golden auction hammer finally fell.

“How is it?” Song Ke asked nervously.

“We got it,” Lu Xiaoyu proudly replied, lifting his chin. His silver hair tips brushed against his neck, and a unique light called “happiness” flashed in his distinctive pupils.

“Pay up, Captain.”

Song Ke glanced at the final bid on the big screen, her voice trembling, “Lu Xiaoyu, do we, do we really have to buy it?”

Lu Xiaoyu’s wheelchair “swooshed” to the front of Song Ke, staring at her without blinking. “Zhuang Qingyan said you would buy it for me.”

There was an irresistible focus in his gaze, like a stubborn child pestering an adult for candy. If you didn’t buy it for him, he would keep nagging, seizing every opportunity to ask for it.

Song Ke took a glance at his empty pants leg. Besides mechanical parts, Lu Xiaoyu never actively asked for anything. If he wanted a new and fancy leg, what else could she do as his team captain?

She gritted her teeth, “Buy it!”

Song Ke, with a righteous demeanor, pulled out her terminal and swiped it. The deduction prompt sounded: “You have spent 3,300,000 Alliance Coins from your account ending in xxxx.”

3.3 million! Not 330 Alliance coins! For such a tiny amount! This wasn’t a rhenium block; it was clearly a gold-devouring beast!

Not only was her money pouch emptied, but a part of Song Ke’s soul also seemed to be hollowed out in a trance.

Lu Xiaoyu enthusiastically started purchasing new parts, his joy being so simple and unpretentious that a mere 3.3 million could satisfy him.

Song Ke rested her chin on the bar, wearing a look of despair. Zhuang Qingyan passed by and casually asked, “How much did you spend?”

Song Ke slowly raised the terminal to show him.

“Hmm, it’s about the same as what I calculated,” Zhuang Qingyan commented.

Song Ke suddenly realized; no wonder Zhuang Qingyan insisted on only buying 270 grams for him. Even a substantial family fortune couldn’t withstand Lu Xiaoyu’s extravagant spending.

Zhuang Qingyan leaned in close and whispered in her ear, “I won’t let you suffer a loss. This is called casting a long line to catch big fish. Give him a little sweetener, and later, I’ll help you recover the cost with interest.”

Song Ke: “...”

She sneakily glanced at Lu Xiaoyu, silently lighting a candle for him in her heart. Why does he have a friend like Zhuang Qingyan? It’s really an unfortunate choice of friends, too pitiful.

The next day, Lu Xiaoyu spent the whole day in his room, busy working on the new arm.

Among the six mechanical arms, one was noticeably different, with a silver-white appearance similar to a starship, polished to a dazzling shine.

“Other than being good-looking, is there any other difference with this one?” Fang Zhixu asked with a curious expression.

Lu Xiaoyu’s rhenium arm flew out with a swoosh, touching the terminals of Fang Zhixu, Su Cha, and Lin Youyou in turn. Then, magically, the browsing records from the previous night appeared before everyone:

Fang Zhixu repeatedly watched some precious old photos and videos, all related to him, Zhang Wanyao, and Tiantian.

Su Cha was diligently studying the public lessons of the Alliance Combat Master, information he didn’t have access to back in Ferrara.

As for Lin Youyou... she was chatting with Jennifer. To win the favor of the beautiful woman, Jennifer, without any hesitation, spilled the beans about her Daddy, Yin Xiao, confessing and failing miserably. The two of them were enjoying the gossip to the fullest.

Lin Youyou supported her forehead, gritting her teeth, and muttered, "...Lu Xiaoyu, leave some privacy for people!"

She glanced at Su Cha, who was diligently studying even before going to sleep, feeling inexplicably guilty.

After Lu Xiaoyu showcased the new features, he finally answered Fang Zhixu's question, "Rhenium has a hexagonal close-packed crystal structure, outstanding mechanical properties, and, when made into an alloy, it can become a superconductor. By combining my ability with the mechanical arm, it now functions as a powerful hacking interface, capable of connecting to any machine with basic computing capabilities."

"Any machine? Even a starship?" Zhuang Qingyan suddenly spoke up.

Everyone paused, wondering what he meant.

"The latest model of starships in District B, can it connect to them?" Zhuang Qingyan asked again.

Their current missions were limited to the vicinity of the Northern Base due to transportation and time constraints. If they could switch to the fastest District B starship, it would save a lot of travel time and expand their mission choices.

"No way! Are you planning to steal a starship?" Lin Youyou exclaimed. Wasn't that too audacious? They had just arrived at the Northern Base, and now they were making such a big move?

"How can you call it stealing? We're borrowing it; we'll return it," Zhuang Qingyan corrected.

V587: "...” Shameless, so shameless.

*

Northern Base, the busy starship station.

A newly maintained and pristine starship slowly emerged from the energy column, gliding smoothly on the track, about to enter the station to pick up passengers.

A group of seven people wearing masks and hats passed by. Men and women, old and young, two young men were in wheelchairs, a girl held a skipping child’s hand, appearing as if they were joyfully heading out for an excursion.

As they passed the starship not yet carrying passengers, a silver-white mechanical arm suddenly appeared in the air. It touched the charging port briefly, and the control panel inside the starship flickered for a second, silently changing its original route and switching to high-orbit mode, heading towards an empty platform.

At the same time, the station’s floating screen automatically issued an error alert: “C1011 train detected a malfunction, signal lost!”

A silver-haired young man slightly tilted his head upward, his ice-blue eyes sparkling with scattered light as the flowing data invaded the panel.

Half a second later, the floating screen automatically corrected the information: “Malfunction cleared, today’s weather: clear.”

The starship’s cabin door opened, and the seven individuals who had just passed by walked in without any concern, disappearing into the sky after a moment.

It was like any other calm and peaceful morning.

Except for the passengers waiting on the original platform, looking utterly bewildered: where was their car? They bought tickets, so why was the car gone?

*

Yin Xiao pulled Song Ke into a channel with a somewhat peculiar name. Although the name was odd, the quality of the tasks inside was indeed much higher than the ones pushed by the system. Moreover, they quickly received a mission they desired:

“A-level Commission (urgent): In District C27, a large-scale zombie tide has occurred. Detected zombie quantities are as follows: 3rd-level zombies xx, 2nd-level zombies xxxx, and mutant zombies xxxx. Nearby awakeners are requested to immediately provide support. Depending on the number of zombies killed, different amounts of points and Alliance coins rewards can be obtained.”

Killing zombies, this was undoubtedly their specialty as V587.

Four engines simultaneously spewed out streams of air, and the silver meteor flashed across the sky.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 143.2: Fire Seed (12)

V587 escorts you

Rainbow Mist was a typical karst landscape, with the central city located at the summit of a plateau surrounded by undulating green terraces. However, at this moment, a multitude of zombies had piled up in layers, crawling upward. In this critical situation, numerous awakeners rushed from all directions, joining the battlefield one after another.

Although this wave of zombie tide was formidable, fortunately, there was no commander, making it incomparable to the zombie king encounter that Song Ke and the others had experienced.

The starship’s cabin door opened, and in the brisk morning wind, V587 arrived above the battlefield.

Song Ke and Su Cha, the two melee fighters, descended low into the center of the most densely packed powered zombies, slashing through them like a whirlwind.

Lin Youyou promptly applied buffs, boosting the speed and strength of the two. With death scythe-like spiritual weapons in their hands, they rapidly harvested zombies.

Xu Xing, with his victory headband on, performed movements resembling radio calisthenics. As he raised his arms and kicked his legs, countless ice blades swept through the air, accurately piercing through the zombies' heads. His efficiency in killing monsters was the highest among them.

Lu Xiaoyu controlled one of the mechanical arms to move the starship and brought out a heavy machine gun purchased from the black market, firing alongside Zhuang Qingyan in the high sky.

In a section of the monster group, Song Ke occupied a small high ground. As she looked down at the densely packed living dead below, she raised her hand slightly. Just as she was about to take action, her terminal suddenly beeped. Song Ke dismissed it, but the other party switched to voice bombardment. Song Ke lightly clicked her tongue; can't they see she's busy?

Glancing at the sender, it was another official message from the Awakener Department. They had changed personnel several times in the past few days, harassing her daily and requesting her to undergo "further examination." Annoyed, Song Ke added it to the blacklist and activated the "Do Not Disturb" mode, finally bringing peace to her terminal.

Immediately afterward, her palm moved slightly, and a high-speed shooting longbow appeared.

"Su Cha, lend me some ability."

Su Cha flipped over with one hand, gripped the bowstring, and unleashed his awakened energy. The ethereal blue surface of the bow instantly flashed a cold quenching green; this was a newly developed attack method after the two of them dealt with the mutated moths in the U-Lab laboratory.

Song Ke took a step back, pulled the bow, aimed, and released—

Ding! The arrow shot through the head of a level 3 zombie.

She pulled the bow again, another arrow, still a level 3 zombie.

Arrow after arrow, each shot found its mark. Song Ke specifically targeted level 3 zombies, and under the powerful penetration and the dual impact of strong neurotoxins, even robust level 3 zombies instantly perished, without any chance of fighting back.

In the terraced fields, Fang Zhixu carried a black mountaineering bag and, like a scout, swiftly followed Song Ke's shooting path. He ran to the fallen level 3 zombies, cleanly sliced open their skulls, and extracted crystals.

It sounded absurd when spoken out loud—why would the healer of V587 also join the battlefield?

The reason given by others was: because of Fang Zhixu's unique physique and precise knife skills, he was entrusted with the most important task—collecting crystals.

Song Ke encouraged him with a pat on the shoulder, "Don't worry, I'll protect you."

Xu Xing grinned, "Uncle Fang, you should exercise more~"

The awakeners on the battlefield were stunned by their skillful maneuvers:

"Damn! Where did those people come from?"

"They're targeting evolved zombies and mutant zombies specifically. Are they here to score points?"

"Secretary Li, I need to know all the information about this team within a minute!"

After resolving the crisis of the zombie tide in Rainbow Mist, V587 hastily headed to the next location.

“A-level Commission (privately issued): Escort mission, please ensure the safe return of Mr. Zhang and his family from the Yinqola Shelter to B13, Baishen.”

This kind of private mission was a rare and highly sought-after opportunity. The issuer needed to pay a considerable deposit on the mission platform and determine the mission’s difficulty level. Although points could only be calculated based on the lowest limit after determining the level, the significant feature was the generous Alliance coin reward.

As for Mr. Zhang, whether he was naive with money and a beautiful soul or just wealthy and generous, he surprisingly posted an A-level mission!

Zhuang Qingyan was right. Lu Xiaoyu, having tasted the sweetness, was indeed full of enthusiasm and managed to secure this rare mission using the newly upgraded cheats.

...

At the entrance of the Yinqola Shelter, Mr. Zhang paced anxiously.

A group of awakeners wearing matching tactical suits approached him.

“Excuse me, are you Mr. Zhang, the client?” a gentle female voice rang out.

Mr. Zhang looked up in surprise, and the speaker was a delicate woman with flowing long hair.

“You are...” Mr. Zhang’s expression showed doubt.

Snap! Suddenly, the people in front of him stood at attention, loudly shouting a slogan:

“Thousands of miles away from home, the original heart remains unswayed, V587 assists you in setting sail for a distant journey!” Xu Xing excitedly recited his lines.

“Worry-free throughout the journey, thorough protection, V587 ensures your safe journey.” Su Cha’s sorrow is greater than death.

“V587, the most reliable guardian in the entire Alliance, escorts your travels,” Zhuang Qingyan summarized with a grin, hands resting on his stomach.

Song Ke stood behind everyone, arms crossed, nodding in satisfaction.

Indeed, these were the slogans she had thought hard about. Very good, very impressive.

Mr. Zhang: “...”

These people were all flashy, but were they reliable? He explicitly requested at least two A-level awakeners!

“Which route are we taking back?” Mr. Zhang tentatively asked.

From the Yinqola Shelter to Baishen, most cities along the way had already been destroyed. Therefore, Mr. Zhang’s family didn’t dare to travel alone.

If this group couldn’t provide a good solution, he would definitely complain to the platform!

“Respected Money Bag... cough, client, your Dadao special car is ready,” Song Ke said with a straight face.

Mr. Zhang looked in the direction she pointed, staring blankly for a moment. He saw a sparkling starship parked not far away.

These people could actually get a starship?! And it was the latest model from District B. Can starships be privately used?

Mr. Zhang and his family boarded the starship with dreamy expressions. Even hours later, stepping onto the land of Baishen, they still couldn't believe it.

This... they arrived already?

...

As night fell, the seven of them stayed in Baishen for the night. During that time, Zhuang Qingyan went out for a bit, and the next day, they resumed their journey to accumulate points.

After three full days of continuous effort, V587's points surged significantly, currently ranking around 60%.

Three days later, on a rare rest day.

Northern Base, Garden Apartments.

At five in the morning, Song Ke's hair was messy as she got up dreamily to have a drink of water. Having received three A-level missions yesterday, everyone was as tired as Taotao.

She closed her eyes and, in a state of unclear consciousness, groped her way back to the bedside. Accidentally kicking the trash can, she lowered her head and saw that it was full.

Song Ke's eyes glazed over, and after two seconds of contemplation, she decided to go downstairs to take out the trash.

Wearing pajamas and sleep pants, she had just walked out of the apartment door when someone called her name from behind.

“Song Ke?”

A man and a woman stood side by side under the trees, resembling each other. The woman looked her up and down, while the man glanced at her, taking out a terminal to check the recording.

Song Ke felt that the two seemed a bit familiar and, after a while, slowly recalled that they were the S6-level twins, Ling Yan and Ling Yue.

After Ling Yue called her, two more unfamiliar awakeners appeared behind her. The four of them inconspicuously blocked her way.

Song Ke’s gaze focused, and she instantly became clear-headed. Judging from the awakened energy released externally, these two were also S-level!

Ling Yue sighed, “You are really hard to find.”

Song Ke asked, “What?”

Ling Yue pointed to her own dark circles and cursed in the Cario Empire’s common language.

“The position is constantly changing, and the entire Alliance is in chaos. We’ve been staking out for three whole days, not even getting a wink of sleep.”

“Stake out on me? Why?” Song Ke was puzzled.

“We want to invite you to go somewhere.”

As soon as the words fell, Ling Yan and Ling Yue both acted simultaneously, instantly clearing all objects around Song Ke, including the trash bag in her hand.

The next second, Song Ke found that all the radiation nearby had disappeared, similar to the situation she had encountered below the 7th floor of the Death Prison. Her awakened energy couldn't resonate, and she couldn't use her abilities! At the same time, her hands and feet were tightly restrained by an unknown force, and she couldn't make a sound.

This was... a restraining-type ability? Territory-type ability?

Song Ke suddenly looked up; it was the other two S-level individuals who had taken action.

The twins captured Song Ke's arms from the left and right, effortlessly lifting her up.

Song Ke's feet left the ground, and a question mark slowly appeared in her head. What were these people up to? A fight? It didn't seem like it.

"Sorry, sorry!" Another A-level awakener rushed out, clasping his hands together and bowing repeatedly to Song Ke. "We have no ill intentions. It's just a last resort. The Awakener Department tried to contact you, but you didn't respond to messages, didn't answer calls, and even blocked location tracking. Commander He gave a strict order – today, no matter what, we must bring you back."

Song Ke blinked slowly. Commander He Qiu Hong wanted to see her?

If that's the case, why not just meet and talk? Why resort to physical actions right away? Sending four S-level individuals in such a big fuss was unnecessary. Really unnecessary. Also, could they let her change her clothes...

A strong spatial fluctuation occurred, and the five individuals disappeared from the original location.

...

Half an hour later, Zhuang Qingyan lazily leaned against the door, knocking on Song Ke's room.

"Knock, knock," he announced, "Captain, it's time to go."

No one responded.

He changed his posture, casually tidied his hair, and knocked twice again. “Song Ke, don’t think about staying in bed.”

Inside, it was quiet as if there was no one there.

Zhuang Qingyan furrowed his brows slightly, the careless expression on his face gradually disappearing. He twisted the doorknob open. “I’m coming in.”

The bedroom was empty.

Zhuang Qingyan took two quick steps, reaching out to touch the bed. The palm of his hand felt icy.

His expression remained relatively calm, but his eyes revealed a storm. The awakened energy belonging to an S-level spread out like a dark cloud, a sign of an impending tempest. In the invisible space, a faint trace of not-yet dissipated spatial ability lingered.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 144.1: Fire Seed (13)

Who kidnapped Song Ke?

“What?”

“What—the—?!”

“Song Ke’er was kidnapped???”

Shouts, escalating in volume, echoed through the entire Garden Apartment building.

Just after finishing packing up, getting ready to enjoy a day off, the entire V587 team was in a state of confusion.

Xu Xing, carrying a small yellow duck backpack, rushed into Song Ke's room, opened the curtains, opened the wardrobe, and even stubbornly bent over to look under the bed: "Sister—!!"

"Our Song Ke'er, the dignified S7-level attack-type awakener, undefeated in direct confrontations, you're saying she was... kidnapped?"

Lin Youyou incredulously pinched her own cheek and, in passing, pinched Su Cha's thigh. She still doubted her ears, finding this whole thing unbelievable.

"No, are you two intentionally messing with us, you lovebirds? Where did Song Ke'er hide to slack off?"

Su Cha remained composed despite being pinched, instead gently pushing Lin Youyou's back, indicating her to look at someone.

Lin Youyou raised her gaze and, upon seeing the expression on that person's face, instantly fell silent.

Zhuang Qingyan's complexion could no longer be described as unpleasant. Leaning against the bar with one hand in his pocket, he held the terminal that Song Ke had left at the bedside. His long crow-like eyelashes hung low, lost in thought, silent to a somewhat eerie extent.

Zhuang Qingyan, to put it nicely, had a naturally large heart, showing no emotions of joy or anger. To be blunt, he was cold-hearted and cold-lunged, with a detached demeanor. Due to his high intelligence, he lacked interest in almost everything, and his true thoughts were impossible to fathom.

While others joined V587 due to being lonely and wandering with nowhere to go or having unfulfilled wishes, Zhuang Qingyan was the first to meet Song Ke. Since their first encounter, he had been in a wheelchair due to a leg injury, and he was the only person "without a goal." No one knew what he was thinking or what he intended to do.

This was the first time Lin Youyou saw Zhuang Qingyan in a state of rage, and yes—rage.

Even though he remained silent now, with a calm and pale expression, everyone could feel the terrifying pressure emanating from him. It was a level of suppression belonging to the S-level, amplified by his awakened psychic abilities, easily inducing a chilling sense of tremor.

Like a precarious live volcano, the calmer he appeared now, the more shocking his eruption would be.

“The surveillance footage has been retrieved,” Lu Xiaoyu said.

A clear image appeared on the projection, and everyone quickly shifted their gaze.

At five in the morning, Song Ke, wearing pajamas and sleep pants, holding a garbage bag, yawned and walked out, kicking and stepping along the way. After leaving the apartment gate, she turned into a shaded area of trees and never came out again.

“Fixed-point camera, conveniently in a blind spot of the surveillance.” Lu Xiaoyu enlarged the footage, rotated the angle, but the situation under the tree shade couldn’t be captured.

He switched to other cameras in the community, patrolling one by one. Half an hour passed since Song Ke disappeared, and apart from a few regularly entering and exiting AI property personnel, there were no other suspicious figures.

This made the kidnapping case even more puzzling. Without any movement, a person disappeared into thin air?

Su Cha said coldly, “The other party scouted in advance, came prepared.”

Zhuang Qingyan’s hoarse voice sounded, “She didn’t resist immediately, indicating that the intruder is not a stranger.”

Everyone was stunned.

“You mean, Song Ke knows the kidnapper?” Lin Youyou whispered.

“Not necessarily familiar, but at least they’ve met, confirming that the other party is not an adversary.”

If the kidnapper was a stranger and showed malice, given Song Ke’s vigilance, she wouldn’t sit idly but would immediately counterattack. In that case, the degree of commotion in the apartment would have been impossible for others to miss.

Zhuang Qingyan tightened his fingertips. “To silently take her away, the culprit must be an awakener, and... probably of the control type.”

“The captain is S-level,” Su Cha reminded abruptly.

At first, this statement seemed inexplicable, but the group quickly grasped the implication: Indeed! Song Ke is S-level; to control her, the other side must be at least S-level!

“Probably more than one,” Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes revealed a mocking smile. “If I were the one orchestrating from behind, to ensure nothing goes wrong, I would send out two, three, even four... at any cost.”

As the reasoning deepened, the truth of Song Ke’s kidnapping gradually surfaced, but the answers became increasingly absurd.

In the Northern Base, who could mobilize two or more S-level awakener? Everyone vaguely had an answer in their hearts—the deputy leader of District B10, the highest official of the Awakener Department they had encountered briefly.

Lin Youyou frowned. “Did He Qihong make a move?”

Fang Zhixu couldn’t understand, “Wasn’t her attitude good before? Why did she suddenly turn hostile?”

“I think this is the reason.” Zhuang Qingyan pointed to the little bee terminal. Song Ke hadn’t set any permissions, and he effortlessly opened it.

Zhuang Qingyan had already checked through it. He released the Awakener Department officials from the blacklist and opened those unread bombardment messages in front of everyone, stopping his fingertips on the words “Further Inspection.”

In the past three days, V587 had been busy with missions non-stop, not even having time to talk. Given Song Ke’s personality, she probably forgot about this or treated it as simple harassment messages.

Zhuang Qingyan said in a deep voice, “There’s an issue with Song Ke’s awakener report.”

Everyone was genuinely shocked, “What issue?”

“The returned report is missing pages, and someone deliberately erased information about the gene sequence and radiation stability.”

Zhuang Qingyan had noticed the abnormality in the report earlier, but those two items were routine checks, not directly related to ability awakening. So, even though he suspected that He Qihong was hiding something, it didn’t attract enough attention.

“I made a mistake,” Zhuang Qingyan sighed. “He Qihong must have noticed something was wrong, but she couldn’t confirm it. She could only temporarily suppress it and find an opportunity to verify it with Song Ke.”

Repeatedly urging her to undergo the examination indicated that this matter was crucial to He Qihong, important enough for her to risk confronting a powerful S-level.

“What if they found out Song Ke is a dual-class awakener and want to capture her for study?” Fang Zhixu asked anxiously.

V587 internally knew about Song Ke's S-level dual-class abilities, but they had kept it a secret externally, never mentioning a word about it.

Zhuang Qingyan clenched the terminal and slowly shook his head, "Dual-class awakened abilities cannot be detected by instruments."

"In theory, dual-class awakened abilities are divided into dominant and recessive. For example, Punk's bloody explosion is a dominant ability, and time reversal is recessive. On the same temporal axis, a coordinate point cannot possess two different awakened abilities. This means that Punk cannot simultaneously trigger bloody explosions and time reversal. When facing instrument checks, he can actively choose which ability to reveal, which is why it could be concealed for so long."

"Song Ke's second ability is related to the rapid healing of the body, a passive ability within the recessive category. Unless her heart is severely damaged, even an R-type won't be able to detect it."

It was because Zhuang Qingyan understood the functionality of R-type that he felt at ease letting Song Ke undergo genetic testing.

Fang Zhixu became even more puzzled, "But if it's not because of the dual-class... why would He Qihong want to kidnap her?"

Zhuang Qingyan couldn't figure out what issues those two routine indicators—gene sequence and radiation stability—could have. What secrets could be hiding on Song Ke's body that even he couldn't discover?

Lin Youyou snapped her fingers, bringing everyone's attention back, "Now that the kidnapper has been identified, how do we rescue her?"

Even if not explicitly stated, they all understood implicitly. Song Ke was the soul of V587, the core that brought them together. Lin Youyou didn't ask "Do we rescue her?" but rather "How do we rescue her?"

"Daring to kidnap my sister, I'll definitely kill them!" With Song Ke absent, Xu Xing's young lion's claws were exposed, and his angelic, innocent face was covered in dark clouds.

“Should we just break into the Awakener Department building?” Fang Zhixu absentmindedly rubbed his chin, his thoughts involuntarily turning more violent.

“Not feasible,” Lu Xiaoyu decisively opposed, “Did you forget the safety education videos we watched?”

Su Cha’s remark was incisive, “The most important thing now is to confirm the captain’s specific location.”

Zhuang Qingyan’s expression changed slightly. He opened a profile from the terminal and initiated a video call.

The call was quickly answered, and a lively voice came through, “Good morning, Song Ke. Any new requests...”

“Miss Ye, it’s me. Song Ke is missing,” Zhuang Qingyan coldly interrupted her.

A look of obvious astonishment appeared on Ye Zimei’s face.

Zhuang Qingyan’s next words directly dismantled her composure, “Do you think she would be at the Awakener Department now?”

Ye Zimei: “Huh?”

Although Ye Zimei had a carefree personality, her mind worked quickly. After the initial shock, she quickly calmed down, “Mr. Zhuang, are you suspecting me?”

Zhuang Qingyan: “I am equally suspicious of everyone.”

Ye Zimei: “...”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 144.2: Fire Seed (13)

Who kidnapped Song Ke?

Zhuang Qingyan brazenly hinted, "Miss Ye, why don't you use your permissions to check if there were any unauthorized individuals in the building this morning?"

Ye Zimei took a deep breath and cut the video feed, saying, "Please wait a moment."

A few seconds later, she returned with a decisive tone, "I have confirmed that there is no abnormal entry or exit in the Awakener Department. We are a legitimate and compliant organization. We wouldn't detain an S-level without cause. Why do you think Song Ke would be with us?"

Zhuang Qingyan carefully observed Ye Zimei's subtle expressions. Her face displayed anger, grievance, and the resentment of being misunderstood, appearing completely unaware.

Zhuang Qingyan raised the corner of his lips, devoid of any hint of a smile. He suddenly changed the topic, "What is Commander He busy with today?"

Ye Zimei's anger abruptly stopped, and an idea that made her scalp numb flashed like lightning.

Perhaps... Zhuang Qingyan's true suspicion wasn't directed at her.

"...I apologize, Commander He's schedule is confidential to the outside world," Ye Zimei's voice quieted down. After some thought, she continued, "But she has a tight schedule today, personally attending all the meetings. She wouldn't choose this time... for something like that."

Accused of being involved in a kidnapping early in the morning, Ye Zimei grew increasingly displeased with her thoughts, raising her voice, "Song Ke and V587 were both brought into the Northern Base by me. Rest assured, I will follow up on this matter and give you an explanation."

After saying this, she abruptly ended the communication with a “click.”

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the dark screen and tossed the terminal to Lu Xiaoyu.

“I want information on all S-level awakeners in the Northern Base, including detailed classifications, types of abilities, and... their current locations.”

Lu Xiaoyu didn’t catch the terminal, and a rare trace of hesitation appeared on his face.

Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu were the only two in V587 who hadn’t switched to District B terminals. These two individuals lived like primitive people, one rarely using electronic devices, living like a caveman every day, occasionally borrowing Song Ke’s terminal to catch up on some news. The other immersed himself in various instruments, using only the outdated District C terminal, and in his words — for safety and pollution-free purposes.

Lu Xiaoyu stared at the sparkling little bee, his voice showing no fluctuations, “Are you asking me to establish a deep consciousness connection?”

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, “Yes.”

To crack the location of an S-level awakener, it required breaking through the District B firewall and hacking into the District B network. In other words, Lu Xiaoyu could only accomplish this using the District B terminal.

“...She will find me,” Lu Xiaoyu uttered a mysteriously profound statement.

Zhuang Qingyan remained impassive, “What’s this? Six years ago, you could cripple her during her peak, and now you’re trembling just standing in front of her?”

Lu Xiaoyu’s ice-blue pupils suddenly stood up, the veins on the back of his hand protruding, revealing a sharp combat stance. Zhuang Qingyan confronted him without giving an inch, his eyes resembling the deep mouth of a volcano, ready to spew out scalding lava at any moment.

“Letting you play the driver a few times, messing around with some parts, living in comfort for too long, and you start considering yourself useless?”

“Have you forgotten— you’re also an early awakener.”

The tense atmosphere between the two scared the other members into silence. It felt like if Zhuang Qingyan said one more word, Lu Xiaoyu would break ties with him.

In the dead silence, Zhuang Qingyan asked one word at a time, “In her presence, can you find Song Ke, erase any traces of intrusion, and retreat without a trace? Can you still do that now?”

Lu Xiaoyu’s face showed no expression. Without uttering a word, he picked up the terminal. His chromium arm slightly shimmered as he connected to the data port.

With his movement, the entire living room was covered in a dazzling silver light. Vast amounts of data, like a galaxy, flowed slowly above their heads. It seemed as if everyone had stepped into a virtual world, surrounded by various intricate and jumping lines of code.

Lu Xiaoyu slightly closed his eyes. The silver hair flowed without wind, and with his body as the center, tendrils of data barbarically grew, expanding their territory unscrupulously, gradually occupying every corner of the apartment.

Unable to hold back, Xu Xing mumbled, “He looks like a tree...”

...

In a city far away from the Northern Base,

Inside a spacious greenhouse, the environment was silent, and only a withered giant tree stood. Suddenly, it sensed something, and its roots emitted a cherry blossom-colored glow. A pair of inorganic eyes slowly opened, calm yet ancient, whispering words like a murmur:

“I see you, my child.”

However, the faint light vanished in an instant, quickly fading into the boundless ocean of data, leaving no trace.

Yet, the almost withered giant tree lit up. Its branches rustled, sounding like countless children clapping in joy. Tiny signs of life sprouted, one after another, and a soft cherry blossom glow surged into the sky, enveloping the entire city in a hazy halo of light.

...

Back at the Garden Apartment, Lu Xiaoyu still had his eyes closed. However, apart from Song Ke, the information of the eight other S-level individuals in the Northern Base appeared before him.

Thanks to the special terminal that He Qihong had sent to S-level awakeners and the good habit of carrying it around by B District personnel, under the tracing of the top-level hacker Lu Xiaoyu, the positions of these individuals were nowhere to hide:

- Ken Oda: S2-level Engineering-type, located ten kilometers away in the Ocean District.

- Ling Yan and Ling Yue: S6-level Double Attack-type, located in the Awakener Department building. Today happened to be their regular reporting day.

- Zhao Yuqing: S2-level Water-type, located a few thousand kilometers away in District C.

- Zhigler: S3-level Constraint-type, located somewhere in the city.

- Xi Ze: S3-level Domain-type, located somewhere in the city.

Two unknown S-level individuals: Located at the Governor’s Mansion, where the firewall level was the highest. Lu Xiaoyu didn’t bother continuing to crack it because the answer was already clear.

Zhigler and Xi Ze, one with constraint ability and the other with domain ability, were currently in the same location. Typically, S-level individuals would have a sense of territory. Unless like the Ling siblings, who were twins, they rarely gathered together outside of missions.

Various scenarios of the two coordinating their abilities to catch Song Ke off guard immediately surfaced in Zhuang Qingyan's mind.

“Where is this?” he asked with a deep voice.

“The map doesn't have a label, only showing it's a controlled area. Risk level: H (High Risk),” Lu Xiaoyu replied.

Zhuang Qingyan stood upright, exhaling a long breath.

“Let's go.”

“Captain has always been the one to save us, but this time, it's our turn to save the Captain.”

Su Cha carried a box of spiritual weapons out of the room and quickly attached them to his arms and legs. Fang Zhixu pulled out several bags of hot weapons specifically purchased for completing missions, clumsily attempting to assemble them. Lu Xiaoyu took over silently and, with six arms moving in unison, quickly assembled the weapons.

Zhuang Qingyan led the five of them out of the apartment, and the others followed behind him, keenly aware of one thing:

—He wasn't in a wheelchair.

*

Brightly lit laboratory.

Song Ke's arms were being carried by the twins, gliding through the long corridor. Since she couldn't escape for the time being, she decided to close her eyes and pretend to sleep.

She appeared to be asleep, but in reality, she deliberately let the enemy relax their guard, secretly using her awakened energy to sense any movements outside.

After a while, Song Ke was brought into a sealed capsule. Inside, it was empty with no furniture; even the tables and chairs were absent. The personnel here were informed that she could use transformations with her ability, so they cleared the space in advance.

Ling Yue opened the terminal across the transparent glass, and on the other end of the line, a holographic image of He Qihong appeared:

“Song Ke, I have another meeting. To keep it short, Dr. Ning is an expert in genetic engineering. He will conduct a comprehensive examination on you while ensuring your personal safety. Please cooperate in any case.”

He Qihong, accustomed to being in a superior position, employed a mix of soft and hard approaches in her speech, leaving Song Ke somewhat speechless.

In her mind, Song Ke couldn't help but sneer: Cooperate? You've already captured me, and there's an S-level eyeing me. How is this not considered “cooperating”?

After He Qihong finished speaking, she quickly ended the communication, appearing genuinely busy.

With the Ling siblings having completed their task and leaving gracefully, only Zhigler and Xi Ze remained at the scene. The two of them intertwined their abilities, showing no signs of interruption. They guarded Song Ke vigilantly from the outside.

After lingering in place for a moment, Song Ke slowly yawned and sat down, cross-legged.

Feeling bored, she looked around, left and right. Suddenly, a glint of light flashed across the corner of her eye. Song Ke paused slightly, then suddenly lifted her head. In the completely sealed and narrow space, a glaring light shone from above, and a bright red dot flickered intermittently in the high air. It was the light from a surveillance camera.

Song Ke stared at it intently for a while, somewhat in a daze. Her pupils gradually contracted due to the strong light, and in the all-white background, her two eyes appeared remarkably black.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 145.1: Fire Seed (14)

The master of the Northern Base

The laboratory door automatically opened to both sides, and a group of researchers in white robes entered, led by a middle-aged man with graying temples.

He seemed to have not slept for a long time, with a tired complexion and two large dark circles under his eyes.

His assistant respectfully called him, "Dr. Ning."

Through the glass, Dr. Ning glanced at Song Ke sitting on the ground, lowered his head to review the awakener report on the screen.

After a few seconds, he looked up again. When facing her in person, Song Ke appeared completely normal. No one would think that the radiation level in her body exceeded that of an ordinary person by twenty times. It was as if she carried a nuclear bomb but casually wandered around.

Dr. Ning pressed the intercom button and calmly said, "I will conduct radiation endurance tests on you. I heard you are S7 level?"

Song Ke's dark pupils stared at him, "Yes."

Dr. Ning nodded with satisfaction, "Very well, your physical fitness is up to par. The experiment process may be a bit tough, so try to endure as much as possible. Your vital signs will be monitored throughout. If you really can't handle it, just raise your hand, and I will stop."

Hypocrite, Song Ke rolled her eyes.

Dr. Ning didn't mind, "Let's begin."

In the capsule compartment, four built-in radiofrequency lamps above lit up, causing Song Ke to instinctively squint.

Dr. Ning waited in place for a moment, "Report the radiation level."

"23%, 35%, 41%, 48%!" The assistant's voice gradually changed tone.

No wonder he was surprised; this data had already exceeded their highest record. At that time, the test subject was a Fallen, and the critical point was only 47.75%.

Song Ke sat quietly in the capsule compartment, as if she couldn't feel the changes in radiation at all. Nausea, vomiting, bleeding, and symptoms of decay that should have appeared were all absent.

Dr. Ning turned to look at the resonance spectrum analyzer. According to the image display, the organs in Song Ke's body were functioning normally. The only noteworthy thing was that the massive radiation that had originally existed in her body seemed to be slowly flowing, greedily absorbing energy.

"Awakened energy report."

"Stably maintained at 12,000."

For an S7-level awakener, normal awakened energy fluctuated between 8,000 and 13,000. In other words, the current increase in radiation had no obvious effect on Song Ke's awakened energy.

Dr. Ning calmly ordered, "Increase the radiation level."

The assistant manipulated the instruments with trembling nerves, not daring to make the slightest mistake. Following Dr. Ning's instructions, he adjusted the values to 50%, then raised them to 90% after a few cycles, briefly paused at 100%, and finally skyrocketed to 120%.

"Stop," Dr. Ning raised his hand.

Song Ke felt a faint discomfort, not from the increasingly strong radiation, but from the oppressive atmosphere created by the surroundings – the glaring rays above, the flickering red lights, and the white-robed researchers coming and going. Her eyes lost focus, and hallucinatory symptoms gradually appeared, with voices in her ears screaming hysterically, like the cries of a desperate animal.

Taking a deep breath, Song Ke stood up irritably, covering her ears with both hands, pacing back and forth in the narrow space.

"Record: Radiation exceeds 120%. The experimental—the target shows obvious anxiety, pacing back and forth. DNA double strands normal, organs functioning normally, awakened energy... huh?" Dr. Ning's eyes showed a hint of surprise. "Awakened energy value: 14,000."

The assistants nearby collectively gasped. Not only did the target remain unscathed under the current terrifying level of radiation, but her surging awakened energy had already reached S8 level!

Dr. Ning's eyes gleamed mysteriously. He clenched the screen tightly, unable to resist taking large strides forward until his nose almost touched the glass.

"Record: Radiation exceeds 120%. The target shows second awakening symptoms."

"Increase the radiation level!"

“Doctor...” the assistant trembled as he reminded, “Exceeds 130%, the scale is maxed out.”

The machine they were currently using had limited instruments, with the highest scale being 130%. Astonishingly, though the machine had reached its limit, this extraordinary individual named Song Ke seemed to have no upper limit to her radiation tolerance.

Song Ke’s discomfort intensified. Under the intense radiation, her entire body felt like it was burning, her skin ached, cells died in large numbers, only to regenerate quickly. Something seemed eager to burst out and take control of her body. Song Ke’s limbs spasmed, and she staggered forward.

Bang!

With a deafening roar, Song Ke raised her fist and smashed it against the glass. Crimson blood flowed down, and although the glass didn’t shatter due to its special material, the entire laboratory floor shook violently. The researchers outside were frightened by her momentum, retreating in succession.

Tiny blood vessels appeared in the corners of Song Ke’s eyes. Her dark pupils, without blinking, were fixed on the people in white robes outside.

Dr. Ning glanced at the spectrum analyzer, observing her body greedily absorbing radiation, and all organ indices were in a chaotic state.

“Stop,” Dr. Ning ordered.

The assistant pressed the pause button, relieved.

Dr. Ning spoke slowly, “Record: Radiation exceeds 130%. The target’s anxiety intensifies, emotions approach losing control, awakened energy value... 18,000.”

Silence engulfed the surroundings.

“Gulp—” After a while, the sound of someone forcibly swallowing saliva was clearly heard.

What did 18,000 mean? That theoretically placed her at S9 level. If Song Ke wished, she could not only crush them like ants but effortlessly destroy an entire city.

After the radiation in the capsule compartment stabilized, Song Ke’s awakened energy slowly returned to 12,000, and other values returned to normal.

“Release the nutrient solution,” Dr. Ning whispered.

A hidden opening in the ceiling revealed itself, and a bag of liquid substance landed on the ground with a soft thud.

Song Ke didn’t touch it. She resembled a cold and vigilant young beast, curled up in the corner, observing each person with her pitch-black eyes.

Dr. Ning fell into contemplation, his expression unusually hesitant.

“Professor? Is there a problem?” the assistant asked.

“Her constitution is too special. Can we persuade her to cooperate with us for long-term experiments?” Dr. Ning inquired.

“Director He said... this ‘examination’ was a one-time thing,” the assistant cautiously reminded. “After all, she’s an S7-level superpower, and it’s already quite rare to ‘invite’ her once.”

While the assistant expressed this sentiment, internally, he silently criticized: Although the examination was requested by Director He, you, old man, are really lacking in courtesy. You came straight to perform a radiation test without even a proper greeting. If this S7-level individual doesn’t come after you for retribution, it’s already benevolent.

Dr. Ning also felt the hope was faint, “Then ask Director He to switch to a machine with a higher scale.”

“Now?” the assistant asked.

Dr. Ning’s expression remained unchanged, “If she wants results, it has to be now.”

Before the assistant could react, several security-uniformed awakeners rushed in.

“Dr. Ning, the laboratory is under attack! Please evacuate immediately!”

“Attack?” Dr. Ning repeated incredulously, “When you invited me here, didn’t you say that the security level was second only to the Awakener Department?”

*

Outside the laboratory, the fully armed V587 was tearing through the defenses.

In the storm of howling winds, the disorienting mist of bladed fog, and the elusive shadows of an assassin, various dazzling awakened abilities accurately struck the crowd. Despite numerous high-level awakeners guarding the area, this reckless six-person squad continued its unstoppable assault.

“How much longer?” Zhuang Qingyan asked.

“Two minutes,” Lu Xiaoyu replied.

The protective door of this laboratory was made of special materials, impervious to water and fire. A slash with a blade only left faint marks on it. Lu Xiaoyu quickly bypassed the firewall. Two minutes later, the door opened a narrow gap, and V587 repelled the security rushing out, swiftly entering.

“Time is limited. The Awakener Department has received the message; reinforcements are expected to arrive in ten minutes,” Lu Xiaoyu reminded.

“Find her first.” Zhuang Qingyan decisively led them straight to the laboratory. They caught He Qihong off guard, and once she reacted, it wouldn’t be so easy for them to escape.

In the bright corridor, security personnel shouted desperately, “Hurry! Go inform Dr. Ning to evacuate!”

A gust of wind passed, and the person shouting fell to the ground, writhing in agony. In his consciousness, there was a tearing pain.

A young man in black clothes and pants crouched down, coldly staring at him.

“The Dr. Ning you mentioned, could it be... Dr. Ning Rong?” Zhuang Qingyan asked indifferently.

The security officer’s face showed clear astonishment, as if saying: How do you know?

Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes were mysterious. He stepped over the fallen person and walked quickly towards the depths of the laboratory.

“Dr. Ning, you need to leave quickly!”

“You go first; I need to retrieve the research data.”

“Data isn’t as important as a person’s safety, Dr. Ning. Your safety comes first!” the urging person said anxiously.

“You don’t understand. Without the data, the research cannot continue. If there’s data... if there’s data, why am I still doing the most basic data testing until now!” Dr. Ning Rong suddenly raised his voice, his chest heaving.

Tap, tap, tap —

Steady footsteps, reminiscent of the tolling of a death bell, echoed in Ning Rong's ears. A tall figure walked towards him against the light in the corridor, stopping in front of the two.

The nearby security personnel were on high alert, raising their guns at the newcomer. Su Cha flashed behind them, swiftly disarming the man.

“Ah!!!” A scream rang out, and the alarm bells suddenly blared around them. Frantic footsteps of people fleeing echoed continuously.

Ning Rong, holding a large pile of documents, felt a sense of fear. Unexpectedly, he met eyes with the young man in black, causing him to be momentarily stunned.

“Long time no see, Dr. Ning,” Zhuang Qingyan spoke casually.

“Old Zhuang?” Ning Rong blurted out, but his gaze froze. Soon, he self-denied, “No, Old Zhuang is already dead... It's you.”

Ning Rong looked bewildered, “You're alive, you actually... you're still alive?”

Zhuang Qingyan stood in front of him, “Where is Song Ke?”

Ning Rong covered his face, seeming to laugh and cry at the same time, “If I had known you were still alive, why would I have gone through all this trouble...”

“Dr. Ning, we can catch up later. Where is Song Ke?” Zhuang Qingyan interrupted.

“Song Ke?” Ning Rong was puzzled for a second, then suddenly enlightened, “You mean the S7 that He Qihong sent?”

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, “Regardless of what you've done before, release her immediately.”

Unexpectedly, Ning Rong decisively refused, "I can't release her! At least not now."

"She just completed a radiation tolerance test, and the accumulated value in her body is too high. Any slight stimulation now could easily lead to a loss of control."

"A radiation test?"

It was unclear what kind of relationship Zhuang Qingyan had with Ning Rong, but the latter was surprisingly unreserved. Without a second thought, he handed over a screen containing Song Ke's complete superpower report.

"You're also an expert; take a look yourself."

"With her condition, these tests must be done, and the sooner the better."

"Not to mention the unknown excessive radiation in her body, just consider those hidden genetic sequences. If we don't figure out their specific origins, when they erupt one day, you know very well what the consequences will be."

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 145.2: Fire Seed (14)

The master of the Northern Base

Outside the capsule, Zhigler was pretending to doze off with closed eyes. Sensing the person next to him standing up, he immediately questioned, "What are you doing?"

Xi Ze shrugged, adopting a somewhat carefree attitude, "Bored, just getting up for a stroll."

"Don't forget our mission," Zhigler warned in a deep voice.

“Mind your own business,” Xi Ze retorted. Both of them were S3-level awakeners. Zhigler was approaching middle age, while Xi Ze was only twenty, with a promising future. He considered himself a step above the older man.

Xi Ze sauntered over to where Song Ke was held, unceremoniously knocking on the glass.

“Hey, what kind of monster are you? How can you withstand such intense radiation?”

“Or maybe you have some way to resist radiation? Tell me, I’m all ears.”

Song Ke stared at him with a deep gaze, her eyes seemingly unmoving for a long time.

Xi Ze found himself displeased under Song Ke’s gaze, but more so, a subtle sense of envy. S7 level or not, she ended up as a captive, subjected to inexplicable experiments.

Ning Rong’s assistants had already fled in panic, and in the chaos, no one remembered to shut down the instruments. Xi Ze, hands in pockets, casually approached the scale meter. Suddenly, he pressed the start button, initiating the radiation beyond 130%.

“Have you gone mad? Who gave you the right to mess around?!” Zhigler roared.

“Just playing around. Anyway, she’s fine,” Xi Ze blocked Zhigler’s punch, activated his field, and turned towards Song Ke with a mischievous grin, “Doctor must have taught you, remember to raise your hand when it gets unbearable, okay? Raise it high.”

“Stop it immediately!” Zhigler unleashed his full awakened energy, and Xi Ze responded with an equal pressure.

Inside the capsule, the just-stabilized radiation instantly surged to its peak again. Song Ke’s dark pupils became deeper, her cells burning fiercely throughout her body. Chaotic screams filled her ears, and her cognitive abilities gradually diminished.

Unnoticed on the spectrum analyzer, the stable double helix of DNA underwent rapid changes, forming a completely unfamiliar structure, grotesquely resembling the skull of some fierce beast. Meanwhile, Song Ke's awakened energy value had surpassed 20,000!

Song Ke slowly raised her hand. Behind Zhigler and Xi Ze, the instruments began to float. A deep blue light flashed, transforming into a fierce Tang sword. The back of the blade "clang" hit the glass, leaving an extremely subtle crack.

The two fighters abruptly stopped, looking at her in astonishment.

It was just a very small crack, but it was enough.

A thousand-mile dike collapsed because of an ant. Song Ke pressed her palm against the glass, and her powerful awakened energy pushed outward.

The entire glass shattered with a thunderous crash, breaking into tiny remnants.

*

Zhuang Qingyan browsed through the report on Song Ke, which could be described as mind-boggling. His eyes grew deeper in contemplation.

Ning Rong stared at his face and sighed deeply. "Genes are truly miraculous. Back then, no one believed you were father and son. Now... anyone with eyes wouldn't make a mistake."

Zhuang Qingyan didn't respond immediately, frowning as he asked, "How much excessive radiation did you expose her to?"

Ning Rong was momentarily speechless. "Um... 130%."

Zhuang Qingyan sneered, “130%? Regular instruments must be close to their limit, right? I heard that this laboratory is sponsored by He Qihong. Are you working for her? What about your research, is it for the ‘Fire Seed’ or the ‘Eternal Project’?”

“...”

“Never mind, I’m not interested in knowing. Now, take me to see Song Ke.”

Crash! As they were talking, the ceiling suddenly collapsed, and a slender figure rapidly descended, pressing onto someone.

The person beneath emitted clear sounds of bone fractures, and blood gushed from their nose and mouth. As they turned their pale face, it revealed the S3-level domain-type awakener who had provoked Song Ke—Xi Ze.

“Sister!!”

“Captain?”

Members of V587 were about to cheer and rush forward but suddenly halted their steps. Something was evidently wrong with Song Ke. Her eyes were pitch black, devoid of any smile. With blood-soaked hands, she raised the Tang sword and unhesitatingly...

...stabbed it into the heart of the fallen person!

“Ah———!!”

The powerful surge of awakened energy from Xi Ze, on the brink of death, shattered the glass in the corridor.

Boom! Amidst the puzzled and alarmed expressions of everyone, another person fell from the ceiling.

Slightly better off than Xi Ze, Zhigler's awakened energy field shattered, and blood spurted from his mouth. Crawling on all fours, he tried to escape the scene.

Holding the Tang sword, Song Ke stood up, coldly pointing it at his neck.

In a critical moment, reinforcements from the Awakened Department arrived, unleashing various abilities against Song Ke without any regard.

"Song Ke! Stop!" He Qihong's holographic image lit up, sternly commanding.

Song Ke appeared like a reaper, the Tang sword swirling as hot blood splattered, swiftly harvesting the lives of her enemies. V587 still hadn't figured out the situation, but if their captain was involved, could they just stand by and watch? Instantly, they joined the fight.

"From now on, pretend you don't know me," Zhuang Qingyan whispered, lowering his voice, pushing Ning Rong away from the center of the battle.

Song Ke was in a frenzy of killing, and the floor was covered with a dense layer of bodies. The tip of the blade continuously dripped blood, leaving crimson footprints with each step. Only a few remaining awakeners, who could still stand, retreated in fear.

Rapidly, Lu Xiaoyu said, "Three S-levels are coming, including He Qihong's specialized car. We won't make it if we don't leave now."

Lin Youyou anxiously called out, "Song Ke, can we leave first?"

Alone in the blood-soaked battlefield, with a trail of bodies, the determined figure didn't respond. Lu Xiaoyu urged, "Three S-levels are on their way, including He Qihong. We need to leave now!"

Zhuang Qingyan waded through the blood and bodies, resolutely approaching Song Ke.

Song Ke, with a blade in hand, noticed him approaching and coldly aimed the weapon at him.

“Song Ke,” Zhuang Qingyan’s voice was gentle and soft, “it’s me, Zhuang Qingyan. Quiet down and look at me.”

“Do you remember?”

Song Ke quietly stared at him, holding the blade, and in her pitch-black eyes, a small Zhuang Qingyan was reflected.

Despite the relentless screams around her, she was plagued by hallucinations.

Who was it?

It was her.

She was smashing things with a loud crash. Was it a door or glass? She couldn’t remember.

She only remembered that time, the arrogant young man sitting with crossed legs outside, complaining incessantly:

“It’s hard to find a quiet place...”

“He won’t let me participate in projects, but makes me carry the data every day.”

“Is he really my dad? He assigns so much, how can I remember it all in one day...”

Thud, thud, thud! She forcefully banged on the door, trying to get the other person’s attention.

“Be quiet,” the young man turned his head, and his beautifully curved eyes glared at her dissatisfied.

But it hurt so much. She could only use even more force to bang. Thud, thud, thud!

The young man clicked his tongue impatiently and slowly approached, squatting in front of her. His slender fingers swiftly manipulated a control panel.

A pile of colorful nutrients dropped from above, thud! Many hit her head.

“Now you can be quiet, little thing.”

Initially puzzled, she quickly realized and tore open the packaging, eagerly drinking. Whether it was a psychological effect or not, the pain inside her seemed to diminish slightly.

“Looking at you closely, you look really ugly, huh?”

The young man observed her and quickly turned his eyes away in disdain. “Are these genes from lizards?”

Her eating motion paused imperceptibly. What did ugly mean?

Unaware, the young man yawned and continued to casually flip through the data. He looked somewhat tired and indifferent, with a brilliantly beautiful side profile, and a teardrop mole shining.

...

“Song Ke, I am Zhuang Qingyan.”

“Look at me, just one glance. Do you remember?”

Someone seemed to be calling her from a distant place.

“Zhuang... Qing... Yan.”

Song Ke’s hoarse voice slowly uttered three words. The dark color in her eyes receded, and her consciousness returned to her body.

Zhuang Qingyan sighed in relief, taking large steps forward, tightly embracing her blood-soaked figure. “It’s me, it’s okay now. Don’t be afraid.”

Like comforting a child, he gently patted Song Ke’s back.

The distant screams disappeared, and the burning cells in her body gradually calmed down. Song Ke lowered her head, glanced at her blood-stained hands, belatedly recalling what had happened just now.

A group of awakeners rushed in like a tide, surrounding V587 still in the corridor.

Under the protection of the Lin siblings, He Qihong appeared behind the crowd, her face darkening. Glancing at the convulsing bodies of Xi Ze and Zhigler she angrily said, “I only asked you to cooperate with the inspection, Song Ke. Did you resist orders and harm your fellow awakeners? Don’t you want to stay at the Northern Base?”

Song Ke stared straight at her. “Inspection, I cooperated.”

He Qihong’s mouth tightened into a straight line. She raised her hand, about to say something.

“Clang—”

A Tang sword whizzed past her ear, and Song Ke swiftly moved forward, passing through layers of awakeners, heading straight towards He Qihong like a lightning bolt.

Startled, Ling Yue and Ling Yan quickly intervened, but were blocked by six mechanical arms and the ever-present Su Cha.

He Qihong was forcefully pulled out of the crowd by Song Ke's domineering strength, her neck pinched, and pressed to the ground, her face turning purple.

"Are you insane...? Daring to attack—"

The aftermath of the burning cells hadn't completely subsided. With an indifferent expression, Song Ke raised the Tang sword high, casting a cold light. He Qihong, now no longer composed, displayed an expression of utmost horror.

"I really cooperated," she pleaded.

The tip of the blade slowly pierced He Qihong's heart. Song Ke's hand remained steady, and her expression was unwavering.

"The first day we came here, you said the Northern Base respects strength."

"You seem to be... only B-level, right? Why... don't I dare to kill you?"

He Qihong's pupils contracted, her face instantly turning ashen.

"Wai—"

In the nick of time, another formidable unfamiliar S-level awakener approached. His arms were like steel, gently deflecting Song Ke's blade. He calmly looked at Song Ke. "Please wait a moment."

Song Ke observed him for two seconds, then stepped back, unceremoniously pulling out the Tang sword from He Qihong's chest.

“Ugh!” He Qihong groaned.

The unknown man helped He Qihong up, then turned his gaze towards the confrontation in the corridor. His authoritative voice echoed in everyone’s ears:

“Stop.”

V587 remained motionless. On the other hand, the people from the Awakener Department retreated two steps obediently, including the Ling siblings.

The man silently opened the terminal, and a holographic image slowly appeared. An old man leaned against the window, his side profile resembling a statue. He spoke with a world-weary tone:

“I heard from Zimei that a young S7-level has arrived at the base, diligent and with excellent combat talent. She keeps talking in my ear every day, making me curious. Qihong, I’ll have Bai Qi go and receive this person. Do you have any objections?”

He Qihong, protecting her neck, respectfully lowered her head, “No, Teacher.”

The old man nodded, “Awakened people, the key in the phrase is not in the ‘awakened,’ but in the ‘people’ at the end. They are first and foremost people with flesh and blood, just like the millions in the base. Remember, this is our foundation. Some things cannot be reversed.”

He Qihong didn’t dare to refute a word, bowing with deep respect, “Yes, I will remember the teacher’s teachings.”

The old man sighed softly and turned his gaze to Song Ke standing in the corner:

“You are the Song Ke that Zimei mentioned? I am Ye Zheng. I would like to meet you and your friends in person. Do you mind?”

Song Ke didn’t answer immediately.

The old man spoke politely and patiently without rushing, waiting for her to respond.

After a while, Song Ke nodded slowly, "Alright."

"Today's events end here. Bai Qi, please bring them back."

The image of the old man disappeared from the air, leaving everyone in the room in silent shock.

Wasn't He Qihong powerful?

As the second in command in the Northern Base, the highest official in the Awakened Department, she could control everything in B10, doing as she pleased, even forcefully conducting experiments on a powerful S-level awakener.

But one thing, since the establishment of the Northern Base, was deeply ingrained in everyone's hearts.

– The true master of this city was the one with the last name Ye.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 146: Fire Seed (16)

I am just old, not dead

Bai Qi was a man of few words, matching Su Cha in his level of silence. At least Su Cha became a bit more cheerful after joining the team, but on the way to Ye Zheng's mansion, Bai Qi didn't say a word, perfectly embodying the saying "silence is golden."

The floating car sped along the floating sky bridge, crossing through a bustling urban area towards the city's outskirts.

Inside the car, Fang Zhixu carefully treated Song Ke's wounds with his abilities, and a faint white soft light lit up as the fine cracks in her joints healed as if untouched.

Xu Xing cautiously knelt on Song Ke's lap, his eyes watery, "Sister, do you remember Xiao Xing?"

Others also looked at her with concern; Song Ke's previous state was too frightening, as if she had fallen into madness, recognizing no one, only knowing how to kill.

Song Ke touched Xu Xing's curly hair, feeling its softness, and comforted her softly, "It's okay, I remember everything."

Everyone finally breathed a sigh of relief.

In the quiet atmosphere, Song Ke tilted her head slightly and stole a glance at Zhuang Qingyan.

Then she noticed that Zhuang Qingyan was leaning on his chin, staring at her without turning away, his deep eyes filled with concentration.

Song Ke: "...". She awkwardly looked away, glanced back after a while, and Zhuang Qingyan was still looking at her.

A blurry image flashed in her mind, but unfortunately, besides the phrase "Be quiet," Song Ke couldn't recall anything else.

She wasn't even sure whose memories those were.

Because in her life in District F177, such scenes had never appeared.

She stole glances too frequently; Zhuang Qingyan took one of her hands, smoothed her palm, and secretly wrote a "later."

Song Ke understood that it wasn't convenient to talk in the car, and he meant to discuss it later.

Two hours later, V587 arrived at the residence of the ruling official.

Surprisingly, Ye Zheng's place was just an ordinary three-story villa, although it had a vast land area, the exterior was modest and inconspicuous amidst the modern skyscrapers of the Northern Base.

Moreover, the security here was lax, not even comparable to the Awakener Department where He Qihong was, let alone Ning Rong's laboratory.

Zhuang Qingyan's comment on this was: "The more people lack something, the more they want to show off."

Because He Qihong was only a B-level awakener and had extreme insecurity, she turned the office building into an airtight fortress, even daring to use only holographic images for their first meeting.

What does that mean? Does Ye Zheng not lack a sense of security?

At first, everyone didn't quite understand his words, but the answer was soon revealed. The floating car entered the villa area, and Ye Zimei, dressed in the uniform of the Awakener Department, was waiting at the door, nodding at Bai Qi.

"At this time, Miss Ye should be at work, right?" Zhuang Qingyan casually asked when getting off the car.

"Thanks to you all, the department is in chaos today, and I was forced to take a day off," Ye Zimei sighed, seemingly genuine or fake.

"Ye Zimei... Ye Zheng..." Lin Youyou repeated the two names, tentatively asking, "So General Ye is your...?"

Ye Zimei helplessly smiled, “Yes, he’s my grandfather.”

Lin Youyou suddenly realized; no wonder Ye Zimei, just a mere administrative secretary, had such high authority in the Northern Base. She not only independently handled the recruitment of awakeners but also easily agreed to their requests. It turns out she was a well-hidden third-generation official—of course, described in an entirely positive sense.

“Please come in; my grandfather is waiting for you,” Ye Zimei said.

As they passed each other, Song Ke softly said, “Thank you.”

From what Ye Zheng said in the laboratory, if he was willing to intervene, it surely had Ye Zimei’s involvement.

Ye Zimei smiled, “I said I would give you an explanation.”

Bai Qi led them through a corridor into a quaint study, and Song Ke finally met the true master of the Northern Base.

Ye Zheng was in casual clothes, nearing ninety years old. His silver hair was neatly combed, and his sunken eye sockets, weathered face with wrinkles and spots, told tales of experience. Yet, his eyes held a serene understanding of the world, and his straight posture reflected the dignity left after enduring wars and the ravages of time.

However, that wasn’t the focus. Song Ke had seen old people before; what surprised her was that Ye Zheng was an S-level awakener!

He didn’t deliberately restrain his awakened energy but didn’t show any offensive posture either. Naturally, a portion flowed out like breath, silently circulating. However, the formidable aura and the grade suppression of an S-level, made people bow their heads submissively.

“General, the guests have arrived,” Bai Qi nodded respectfully and then quietly exited.

This “General” was not a casual title. Unlike someone like Nai Kang, who was a mere show-off without substance, “General” in the Mu Dan was a title of respect for the first rank. Ye Zheng was a genuine military man, having carried a gun, shed blood, dug trenches, and led troops in battles during the old civilization era.

Ye Zheng witnessed the decline of the old civilization, the establishment of the New Asia Alliance, and now, the arrival of the apocalypse. His life experience was like a thick ancient book, even if covered in the dust of time, still invaluable.

In recent years, due to his declining health, Ye Zheng lived a reclusive life, gradually disappearing from the public eye.

“The Northern Base values strength”, Song Ke suddenly remembered this phrase. No wonder Ye Zheng didn’t need security; he himself was the most robust shield, even in his old age.

Seeing such a legendary figure, Song Ke felt a bit awkward, not knowing where to put her hands and feet.

Ye Zheng took the initiative to open the conversation, “Is that a Tang knife in your hand?”

He pointed to the knife inserted in Song Ke’s backpack. “Can I take a look?”

Song Ke silently took it off and handed it to him. Ye Zheng’s hands were very old, with thick joints that could hardly bend. He carefully touched the blade and sighed, “I didn’t expect to see young people using artifacts from the old civilization. I thought we old folks should all be in the ground by now.”

He made a joke, and although Song Ke and the others didn’t laugh, their tense nerves relaxed a bit.

As leaders, Ye Zheng’s impression was completely different from He Qihong. He didn’t exude a condescending arrogance; instead, he emanated humility more befitting an elder. When speaking to others, he looked them in the eye and listened patiently.

After skillfully twirling the knife, Ye Zheng suddenly spoke, "Do you have a bad impression of the Northern Base?"

Song Ke remained silent for a moment, then nodded sincerely.

Ye Zheng smiled, "You seem to be not very talkative."

Zhuang Qingyan stepped forward, standing side by side with Song Ke. "General Ye, forgive my boldness. Our captain may not be eloquent, but that doesn't mean she should be mistreated. He Qihong kidnapped an S-level awakener and even used force. How do you intend to handle this?"

"On this matter, I'd like to discuss it with you calmly," Ye Zheng said as he returned the Tang knife to Song Ke.

"Qihong did make a mistake. She tends to be stubborn, and I'm not defending her, but her original intention was to have you undergo an examination to understand your abnormal constitution.

The reason the situation deteriorated to this point is because you nearly killed two S-level individuals. Do you understand the seriousness of this matter?"

Ye Zheng pressed a switch on a desk, displaying real-time footage and several reports. It showed Zhigler in critical condition, still unconscious, and Xi Ze, although barely recovering, had dropped to A9 level due to the shattered magnetic field. This was the first occurrence of an S-level downgrade, and once the news was made public, it would undoubtedly cause a significant stir within the Alliance.

"A few months ago, the Central Court lost an S-level dual-type awakener in District C. The inspection team is still investigating the murderer. After the apocalypse, every S-level individual is a precious strategic resource. Qihong has always valued awakeners. In fact, you incapacitated two of them, so naturally, she wanted answers from you," Ye Zheng explained.

Song Ke remained expressionless. District C, S-level dual-type, why did it sound a bit familiar? As if it was also someone she had taken down.

“Does General Ye also want answers from us?” Zhuang Qingyan’s face showed no hint of a smile.

Ye Zheng waved his hand and sighed, “I have always believed that appearances can be deceiving, Song Ke. I want to hear your side of the story. Why did you attack Zhigler and Xi Ze?”

Song Ke looked into the old man’s calm eyes, pondered for a moment, and recounted the situation where Xi Ze provoked her by deliberately activating the device.

Ye Zheng nodded, “If that’s the case, you have indeed suffered a lot of grievances. How would you like me to handle this?”

“General Ye, do you know that Qihong secretly supports illegal research?” Zhuang Qingyan suddenly changed the topic. “Forgive me for being frank, she is not a qualified leader. She acts impulsively, has deep-seated prejudices, uses awakeners on one hand, and ruthlessly discards them on the other. Have you considered the consequences of continuing to support her?”

Zhuang Qingyan implied through his words that letting Qihong lead would eventually lead to the downfall of the Northern Base.

However, Ye Zheng said, “Qihong is currently the most suitable person. She has the ability and ambition. Even if she can’t do better, she can at least maintain the status quo.”

Zhuang Qingyan’s expression changed slightly, noticing that Ye Zheng used the words “currently” and “maintain the status quo.”

“Do you know what people outside call the Northern Base?” Ye Zheng asked.

—” Humanity’s last hope,” Ye Zheng said word by word.

“In this world, things will become increasingly difficult, bringing more despair. Maybe one day, our days will come to an end,” Ye Zheng’s gaze was profound and determined. “But even if that time comes, I still hope that the Northern Base can be the last refuge for countless ordinary humans. That was my original intention in building this city.”

“I am old, and death can embrace me at any time, but I don’t want to see my lifelong efforts go to waste,” Ye Zheng sighed deeply. “Until I find a suitable successor and completely entrust the Northern Base to them, even if Qihong makes mistakes, she cannot temporarily leave that position.”

Ye Zheng gazed at the young girl before him. Both being S-level, he could intuitively feel Song Ke’s strength, like a drawn sword, sharp and unstoppable. More importantly, her blade would never turn against her own people. This was the rarest trait among S-level awakeners, but unfortunately, He Qihong couldn’t see this.

With a weathered voice, Ye Zheng spoke, “Song Ke, can you give the Northern Base another chance?”

Song Ke was momentarily stunned.

“For your future affairs, and the matters of your team, report directly to me. You no longer need to be under the jurisdiction of the Awakener Department. If there are any issues in your daily life, go to Zimei. If you ever face injustice, this old man will personally stand up for you.”

“After all...” Ye Zheng’s expression turned cold, “I am just old, not dead.”

Song Ke remembered asking Zhuang Qingyan on the V587 starship coming to the Northern Base about the founder of this place. Zhuang Qingyan had said at that time, “A person worth admiring.”

She looked at the silver-haired Ye Zheng and thought for a long time before nodding slowly.

...

After leaving the villa, Lin Youyou grumbled discontentedly, “He Qihong only got a two-week suspension. Isn’t that too easy for her?”

“Yeah, yeah!” Xu Xing joined in, “Old witch, I curse her!”

Song Ke, however, remained unusually calm, "It's because of me. I'm not strong enough."

If she were strong enough, at the apartment entrance, even if Zhigler and Xi Ze simultaneously launched an attack, she shouldn't have been instantly controlled. In the Manzoni Street and Punk battle, if she could have directly killed him, he wouldn't have had a chance to activate time reversal.

Song Ke lowered her head, looking at the palm of her hand. All along, she had been too confident. Awakening abilities were diverse, and the methods of attack were unpredictable. If she faced a similar situation next time, with more S-level individuals coming to hunt her down, would she let herself be slaughtered again?

—Absolutely not.

Although the intense radiation brought endless pain, she also felt a new power.

Suddenly, Song Ke remembered Dr. Ning, the silver-haired man. After the chaotic battle, she wasn't sure if he survived.

Back in the apartment, Zhuang Qingyan followed Song Ke into the room.

With a serious expression, he took out a light screen, "Now, let's talk about your physical condition."

Song Ke lowered her head and glanced at it, signaling with her eyes: ... I don't understand.

Zhuang Qingyan fell silent for a moment, then changed the topic, "Your grandfather, do you have a photo or video of him?"

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 147: Fire Seed (17)

The little dog at home is upset

Grandpa's photo?

Song Ke shook her head honestly, "No."

"Not a single one?" Zhuang Qingyan was slightly surprised.

Song Ke counted on her fingers, "Grandpa doesn't take photos, doesn't play 'Vu Le Gè,' and doesn't have a phone." As for terminals? There's no such thing in District F.

Zhuang Qingyan cleared his throat and couldn't help but correct her pronunciation: "v—l—o—g."

Song Ke pouted, "Oh." She learned the Alliance language late, and it's not her fault if she doesn't speak well.

Zhuang Qingyan continued, "Do you still remember what your grandpa looks like?"

Song Ke nodded, "Of course."

"Then you describe, and I'll draw." Zhuang Qingyan took a pen, crossed his long legs and leaned against the window, starting to sketch.

"Grandpa and Old Fang are about the same height, round forehead, a nose that is straight at the top and a little curved at the bottom... here and here, there are wrinkles, and he has little hair," Song Ke tried to describe in simple words, "He likes to wear hats, his health is not good, always coughing."

After more than ten minutes, Zhuang Qingyan put down the pen and turned the screen to Song Ke, "Take a look, does it look similar?"

"Um!" Song Ke gave him a thumbs up, "Very much!"

Zhuang Qingyan looked helpless, “Is it really similar or not? I’m not seeking praise from you; I want the truth.”

“Really like,” Song Ke said confidently.

Getting the answer, Zhuang Qingyan’s brow slowly furrowed, and he looked down at the sketch on the screen.

According to Song Ke’s description, what he drew was a sickly old man, with tired eyes, slightly hunched back, looking around seventy years old, but far less spirited than ninety-year-old Ye Zheng.

“Song Keke,” Zhuang Qingyan sat down close to her, and the screen was switched to projection mode, “Did you have a serious illness when you were a child? Have you been to the hospital?”

“I don’t get sick.” Song Ke shook her head; her body was very strong, and she rarely had even a cold or fever.

“You see, this is your genetic report. I’ve marked several DNA deletions with nitrogen-containing bases, peptide chain fragments with breaks and losses, significantly affecting both copies. Currently, we don’t rule out the possibility of meiosis or translocation, but this unknown sequence is different...”

Song Ke, listening, began to stare blankly, pulling a cereal bar from her pocket and mechanically stuffing it into her mouth.

“Crunch—” The crisp sound of chewing interrupted Zhuang Qingyan’s analysis.

He abruptly turned his head, meeting Song Ke’s puffed-up cheeks.

The two stared at each other for a second. Song Ke desperately swallowed, like an unlucky student caught daydreaming in class, honestly saying, “Sorry, I don’t understand.”

Zhuang Qingyan: “No, it’s my fault.”

He immediately changed his approach, tailoring his words to her: "In short, there are some issues with your genetic composition. I suspect..."

-I suspect your grandfather may have had you undergo genetic modification.

He couldn't bring himself to say this sentence. Song Ke was an orphan, dependent on her grandfather from childhood to adulthood. She had only one relative, so saying such a thing was like stabbing a knife into her heart.

Zhuang Qingyan raised his palm, paused on Song Ke's cheek for two seconds, and finally patted her head. "Genetic problems are like hidden thunder. Just because it hasn't erupted in your past nineteen years doesn't mean you can safely pass in the future. Shall we investigate it thoroughly? Don't worry, there won't be any more radiation tests like today. I'll accompany you for every future checkup."

It would take a few more days to rebuild Ning Rong's laboratory. The research and equipment foundations there were top-notch in District B. The only concern was his deal with He Qihong and the possibility of leaks. However, he could use other chips to exchange for it.

For Song Ke's subsequent examinations, he must personally handle them, controlling every step of the process.

Zhuang Qingyan's handsome profile sank into contemplation. The character "川" on his brow remained tight for a long time. Song Ke extended a finger, slowly helping him smooth it out.

Although she didn't feel she had any "genetic defects," she still nodded, "Okay."

...

In the next room, Lin Youyou was searching for information about "Ning Rong" on the Star Network.

Indeed, the terminal privileges in District B were high. With just a refresh, densely packed pages popped up.

Lin Youyou flipped through two pages and then exclaimed unbelievably, “This Ning Rong is actually a renowned genetic engineer, on par with Vincent, and officially joined the Qinglan Research Institute in the year 19 of the New Calendar.”

She pulled out the light screen, lightly tapping it twice, and said, “Hey, Lin Xiu, come out quickly.”

A holographic projection flashed, and Lin Xiu, wrapped in a blanket, sat up, rubbing her eyes sleepily and murmuring, “Why are you calling me? I stayed up late watching dramas yesterday, so tired.”

“Don’t joke. You, an AI, can get tired?” Lin Youyou suddenly found it amusing.

“I call this simulated sleep, creating an atmosphere, you understand or not!” Lin Xiu immediately retorted.

“I don’t understand, I don’t understand,” Lin Youyou rolled her eyes, gossipingly asking, “Hey, do you know Ning Rong?”

“Dr. Ning? I’ve heard of him but haven’t met him. What’s up?”

“He seems to know Zhuang Qingyan.” Lin Youyou revealed an intrigued expression.

“The Zhuang Qingyan you’re talking about, Vincent or Brother Yan?” Lin Xiu squinted at her sister.

“Uh...” Lin Youyou stuttered for a moment. She still hadn’t figured out the relationship between these two people.

“If you’re talking about Vincent, they’re colleagues, so it’s not strange if they know each other. However...”

Lin Xiu, seemingly thinking of something, chuckled, “Dr. Ning’s life perfectly confirms a saying, called ‘If you’re born with jade, why bother with brilliance.’”

Lin Youyou became interested, “What do you mean?”

“He has a nickname, ‘Eternal Second.’ As long as Vincent is around, everything can only be second best. He joined Qinglan a year later, became a professor a step slower, published one less paper in a top journal, even got married and had a child later. Haha, by the time I shut down, he was still a bachelor!”

“What?! Zhuang Qingyan, I mean, Vincent, got married?”

“Yeah, his marriage was quite sensational at the time. The news was all about ‘Golden Boy and Jade Girl, crossing boundaries,’ and the background of the woman was very profound. In the end, nothing about her name or pictures was revealed...”

After Lin Xiu finished talking, she yawned and continued her “simulated sleep.”

Lin Youyou held the terminal and murmured, “Now I’m sure, the man in our team is truly a mysterious one.”

Onlooker Su Cha asked, “Why do you suddenly want to know all this?”

Lin Youyou, puzzled, replied, “Why? Of course, out of curiosity.”

“I thought...” Su Cha hesitated for a while and stuttered, “He and the captain, that, it’s not good for you to do this.”

“Pfft! Hahaha!” Lin Youyou laughed without any restraint, “You don’t think I’m interested in him, do you?”

Su Cha was speechless, and Lin Youyou continued, “How could that be? I clearly like pure little puppies. I thought you knew.”

Su Cha's actions of tapping his fingertips suddenly stopped, and he looked at her silently, lips tightly pursed.

Lin Youyou's lips curled slightly. After teasing, she ran away, comfortably nestled in the rocking chair, opened the projection and started remote work.

There was a piercing gaze behind her, but she pretended not to notice, humming a light tune: "I like~ the smile of a puppy, like a gentle rain~ sprinkling into my heart." Anyway, it's her own song, so she can change the lyrics as she pleases.

The chat box beeped, and Jennifer sent a heart emoji along with a staged photo of a table covered in rose petals, accompanied by a sweet voice message: "Darling~ I've booked the Galaxy Restaurant. Would you honor me with your presence for a starlit dinner tonight?"

Lin Youyou glanced at Su Cha, and indeed, he saw the chat content. His brows furrowed, and his ears were almost standing up.

Lin Youyou intentionally typed loudly: "Why suddenly invite me to dinner?"

Jennifer quickly replied, "Because you're my lifesaver~ Dad always said, a drop of water should be repaid with a bucket of water."

Lin Youyou smiled, "It's 'repaying a drop of water with a gushing spring,' but we're friends, no need to be so formal."

Jennifer's melodious tone paused, and her tone returned to normal, "Oh, actually, the words just now were taught by Yin Xiao, that illiterate. I'm very cultured myself. Because we're friends, I want to see you, I want to be your best girlfriend."

The high chair made a harsh noise on the floor, and Su Cha stood up abruptly, "I'm going to train."

He clenched his shoulders, lowered his head, and walked out of the room in large strides.

Lin Youyou casually sent a voice message, "Sorry, Jennifer, I can't have dinner with you alone. My little dog at home is upset, and I have to comfort him."

Jennifer sent a "crying" emoji, "Let's talk about business then. Have you seen the group tasks today? The pinned task released today, is your team interested in participating together?"

...

In the living room, Xu Xing was focused on painting. Fang Zhixu casually glanced over and commented, "Wow, you're a master of abstract art."

Xu Xing drew a distorted face of a female monster, resembling the white-boned demon from a storybook, being beaten by a group of awakeners. One big man unleashed a fierce snowstorm with both hands, and colorful text next to it was deliberately labeled— "Height three meters, Hero Xu."

As Xu Xing colored, he explained with annoyance, "This is the old witch, and this! The most powerful one is my sister, and then the tallest is me! We teamed up to kill the old witch!"

Fang Zhixu, rubbing his chin, seriously observed for a while, "There's a problem with your painting."

Xu Xing immediately turned to him, "What's the problem?"

"Me," Fang Zhixu pointed at himself, "You even drew Taotao, but where am I?"

Xu Xing blinked his eyes, jumped off the bar stool, and grabbed the drawing board as he ran to the room, muttering, "You don't know how to fight anyway."

Fang Zhixu rolled up his sleeves and threatened him, "You little brat, feeling itchy, huh? Who says I can't fight? I picked up all the crystals!"

As the two were playfully wrestling in the crowded living room, Su Cha came out from Lin Youyou's room and silently sat on the sofa.

With expressive big eyes, Xu Xing asked him what happened.

Fang Zhixu, panting from the pursuit, shook his head, indicating he had no idea.

After a while, Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan also came out.

Zhuang Qingyan casually asked, "Where's Lu Xiaoyu?"

Fang Zhixu replied, "He went out, said he wanted to...dye his hair?"

Coincidentally, the apartment door opened at that moment. The familiar wheelchair glided in, but the person sitting on it looked unusually unfamiliar.

Jet-black hair fell smoothly on the neck side. The young man's pupils changed to a clear brown, and a pair of old-fashioned black-framed glasses sat on his nose. Due to prolonged indoor stays, his face had a pale, delicate complexion.

He calmly looked at the stunned crowd and said, "I'm back."

Song Ke looked at his empty legs, then at his face, and finally reacted, "Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Xiaoyu!"

Lu Xiaoyu pushed his glasses and responded with a touch of arrogance, "Hmm."

Song Ke, shocked, blurted out in a local dialect, "Why did you change like this?!"

Lu Xiaoyu glanced at Zhuang Qingyan, raised his chin, and said, "Because I invaded the terminal in District B and caused a little, very little trouble. Of course, I wiped out all traces, confident that I did it

seamlessly. But for safety reasons, and considering someone's past experience, I decided to do some disguise."

"Oh..." Song Ke expressed understanding. She stole a glance at Zhuang Qingyan and couldn't help but think, "You two have quite similar hobbies, huh."

Lin Youyou came out of the room holding the terminal, found everyone gathered in the living room, and walked over. Upon seeing them, she laughed:

"Oh, you two difficult brothers, sitting in wheelchairs together, and now playing cosplay together with glasses?"

Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu exchanged a glance, then turned their eyes away in mutual disdain.

Lin Youyou waved, "Song Ke'er, come over and take a look at this task. Should we take it?"

Song Ke ran over quickly.

After people dispersed, Zhuang Qingyan stood next to Lu Xiaoyu and asked seriously, "Did you find any clues about that anonymous IP?"

He handed over the sender's address he got from Lucia to Lu Xiaoyu for investigation.

Lu Xiaoyu replied, "That person is quite cautious, using his own layer of encryption, but it's all in vain. I cracked it in less than five minutes. Based on the last signal source location, he should be in the eastern part of the Alliance."

"But there's something strange. He didn't use a terminal to connect; instead, it's the lowest-level local area network. Isn't this kind of antique outdated long ago? And his outer IP is fixed, but the inner one keeps changing. I estimate he has at least 1500 devices."

Lu Xiaoyu's glasses were a bit big, and as he spoke, they slid down. He adjusted them uncomfortably and casually said, "If it weren't for the network level being too low, I would suspect it's someone from your side doing 'garbage network testing.' Besides the research institute, where else would you need so many devices?"

"No," Zhuang Qingyan suddenly spoke, "there's another possibility."

"He's in an Internet cafe."

Lu Xiaoyu looked puzzled, "??"

Being from District B8 Erjia, he had been exposed to the most cutting-edge computer technology since childhood and was completely unfamiliar with this unfamiliar term. However, Lu Xiaoyu wouldn't casually reveal his ignorance. He subtly moved his fingertips and quickly opened the terminal to search.

"1500 devices would already be considered a large-scale Internet cafe, making it easier to hide oneself."

"In some backward D or F districts, there are many people who use this method to sneak into the Star Network..."

Zhuang Qingyan paused as he spoke, and the anonymous sender... Ming... District F... Internet cafe...

In a flash, all the clues in his mind connected, leading to an unimaginable thought.

...

Song Ke saw the mission mentioned by Lin Youyou in the "District B10 High-level Awakeners Matching Conference" channel.

Dozens of large rehabilitation, nursing, and dietary suppliers in District B jointly initiated an S-level commission: "As of 23:00 yesterday, the Foreign Trade Department of the Elderly People's Nation in

District A5 has been out of contact for twenty-one days. Special line communication is unavailable, and all related cooperation has been completely suspended. A-level or above awakener teams are requested to go to District A5 to confirm the situation. Accepting the mission will grant the team 48 hours of supplier access permission.”

Song Ke was momentarily stunned. This was her first mission related to District A!

She quickly gathered everyone for a meeting and expressed her gratitude, “Thank you all.”

Today was the most chaotic day in Song Ke’s nineteen years of life. From being kidnapped in the early morning, undergoing radiation testing, losing control, falling into a state of killing, to being rescued by her companions, with Ye Zheng mediating, meeting at the government mansion, everything unfolded in the midst of chaos.

Fortunately, she had returned to normal, and V587 was unharmed.

“Starting tomorrow, let’s continue to climb the rankings,” Song Ke said seriously. “We’ll settle the score with He Qihong sooner or later.”

“I agree,” Fang Zhixu said. “He Qihong dared to move against you today because she holds immense power in District B10 and is accustomed to controlling S-level individuals. Secondly, she looks down on us. We, the A-levels, are insignificant in her eyes, and we’re even lower in the rankings. We’re not worth a second glance.”

Lin Youyou sneered, “Let her see that, apart from Song Ke being S7, V587 also have us.”

Xu Xing banged on the table, “Charge to the first place in the Northern Base and defeat the old witch.”

Su Cha silently nodded, expressing his support.

“No, that’s not right,” Song Ke shook her head, her eyes filled with a determined resolve.

“Not just in the Northern Base, but the first place in the entire Alliance.”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 148: Fire Seed (18)

Let's go to District A5, Elderly People's Nation!

Northern Base, outskirts of Qianzhan City.

A helicopter was slowly descending, its massive rotor buzzing and generating strong gusts of wind that forced pedestrians to step back. The cabin door opened, and a member of the Tustan team in black combat gear lowered a swaying rope. He effortlessly grabbed it and descended one after another, performing with a flair as if in a movie.

The first to touch the ground was a tall young man wearing pilot sunglasses, a dazzling ruby earring catching the light, exuding an arrogant disregard for others' well-being.

He waved towards the other group waiting on the opposite side, “Hey, Captain Song, traffic was jammed on the morning route. Sorry for being two minutes late.”

Yin Xiao's gray eyes, seen through the sunglasses, scanned the large vehicles parked on the side of the road, and his eyebrows slowly lifted, “Oh, District B Starship. No wonder you have the confidence to have us gather here.”

Needless to say, the other group waiting in place was V587. They had repeated their morning routine and “borrowed” another starship.

“Youyou~”

Jennifer had just landed, her deep red curls swaying as she eagerly rushed towards Lin Youyou, opening her arms to embrace her.

Su Cha stepped in with an expressionless face, blocking her way.

Jennifer glared at him, “What are you doing? I want to get close to the beauty.”

Su Cha remained unmoved, his tone cold and unyielding, “Stalker fans are not allowed, please maintain a safe distance.”

Jennifer exclaimed, “What the heck?!” She had just successfully arranged a joint activity between the two teams, no, two alliances. What did this man mean by calling her a stalker fan?

“Get on first, we’re in a hurry.”

Song Ke cleared her throat and raised her voice.

The two groups quickly boarded the starship, the cabin door closed, and facing the crowd bustling towards the Northern Base in the glow of the morning sun and mist, the silver-white flying starship quietly departed.

Inside the starship, there were twelve Tustan members in total, spreading out to find seats.

Yin Xiao’s two long legs moved swiftly, heading straight for Song Ke. Just as he was about to sit down next to her, he suddenly noticed someone already there—Zhuang Qingyan in white casual attire, golden-rimmed glasses, reading a light screen with a gentle and perfect profile.

Yin Xiao sneered inwardly, what’s up with him? It’s not like they’re on vacation. Wearing all white, isn’t he afraid of getting bloodstains?

He casually sat down directly across from the two, as if passing the time, dismantling and reassembling the “Hellcat,” its cold mechanical parts emitting a chilly gleam.

Zhuang Qingyan raised his eyes to glance at him, showing no emotion.

Once everyone was seated, a Tustan team member spoke up loudly, "Captain, none of us have been to District A, and we don't know much about the Elderly People's Nation. Can you introduce the background of this mission to everyone?"

Yin Xiao completed the assembly of the Hellcat with a "click" sound, placing it in front of Zhuang Qingyan. Then, he leisurely stood up and said, "Sure."

Without a word, Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair glided forward, taking the lead to enter the aisle, brushing past Yin Xiao, and stopping in front of everyone. "I'll do it."

Tustan member: "???" Who is this guy?

V587: "...". The peacock has opened its feathers again.

Yin Xiao generously extended his hand in a "please" gesture, then crossed his arms and stepped aside, with a face full of anticipation.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded indifferently, "I am V587's technical consultant. I'll be introducing the relevant information about this mission. Feel free to ask if anything is unclear."

Someone below whistled lightly, making a joke about him stealing the limelight, but there was no malicious intent.

Zhuang Qingyan paid no attention, opened the screen, and projected the Alliance map. "The New Asia Alliance currently has five District As, representing the highest centralized authority for different functions. They are: Central Court A1 for political center, Emira A2 for military command, Eikang A3 for economic council, Liuponi A4 for cultural academy, and Elderly People's Nation A5, a welfare paradise.

Except for the Elderly People's Nation, the other four districts do not provide household registration services, have no local residents, and entry and exit are based on admission permissions. Even so, 90% of the Alliance's people, throughout their lives, cannot step into any District A."

Zhuang Qingyan's storytelling was clear and organized, his voice seemingly possessing a peculiar persuasive quality. On the Tustan side, the initially disdainful expressions gradually disappeared, replaced by focused and serious expressions.

Song Ke held her chin, listening with relish, while Yin Xiao stared at her face without blinking, his fingertips subtly moving, feeling strangely itchy.

He took out a bottle of specially provided functional drink from his tactical backpack, grapefruit-flavored, and gently pushed it towards Song Ke.

“The concept of the Elderly People's Nation originated from the renowned utopianist, Smirel,” Zhuang Qingyan continued calmly. “He believed that individuals who had made significant contributions to human development should enjoy their retirement in the best environment, with the most comprehensive welfare conditions. Smirel attempted to mobilize the entire Alliance to create a retirement home resembling paradise, dedicated to caring for those distinguished individuals.”

Upon hearing this, whispers arose in the rear cabin:

“It sounds reasonable...”

“If you've contributed to all of humanity and worked hard your whole life, it's only right to enjoy your later years.”

“The recommendations from this expert seem quite sensible.”

Zhuang Qingyan's eyelashes drooped, and the smile at the corner of her lips gradually turned cold.

“Smirel's original intention isn't necessarily wrong, but unfortunately, he couldn't see through human nature.”

“The best environment and the most comprehensive welfare always protect the privileged class. As long as you have enough power, enough status, and enough wealth, even crying children and blood-

stained criminals can knock on the doors of the Elderly People's Nation and enjoy the Alliance's best infrastructure and meticulous care."

"The household registration in District A5 is like a life clearance card. Once you have it, you don't need to struggle for a lifetime. You can stand at the height others admire. As various interests continuously pour in, it gradually loses its initial function and becomes a paradise for the powerful."

"The founder of the Elderly People's Nation, Smirel, was also sentenced to a hundred years in prison."

"Damn! Using our taxpayers' money to support a bunch of social parasites?"

"You were just an electrician before. How much tax did you pay? I own a company. My heart is bleeding!"

The two members who joined Tustan after the apocalypse gritted their teeth. Although others remained silent, their hearts were filled with mixed emotions, feeling a sense of pity for the situation in the Elderly People's Nation and the fate Smirel suffered.

In the quiet atmosphere, occasional clouds drifted past the porthole. They had already left the range of the Northern Base and were speeding towards the northern part of the Alliance.

Zhuang Qingyan lightly touched the screen, switching to the mission page. "Returning to the mission itself, because the residents of the Elderly People's Nation do not engage in production or work, and all resources are transported from the outside, its only management department is also called the Foreign Trade Department, responsible for supplier selection and procurement. With the loss of contact for a whole twenty-one days, the entire chain of interests between the two sides has been completely severed. Our client, who can't sit still, can understand."

What Zhuang Qingyan didn't mention was that there was something subtly strange about this matter. The system determined the difficulty of public commissions on its own, and the client simply asked them to investigate the Elderly People's Nation. So why was the mission rated as S? Could it be that the Elderly People's Nation had fallen victim to a zombie tide or savage beasts? — Absolutely impossible.

Not to mention its unique geographical location, the city defense of the Elderly People's Nation is under the control of Emira, the strongest military force, making it virtually impregnable.

With the mission background understood, everyone had a clearer picture. Since the Elderly People's Nation is located in the endless sea at the northernmost part of the Alliance, bordering the Cario Empire and the Luce Federation, even with the District B starship at full speed, the journey would take around five days to reach.

Zhuang Qingyan returned to his seat and smiled tenderly at Song Ke, "Do you understand? If there's anything unclear, I'll explain it to you in detail."

Song Ke proudly lifted her head, "I understand everything."

"That's good," Zhuang Qingyan completely ignored Yin Xiao across from her. Just as he sat back down, he suddenly noticed a bottle of pink drink on the table.

"..." He nonchalantly reached over, took it, and unscrewed the cap, taking a sip. "Thanks, you're quite considerate, huh? You know I get thirsty when I talk."

Yin Xiao couldn't stop him in time, "Hey, that's for Song Ke!"

"Really?" Zhuang Qingyan turned to look at Song Ke, looking melancholic, "I accidentally drank your drink. You won't blame me, will you?"

Song Ke waved her hand generously, "It's okay, go ahead."

Zhuang Qingyan turned back, his peach blossom eyes curved as he smiled warmly.

Yin Xiao: "... He had never seen such a shameless man!

On the other side, once the starship entered stable flight, the Tustan members enthusiastically started chatting.

“There are only fifty slots for this mission, and our Northern Base is sending the least, only three teams.”

“Another team is Blue Flame, right? Hey, speaking of which, did Xi Ze not go? Doesn’t he never miss an S-level commission?”

“Haven’t you seen the official statement from the Awakener Department yesterday?”

“...I was shopping with my wife yesterday, what happened?”

“Zhigler and Xi Ze were besieged by a large-scale beast tide during their mission, including a rare 5th-level beast. They almost got wiped out. Xi Ze’s awakened energy shattered, and he dropped back to A9. Director He was suspended from duty because of it.”

“What the heck, an S-level awakener getting downgraded? Isn’t that explosive news? Why don’t I know about it? Am I the only one who doesn’t know? Hey, V587, do you guys know?”

The members of V587’s “Beast Tide” could hardly keep the smiles on their faces: “Haha... We don’t know.”

Innocently, Xu Xing said, “Uncles and aunts, yesterday we rested and slept at home all day.”

Song Ke, the globally rare “5th-level beast”, said: “...”

...

Five days later.

Northern part of the Alliance, Endless Sea.

Early in the morning, Lu Xiaoyu disengaged the automatic pilot, summoned the control panel, and switched to low-orbit mode. Then, he pressed the intercom button and spoke in a flat and calm tone, “Wake up, we’ve reached the ‘Sea of Misfortune.’ I will manually pilot the starship and pass through the navigational hazard zone. Friendly reminder, fasten your seatbelts, or bear the consequences.”

Outside the porthole, the morning sun painted the sky with a golden glow, casting a radiant light on the gently undulating sea, resembling a serene and embracing elder.

As an islander, Song Ke had grown up by the seaside and was very familiar with the ocean. However, this particular area gave her a completely different feeling. Beneath the calm surface, it seemed to hide a turbulent crisis.

She turned her head and curiously asked, “Why is it called the ‘Sea of Misfortune’?”

Yin Xiao, having just finished washing up and holding a toothbrush, came back and casually explained, “Because misfortune descends here. Hundreds of airplane and ship disappearances occur here every year, and the phenomenon remains unexplained by science.”

“Oh,” Song Ke nodded in understanding. At that moment, Lu Xiaoyu’s morning announcement sounded, and her expression changed. She quickly fastened her seatbelt.

At the same time, other V587 members heard that Lu Xiaoyu was switching to manual control. They instantly rushed back to their positions, their expressions uniformly serious. Only then did Xu Xing, almost imperceptibly, grasp the armrest, and even Yin Xiao hesitated for a moment. With a sudden realization, he threw away his toothbrush, took a step forward, and swiftly buckled his seatbelt across from Song Ke.

The Tustan team members remained oblivious to this, continuing their cheerful conversations and carefree movements. Jennifer lazily sat at the mobile snack bar, lifting her flower-adorned fingers to enjoy an ice coffee.

The next moment, the entire starship flipped in mid-air, engines roaring violently as it charged towards the vast sea like an unbridled wild horse.

“Ah, xxxx!” Jennifer was splattered with coffee all over her head, her beautiful face a mess. However, she wasn’t the most unfortunate.

The Tustan team members standing in the aisle, caught off guard, tumbled and rolled like bowling balls, colliding with each other in twos and threes.

In the cockpit, Lu Xiaoyu was completely focused, pushing the energy system to the maximum. The calm sea gradually revealed ferocious fangs, black clouds overhead changing rapidly with lightning and thunder. Layers of huge waves splashed against the front window, and black, terrifying mist encroached from all directions.

Although the navigation had long since failed, Lu Xiaoyu, relying on pre-memorized mechanical coordinates, decisively changed direction. The massive starship, like a sailing ship breaking through the waves, plowed through obstacles, advancing at high speed!

In the rear cabin, cries of despair filled the air. Jennifer’s long hair was in disarray as she clung to the bar like a koala.

But when she looked up, she saw Yin Xiao sitting calmly in place, securely fastened by his seatbelt, witnessing their embarrassment and bursting into laughter.

Jennifer angrily exclaimed, “Yin Xiao, faced with great danger, you abandoned your daughter. What kind of man are you?”

Others weakly echoed, “Yeah, Captain, you...you’re not a real...man!”

Thirty minutes later, the speed of the starship finally returned to stability, and the sounds of vomiting echoed in the rear cabin.

Zhuang Qingyan gently reminded, “We’ve arrived.”

Song Ke looked out of the porthole with anticipation. The sky was clear, seagulls soared, and in the center of the vast sea, a magnificent and dreamlike island stood quietly.

This was one of the five major District As in the Alliance and the destination of their journey—the Elderly People’s Nation.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 149.1 – Fire Seed (19)

Can you swim?

“Prepare for landing.”

The starship announcement sounded again, and this time, there was no need for Lu Xiaoyu’s reminder. All crew members in the rear cabin neatly and uniformly clicked their seat belts in place.

After approaching the periphery of the island, a transparent barrier appeared in the sky, and holographic signs automatically lit up: “Please use the supplier channel.”

Following that was a small bright square area: “Please present your admission authorization here.”

Lu Xiaoyu decelerated and turned the direction, and the starship hovered neatly in the highlighted area. Song Ke and Yin Xiao opened their terminals, pulled up the temporary admission obtained after accepting the mission, and two seconds later, the barrier opened a passage, just large enough for the starship to pass through.

The aerial signs also turned into clear navigation maps: “Please continue driving three kilometers along the current road and land at the Splendid Tower.”

It had to be said that the visitor system of the Elderly People’s Nation was planned very reasonably, just... with a somewhat inexplicable soft coercion. They had no other choice but to follow the route provided by the system, and there was no possibility of “I’ll go around first” at all.

At the top of the Splendid Tower, there was a luxurious helipad. Lu Xiaoyu found a vacant space, smoothly landed the starship, and just as he stabilized, the ground passage folded open, and the entire starship was slowly taken into the building, transported to the temporary parking level.

After the two teams came out, they could only take the observation elevator, which had only one button inside: "Visitor Hall."

"Ding—" The elevator door opened, revealing a spacious banquet hall, and surprisingly, there were already quite a few people on the scene.

Song Ke sensed it slightly and was surprised. These people were all awakeners! The chaotic and diverse awakened energies were like those in a vegetable market.

"Why are there so many people?"

"Fifty teams, there must be those who arrived earlier than us," Zhuang Qingyan said.

The Northern Base was too far away, and they rushed non-stop, taking a full five days.

"Not only the Alliance," Yin Xiao pointed in two directions, "but people from the Cario Empire and the Luce Federation are also here."

Song Ke looked in the direction he pointed. Although it was unclear what permissions the other two countries used to enter, the awakeners in the hall were clearly divided into three groups, and their differences were apparent just by their appearances.

Ninety percent of the cities in the Luce Federation were located in the ice fields, with a cold climate. Most of the awakeners there had high noses and deep-set eyes. Both men and women were tall and slender, looking like they had explosive combat capabilities. Among them, the most eye-catching was a pair of intimate-looking lovers. The man had a sturdy physique, nearly two meters tall, resembling a powerful polar bear, while the woman, estimated to be around 1.9 meters, had shoulder-length brown hair and a somewhat unapproachable face.

On the other hand, in the Cario Empire, due to being an immigrant nation, the awakens had various skin colors, and their irises were colorful. At first glance, it was challenging to determine their nationality.

“What are they doing here?” Jennifer snorted lightly.

Yin Xiao chuckled, “Girl, your grandfather is, after all, from Cario. Are you forgetting your roots?”

Jennifer was unashamed and even proud, “But my father made an enlightened decision against our ancestors. I am a born and bred Alliance person.”

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the three different forces in the hall with a meaningful smile, “The Elderly People’s Nation is located at the intersection center of the three-country sea area. The residents are not only from the Alliance, and they probably heard the news and came to join in. It’s reasonable.”

“Sister...” Suddenly, Xu Xing pulled Song Ke’s sleeve and stared straight at someone across the hall.

It was an awakener from the Cario Empire, and he looked quite young. Freckles adorned his tender face, and his thick, curly reddish-brown hair framed his face. His eyes were a clear ocean blue, and despite his young age, he was already close to 1.7 meters tall, surrounded by people like the center of the universe.

Tustan’s electric-type awakener leaned over to gossip, “His name is Dylan, quite famous.”

Xu Xing blinked, “Why is he famous?”

“Dylan is from Cario and is also the youngest S-class awakener in the world. He reached S2 level at just ten years old. His ability is in the mysterious category called ‘Nightmare Descends,’ which can unconsciously make people’s bodies fall asleep while keeping their minds awake, creating hallucinatory nightmares similar to ‘sleep paralysis.’”

After hearing this, Xu Xing pursed his lips, “...”

His self-esteem took a heavy blow. He was happy to be able to take on S-class missions, but here was someone who reached S2 level at just ten years old. While he struggled to grow to 1.7 meters, Dylan effortlessly reached that height at eleven. It was truly a crushing defeat, both in abilities and height. Comrade Xu Xiaoxing became a complete emo.

“Yin Xiao?” Several awakeners with Alliance faces walked over, and among them, a short-haired woman, elegant and agile, greeted them proactively. “The Northern Base is distant. I thought you wouldn’t arrive until at least tomorrow.”

“I hitched a ride.” Yin Xiao smiled, raised his hand to try to put it around Song Ke’s shoulder, but considering it might be offensive, he temporarily changed it to a patting motion.

“This is Captain of V587 and also my friend, Song Ke.”

“Yooooo, Gu Ruoyi, Captain of the ‘Peace Dove’ Team in Minlin (B16 District).” Jennifer stepped back, whispered to Lin Youyou, “I swear on my sixth sense as an illegitimate daughter, she’s interested in my dad and wants to be my stepmother.”

“Stepmother? Then who is your dad’s legal wife?” Lin Youyou laughed.

“There,” Jennifer discreetly pointed at Song Ke, “hasn’t entered the door yet, a long way to go.”

Feeling a chill behind her, Jennifer rubbed her arm. As she turned around, a handsome young man in a wheelchair was expressionlessly staring at her.

Jennifer’s magical sixth sense kicked in again, and she quickly changed her tone, “Actually, my dad continuing to be single is quite good, really!”

In the “Peace Dove” team, a man with rainbow-colored hair in the back exaggeratedly exclaimed, “V587? Never heard of it. I guess you don’t even have a ranking in the Alliance? Is your Northern Base so short-handed that you’re randomly picking a team to make up the numbers?”

“We do have a ranking,” Song Ke argued seriously, “Currently, we are ranked 235,706th.”

“What rank?” Rainbow-head was stunned for a good three seconds, even scratched his ear. Then he burst into laughter along with his teammates, “Hahaha! Did you guys hear that? How many numbers did she just say?”

“235,706th!” Rainbow-head’s exaggerated tone attracted the attention of many people. “Is this your level? Did you deliberately bring in an A-class to act as a newbie? Are you A-class?”

“No,” Song Ke honestly shook her head.

Rainbow-head then asked Lu Xiaoyu, “What about you? A-class.”

Lu Xiaoyu couldn’t be bothered to look at him and coldly spit out a word, “No.”

“Hey, there’s also a guy in a wheelchair,” Rainbow-head turned to the other side, amusing himself, “Bro, are you disabled people having a party here? Are you A-class?”

Zhuang Qingyan folded his hands together and politely said, “Of course not, how could I be A-class?”

The four A-class members of V587 exchanged glances, “...”

Similarly, Yin Xiao and others who knew Song Ke’s true level had the same reaction, “...”

This rainbow-haired guy was really something. Was it luck that he got it wrong each time? Or was it bad luck that he always managed to pick an S-class? Truly incomparable... luck.

“Enough, Yang Xiaobo, say one more word, and I’ll have you roll back to Minlin,” Gu Ruoyi reprimanded with a cold face.

Yang Xiaobo raised his hand to his mouth, mimicking a zipper motion.

Yin Xiao chuckled and ignored him, "Why is everyone gathered here?"

"Because we can't leave." Gu Ruoyi calmly dropped a bomb, "The Elderly People's Nation's weather simulation system is malfunctioning."

Weather simulation system?

Song Ke quickly glanced at Zhuang Qingyan. That name sounded familiar.

Gu Ruoyi took out a terminal and displayed the environmental index, "You also entered through the sky route, right? Following the navigation all the way indoors, so you didn't feel it. The current temperature outside is 38°C. The sunlight is glaring, and the heat radiation intensity has exceeded thirteen times the normal post-apocalyptic level. Staying outdoors for an extended period can easily cause mutations."

"Somebody tried to go out just now, and within five minutes, their awakened energy went haywire. Helpless, they had to retreat."

"Did you report it for repair?" Yin Xiao asked.

"We've already contacted the Qinglan Research Institute, but..." Gu Ruoyi sighed, "After the apocalypse, many advanced repairers suffered casualties, and currently, they can't spare the manpower. The earliest they can arrive is two days later."

"Sister Ruoyi, what's the use of telling them? They can't fix it anyway?" Yang Xiaobo started blabbering again, unable to stop his mouth.

Gu Ruoyi took a deep breath, turned her eyes away from him, and rolled her eyes, "Yang... Xiao... Bo."

"Alright, alright, I won't say anything more." Yang Xiaobo instantly conceded.

Gu Ruoyi nodded apologetically to Song Ke, "Sorry, he has a sharp tongue, likes to boast, but he's not a bad person."

Song Ke frowned slightly. Their admission was only for 48 hours, and in two days, it would all be over.

“But wait, if there’s radiation outside, what about the residents here? Did they turn into zombies?” Someone in Tustan’s team asked in confusion.

“Do you think they’re idiots? If they sensed danger, they would definitely hide first, like in basements or air-raid shelters, and then send out distress signals,” a companion reasoned convincingly.

“The problem is…” Gu Ruoyi said in a deep voice, “We haven’t received any signals, and we can’t contact any organizations.”

Everyone fell silent after hearing this, disbelief flashing across their faces.

Suddenly, someone stood up in the corner, an awakener who ignored his companion’s attempt to stop him, insisting on going out. He shouted, “What’s there to be afraid of? Not every bit of radiation will cause mutations. It’s a matter of probability. I’ll be back before my awakened energy goes haywire.”

Gu Ruoyi quickly explained, “They were the first team to come in, hoping to take the lead. Seeing more and more people, they probably couldn’t sit still.”

The polar bear couple not far away glanced at the person who spoke, had a brief conversation in a low voice, and made no move.

The person smashed a window, leaped onto the balcony, then jumped to the adjacent ribbon bridge. He strode into the sunlight, his back disappearing in an instant.

About seven or eight minutes later, he nonchalantly strolled back, “I circled nearby, and there’s no one in the entire Splendid Tower.”

He spread his hands, basking in the sunlight, and casually smiled at his companions, “See, I’m perfectly fine. My awakened energy is stable. I told you, radiation is a matter of probability—”

“Tahp—” His body suddenly swayed, a piece of rotten flesh falling from his face.

“Captain!” His teammates in the hall panicked.

The person absentmindedly wiped his face, and another piece of decaying flesh fell off. Under the intense radiation, his eye pupils rapidly turned gray, teeth bled and fell out, his appearance quickly resembling that of a zombie.

“What’s happening...?” Before he could finish his sentence, his last bit of sanity disappeared, turning him into a full-fledged mutant zombie. Emitting a deep, hoarse roar from his throat, light orbs flickering in his palms, he pounced toward them.

From leaving to coming back, the entire process took less than ten minutes, and this person transformed from a human into a ferocious zombie.

“Bang, bang—” Other awakeners in the building quickly took action, eliminating him.

The martyr’s body lay quietly on the ground. After this incident, no one dared to go out without permission.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 149.2: Fire Seed (19)

Can you swim?

Some smart individuals sent the situation back to the system platform. After consulting with the client, awakeners from the Alliance team received a new prompt:

“New side mission: Please restore the ecological environment of Elderly People’s Country District A5 as soon as possible. The reward for this mission will be calculated separately.”

Song Ke quietly walked to the side and gestured for Zhuang Qingyan to come over.

“T014.” Like a street secret agent, Song Ke whispered the code.

This was the serial number of the out-of-control weather simulation system in Hua City. At that time, only she and Zhuang Qingyan were part of V587, and only they knew the details.

Zhuang Qingyan immediately understood, “Elderly People’s Country’s T001 is a first-generation machine, and it’s also the only simulation system used in District A. Do you want me to shut it down?”

“Can you shut it down?”

“Yes.” Zhuang Qingyan smiled, “I know the central location of T001. If we have Lu Xiaoyu’s help, it won’t take fourteen days.”

“But the difficulty of this matter isn’t in the simulation system. I believe there are other hacker-type awakeners at the scene. The key is the radiation outside...”

As he spoke, he suddenly looked up, staring at Song Ke intensely. “Song Ke, you’re not thinking of...”

“With the current radiation, how much is the excess?” Song Ke changed the subject.

The calculation of radiation was a very complex formula, but Zhuang Qingyan quickly glanced at the environmental data and almost instantly provided an answer, “Equivalent to about 30%.”

Song Ke nodded and then pointed to herself, “I’ll go find the central hub.”

She wasn’t showing off. Although the radiation test at Ning Rong’s Laboratory had caused her pain, Song Ke now had a deeper understanding of her awakened energy. Within a radiation excess of 100%, her body wouldn’t be affected at all; instead, her awakened energy would slightly increase.

This side mission seemed tailor-made for V587!

“Your abnormal radiation and unknown genes inside your body haven’t been fully examined yet,” Zhuang Qingyan hesitated, a rare occurrence. “If you enter a strong radiation environment again, and if anything unexpected happens...”

Song Ke patted his shoulder, reassuringly saying, “Don’t worry, I know my situation.”

Recalling Ning Rong’s test report, if one analyzed the data alone, the impact of 30% excess radiation on Song Ke was practically negligible. Her real tolerance limit was above 130%.

Zhuang Qingyan remained silent for a while.

Song Ke patted him again and again, saying, “Let me go.”

“Okay, you can go. Take the communicator with you and stay in constant contact,” Zhuang Qingyan, with a slightly painful chest from the patting, helplessly held her wrist and gently scratched her palm. “Also, don’t linger. Go and come back as soon as possible.”

“I got it.” Song Ke made an OK sign with her other hand.

The two returned to the team, and Song Ke informed everyone about her decision to go outside to find the T001 central hub.

Both Tustan’s team and V587 were shocked beyond words:

“What?!”

“Captain Song, don’t act impulsively!”

Yin Xiao frowned, "Song Ke, this decision is very unwise. If you're in a hurry, we can push Qinglan Institute again."

Tustan's team members also joined in persuading, "Yeah, Captain Song, you don't need to be so sacrificial. Anyway, everyone is here, and no one can complete the mission. Hey! V587! Aren't you stopping your captain?"

Song Ke picked up her backpack and zipped up her jacket to the top. "Don't worry, just wait here."

Yin Xiao wasn't naive and quickly guessed something, "Do you have a way to resist radiation?"

Song Ke nodded vaguely. About the secrets of her body, besides Zhuang Qingyan and her teammates, she didn't plan to tell anyone.

After the initial shock, members of V587 calmed down.

Xu Xing scratched his head, his mind in confusion. T001? T014? His inability to remember suddenly began to attack him. He instinctively looked at Zhuang Qingyan, and Lin Youyou and Fang Zhixu also turned their gazes in unison. Song Ke wasn't one to act recklessly; even if we consider the worst-case scenario and her thoughts were immature, Zhuang Qingyan would surely intervene.

Then they noticed that Zhuang Qingyan nodded imperceptibly.

V587: "???" Look, look, these two are whispering behind their backs again.

The group quickly returned to normal. Fang Zhixu sat back on the sofa, reviewing the treatment methods for radiation sickness. Lin Youyou took out sunglasses, a hat, and sunscreen gloves from her bag, putting them on Song Ke.

Zhuang Qingyan turned to Lu Xiaoyu: "After obtaining the central hub of T001, how long can you crack it?"

Lu Xiaoyu snorted, "Just a first-generation machine, half an hour is enough."

"Pfft." Song Ke couldn't help but laugh. She glanced at Zhuang Qingyan and awkwardly pulled down her hat.

In a rare occurrence, Lu Xiaoyu sensed a subtle embarrassment on Zhuang Qingyan's face.

His tea-colored pupils blinked, cleverly realizing something. "Have you tried to crack a firewall? How long did it take you?"

Zhuang Qingyan turned coldly. "Let's get ready to move."

Lu Xiaoyu persistently brought his head closer. "How long did you take? A day? A week?"

"Why won't you tell me? You must have taken a long time, right?"

"Shut up."

"I remember!" Xu Xing suddenly exclaimed. "T014, is that the one you spent fourteen days repairing?"

Lu Xiaoyu: "Pfft."

His mood visibly improved. The mechanical arm fluctuated up and down, and he happily walked away.

Zhuang Qingyan narrowed his eyes, expressionless, staring at Xu Xing.

Xu Xing touched the back of his collar for the first time in a long time, and ran behind Song Ke to hide.

Five minutes later, Song Ke put on her hat, sunglasses, and earphones, turned around, and walked towards the broken window.

She stepped over the body on the ground, raised her hand towards her companions with her back turned, and then—right in front of everyone’s eyes—jumped outside!

Dylan, with his sea-blue eyes, flashed a mocking curve. “Idiot, adults really underestimate themselves.”

The polar bear couple exchanged a glance, and the tall man spoke heavily, “Veronica, did you sense the person who just went out?”

Veronica, an S5-level precognitive awakener, looked solemn. She shook her head slowly. “Vladimir, I can’t discern her level, but she’s a ‘Tank.’”

At Veronica’s fingertips, a tarot card suddenly appeared: The Chariot in the upright position.

The Chariot card, a symbol of strength, was closely related to power. In the upright position, it meant overcoming obstacles and achieving success.

Vladimir lowered his head and made the sign of the cross with his fingers. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come...”

...

One hour later.

Bang! Bang!

The main entrance of the Splendid Tower was knocked, and the awakeners inside changed their expressions, instantly preparing for battle.

Yin Xiao walked casually to the center of the field, effortlessly holding a super-powered shotgun in his hand, aimed at the restless crowd.

“Everyone, don’t be nervous, relax a bit. It’s just our friend who came back.”

“Are you sure it’s your ‘friend’ who came back?” questioned Cario’s awakener with a cold tone.

“Of course,” Yin Xiao pushed and loaded the gun, revealing a sarcastically kind smile. “Didn’t she knock on the door? How polite.”

Lu Xiaoyu’s six mechanical arms extended simultaneously. Before everyone could react, he swiftly operated the control panel, opening the main door.

The sunlight was glaring, and everyone quickly retreated, moving into the shadows. Then, they suddenly looked up, exclaiming, “!!!”

They saw a machine, exceeding two meters in length, width, and height, slowly “walking” in. With a loud thud, it slammed onto the ground. Afterward, a young girl’s flushed face emerged from the front, sweat beading on her forehead, but her eyes were exceptionally clear.

“I’m back, so tired.” Song Ke gasped for breath.

Although she followed Zhuang Qingyan’s advice and dismantled the outer shell, leaving only the core components, this machine, made of an unknown material, was exceptionally heavy. She carried it all the way back, fearing any accidental bumps, and she was genuinely exhausted.

The hall fell into stunned silence, and the awakers displayed expressions of disbelief.

No way, right? This person stayed under thirteen times the radiation for a whole hour, and nothing happened?

Song Ke calmed her breathing and then went to Tustan and V587 with a serious expression.

“Something’s not right outside.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Everyone, go outside and see; you’ll understand.”

Those knowledgeable quickly recognized it as the central control of the weather simulation system. An awakener approached voluntarily, saying, “Hey, need help? I’m an A7-level hacker and can try to break in.”

“No need, we have a faster way,” Lu Xiaoyu activated the T001 central hub, tapping on the panel, “Come on, permissions.”

Zhuang Qingyan glanced at him coldly, cooperating for fingerprint and iris recognition.

Lu Xiaoyu’s ten fingers worked rapidly, and he hummed something. On closer listening, one could hear him singing, “Fourteen days, it actually took fourteen days~”

Zhuang Qingyan’s forehead veins throbbed. “That’s enough. With one’s own strengths, attacking the opponent’s weaknesses, what are you so proud of?”

Lu Xiaoyu remained unfazed. “Fourteen days~”

After 22 minutes and 20 seconds, as Lu Xiaoyu entered the last line of code, T001 was forcibly shut down.

Rainbowhead Yang Xiaobo witnessed the entire process, covering his face in disbelief, murmuring, “Oh my God! Is my mouth cursed or something?”

The three “weaklings” he had just mocked because none of them were even at A-level, each of them gave him a slap. What was the background of this V587 team? Why did something that many people couldn’t handle become easy when it fell into their hands?

“Sister Ruoyi, do you think it’s not too late for me to apologize now?” Yang Xiaobo forced a smile with a bitter face.

Song Ke clicked “Submit Task” on the terminal, and V587’s points soared significantly, proudly entering the top 200,000 in the Alliance.

With the closing of T001, there was a noticeable change in the weather outside.

The bright sunlight disappeared, the temperature suddenly dropped, and the gloomy sea breeze roared. Even though it was midsummer, people shivered as if it were freezing.

All the awakeners stood up, leaving the Splendid Tower one by one.

Fine drizzles hit their faces, carrying the unique salty scent of the sea.

Song Ke and her team also arrived at the side of the Ribbon Bridge, overlooking the entire island from top to bottom.

The city construction of the Elderly People’s Nation lived up to being the top in the entire Alliance. Many buildings were beyond their ability to name: floating cinemas, private care centers, immersive restaurants, simulated parks changing themes, and various flying vehicles drifting through the air...

The entire city was orderly, all infrastructure operating normally, except—there was no one.

No traces of human habitation, and it didn’t look like it had been invaded by an external force. Everything was in perfect order, yet everything exuded an indescribable sense of strangeness.

This dreamlike island, this District A5, this Elderly People’s Nation.

It turned out to be an unmistakable deserted city.

Song Ke looked up at the sky, cold rain falling on her cheeks. She suddenly noticed that after T001 was shut down, all the seagulls had disappeared.

On a nearby rooftop, a perception-type awakener suddenly issued a warning, “Something is approaching us!”

Song Ke sensed something and looked towards the distance.

A speedboat was approaching from the sea, and the awakeners on it shouted across the distance, “Hey—we’re late! Has the mission been completed? Can we still get some soup?”

The awakeners on the island were silent, no one answering.

The person cursed, “Damn the Sea of Misfortune! If it weren’t for getting lost, I would’ve been here already!”

“Sister, over there!”

Xu Xing pointed sharply to a certain direction, where continuous shadows were rapidly moving, undulating waves causing the sea to shake violently.

Suddenly! A group of whale sharks covered in gray spots leaped out of the sea, their massive bodies rolling half a circle in the air, biting onto the speeding speedboat!

“Ah—!!”

The driver didn’t have time to escape; his entire body was bitten in half at the waist. The others fell into the sea in panic, hastily releasing their awakened abilities.

Unfortunately, the ocean was not a human’s domain.

Another batch of grotesque monsters burst out of the water, their decayed bodies swimming agilely, chasing and biting the awakeners who fell into the water. Blood sprayed, turning that area into a deep red in an instant.

After seeing the monsters clearly, Song Ke swallowed hard. “Do you all know how to swim?”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 150.1: Fire Seed (20)

The island split open

Song Ke felt very uneasy; the tragedy unfolding before her eyes seemed to foreshadow something.

“Do you all know how to swim?” She turned to her companions.

“Sister, I can do many different swimming styles!” Xu Xing and Song Ke both came from the District F177, where most children growing up by the seaside were adept swimmers.

“Yes.” Su Cha, who grew up in the rainforest, underwent rigorous training and swimming was a necessary survival skill.

Song Ke felt a bit relieved and then looked at the two difficult brothers sitting in wheelchairs.

“I used to know how.” Lu Xiaoyu was always candid, not deliberately avoiding his own shortcomings. “Now, I might need some time to adapt.”

After breaking his legs, he was thrown into the Death Prison and hadn’t had the chance to go into the water since then.

Zhuang Qingyan leaned on the wheelchair, his gaze fixed on the blood-stained sea, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

“I actually don’t like this sport of swimming...”

“Really? Didn’t you book the temperature-controlled swimming pool at the dormitory building? The young master, spending money like water, paid ten years’ worth of exclusive booking fees in one go.” Lu Xiaoyu didn’t hesitate to expose his old classmate.

Zhuang Qingyan’s smile remained unchanged, but his tone changed, “But I’m quite good at it.”

Song Ke: “...” You clearly just find the sea water dirty.

Among the remaining two, Fang Zhixu honestly shook his head, “No, I was too busy with work before, didn’t have time to learn.”

Surprisingly, Lin Youyou also followed with a sheepish smile, “Um, yeah, I don’t know how either.”

“Huh?” Song Ke’s eyes widened slightly. “Didn’t you shoot an ocean-themed photoshoot?”

At that time, fans supported her, and the flower boats and billboards along the street looped Lin Youyou’s new song promotional MV, portraying her as a mermaid swimming in clear waters. Song Ke remembered it very clearly!

“It was all special effects, synthesized to create the ‘pure desire’ image.” Lin Youyou grabbed Song Ke’s shoulder and looked pitiful, “I’m actually terrified of water. Song Ke, you must not make me go in!”

Song Ke fell silent for a moment, once again marveling at how fake the entertainment industry could be.

“Well, then wear a life jacket,” Zhuang Qingyan pulled out life jackets from the space and distributed them to everyone. “Be prepared, everyone put them on.”

As they put on the life jackets, they discussed, "Why did so many marine beasts suddenly appear?"

"Because we closed T001," Zhuang Qingyan looked up at the gloomy sky, "the strong radiation it originally emitted had the effect of repelling beasts. Marine life tended to avoid it, automatically staying away. Now that it's back to normal, with more awakeners gathering here, they come attracted by the scent."

The Ribbon Bridge where V587 was located was the famous "Island Loop Scenic Line" in the Elderly People's Nation, rotating slowly around the entire island. As it moved closer to the sea level, the scene gradually became clear.

The zombie whales and the extremely ugly giant flounders that appeared later leaped high into the sky, eagerly crashing towards the island with a "bam bam" sound. Although they were blocked by an invisible barrier, the ground beneath the feet of the people shook continuously.

The awakeners on the island took action one after another.

On the side of "Tustan," the Yin Xiao raised a mortar, activated his ability "Seeing Weakness". The scarlet explosive bomb drew an arc in the air and landed accurately on a zombie whale that had just jumped out of the sea. Its eye sockets were instantly blown open, countless shrapnel pierced its skull, and its bulky body fell heavily, creating a splash of water over ten meters high.

Lead by Jennifer, the AOE-type awakeners bombarded wildly, causing fire, thunder, wind, and mist to rise on the sea surface. However, these marine beasts were equally cunning. As soon as they saw the attacks starting, they quickly submerged underwater to avoid damage.

Gu Ruoyi, from the "Peace Dove," was an A5-level powerful control-type awakener. Her ability, called "Gathering," could maximize the traction of enemies to specific locations or areas. Coordinating with the AOE-type awakeners, it often had a miraculous effect when facing a tide of corpses.

Gu Ruoyi moved her fingers, and whirlpools appeared on the sea surface, sucking nearby beasts together.

She glanced at Tustan's side, changed direction, and helped them gather a wave of monsters. Finally, the group attacks had tangible results.

"Thanks, Sister Ruoyi~" Tustan's teammate shouted from a distance.

The combat capabilities of the awakeners in the New Asia Alliance were strong, and among them were prominent S-level individuals.

Looking at Cario and Luce's side, the most eye-catching should be the pair of polar lovers from the "Kazan Locomotive," Vladimir and Veronica. Vladimir's ability is "Distortion," and he is also an excellent boxer. Although he cannot go into the sea, he slightly raised his right hand, covered with old scars, and clenched his fist fiercely—

The giant flounder was twisted into a spiral, with hundreds of broken bone spikes piercing into flesh, instantly turning into a bloody string of sashimi!

Everyone was quite formidable, except... for V587, who looked like a slacker.

From the perspective of Rainbow Head Yang Xiaobo, this group of people was cowardly, wearing life jackets early on, and the whole team was goofing off. Surprisingly, the only one taking action was a kid? He immediately regretted his apology; he didn't say anything wrong. The ranking of 235706 definitely made sense. Even if they were skilled at repairing machines, they completely fell apart when it came to killing monstrous beasts.

"V587."

Slacker number one, Fang Zhixu, usually responsible for picking up crystals, found himself almost useless in the current situation.

Slacker number two, the wheelchair brothers in charge of logistics and transportation, refrained from getting involved unless absolutely necessary.

The remaining two passive slackers, Song Ke and Su Cha, looked at each other.

Both were melee fighters; they couldn't just jump into the sea to fight, right? Not to mention the current concentration of monsters; those awakeners didn't have foresight. They lazily held their spiritual crossbows, shooting into the sea with sporadic attempts.

Xu Xing, on the other hand, was in his element. He started doing radio calisthenics, and his ice-type ability became significantly more potent in the presence of water. With a set of stretching exercises, the sea instantly froze. Then, with a set of kicking movements, ice blades shot out, skewering various fish into a string.

Xu Xing sneakily glanced at Dylan, his small face full of pride. "Nightmare Descends" couldn't control the monsters, and Dylan was visibly frustrated.

Lin Youyou was also pondering new possibilities. Her ability relied on lyrics to function, and different lyrics imposed on different targets resulted in completely different buffs. However, evidently, these marine monsters couldn't understand human language, causing her singing effects to be greatly reduced.

Lin Youyou closed her eyes, singing a song without lyrics that echoed gently in the air above the sea. When the song finished, nothing happened. Lin Youyou couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed; she had just expressed her willingness to communicate, but evidently, these monsters couldn't understand.

Yang Xiaobo couldn't bear to watch anymore. Why were they doing exercises and singing? Were these people here for a vacation? Could they be more serious?!

After half an hour of concerted efforts from everyone, the sea monsters disappeared without a trace, and the floating corpses drifted away with the waves. The crisis in the Elderly People's Nation was averted. The powered individuals prepared to conduct a comprehensive search of the entire island. As they were leaving, Song Ke looked back at the crimson sea. Was the crisis really resolved?

...

Six hours later.

“Click—”

Song Ke twisted the pull ring, and the sweet and thick hot corn juice poured into her throat, warming her entire abdomen. The weather was continuously gloomy and rainy. She blew into her cupped hands, but unfortunately, her fingers were still icy cold.

There were many colorful small pavilions along the streets of the Elderly People’s Nation. These mobile restaurant-style booths offered various flavors, and without payment or verification, passersby could take out warm food cooked on-site by machines.

Similar facilities couldn’t exist in the District F177 District. If they were placed there, they would be smashed and looted by the crazy wanderers on the first day. However, the residents of District A5 lacked nothing in terms of clothing and food. They seemed to prefer showcasing their “noble” morality through such “generosity.”

After the failure of T001, the dreamlike Elderly People’s Nation was torn apart to reveal its true face. The island was shrouded in gray cold fog, with a blurry vision, slippery and difficult to walk on the wet road. The incessant raindrops were enough to make one feel anxious.

A group of awakeners passed by, and fragments of their conversation were carried into Song Ke’s ears by the wind.

“The access restriction is about to expire. Damn, where did the people here go?!”

“Maybe we should give up. S-level missions were never easy, and this place is eerie. I feel uneasy. Captain, let’s just leave?”

“Sure, let’s go. Staying here is no fun; it’s like a ghost town.”

As they spoke, the group headed towards the Splendid Tower, seemingly preparing to retreat.

Song Ke watched them go, took another sip of the warm corn juice, and then left the small pavilion.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 150.2: Fire Seed (20)

The island split open

Inside an unmanned coffee shop two meters away, Zhuang Qingyan asked in a low voice, “Any progress?”

Su Cha shook his head quickly, “The structure of this island is different from a regular city. There are no air-raid shelters or underground facilities for refuge. I’ve confirmed that all residential buildings and public places are empty.”

“Is that so? Interesting...” Zhuang Qingyan supported his chin, and his gaze gradually became distant.

Su Cha hesitated, but eventually voiced his thoughts, “The feeling here is... very unsettling.”

“What do you find unsettling?” Zhuang Qingyan lifted his gaze.

“Everything is too clean and orderly. The residents don’t seem to have suffered an attack. Instead, it feels like... they disappeared out of thin air.”

Su Cha knew his thoughts sounded absurd, but that’s what he believed: the residents of the Elderly People’s Nation had vanished into thin air.

“Your intuition is correct,” Zhuang Qingyan nodded faintly. “I guess they left voluntarily.”

This statement stirred up waves of questions.

“What?” Lin Youyou exclaimed in disbelief. “Why would they leave voluntarily? Elderly People’s Nation is the most prosperous city in the entire Alliance. Why would they run to our lower-level districts and suffer?”

“Doesn’t make sense, right? There are quite a few residents here. If they really left, how could there be no news at all?” Fang Zhixu questioned.

The number of local residents in the Elderly People’s Nation was around a million, a mere drop in the bucket compared to the Alliance’s thirty billion population. However, for a million people to vanish quietly, especially among the privileged class, it couldn’t possibly happen without causing a stir.

This S-level mission was becoming more and more mysterious. The residents of the Elderly People’s Nation were hiding something, but what were they hiding and where had they gone?

“That’s right, a million people can’t just disappear out of thin air,” Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped the table with his fingertips, his gaze turning gradually cold. “So I suspect that the Central Court has long known the truth, and perhaps... this is part of their plan.”

The others listened, feeling confused, and were about to ask Zhuang Qingyan for clarification.

“Something doesn’t seem right,” Su Cha spoke up, his sensitivity to the environment making him keenly aware.

“What’s wrong?” The others became tense.

“After leaving the Splendid Tower, I made a reference mark using a landmark,” Su Cha pointed to a spot below, “the position of that tree has changed.”

Lin Youyou looked over in confusion and then turned back with the same confusion. “I can’t see anything. What do you all think?”

Zhuang Qingyan frowned at the statement. “It’s not the tree that’s changing; it’s our position.”

Surrounded by endless seas, it was easy for people to lose their sense of direction in such an environment.

Lu Xiaoyu quickly pulled up a map, confirming their current location. “Wow, here’s some bad news. From the time we landed on the island until now, the exact position of the Elderly People’s Nation has shifted thirty nautical miles.”

When nobody noticed, the entire island had been moving at a gentle pace on the surface of the sea.

Everyone fell silent....

Xu Xing asked innocently, “Is this island alive?”

“Maybe it’s due to magnetic attraction...” Zhuang Qingyan pondered for a moment. “Can we determine the direction of its movement?”

Lu Xiaoyu clattered on the keyboard, then abruptly stopped, “Even worse news: it seems to be heading towards the Sea of Misfortune.”

“The Sea of Misfortune Triangle, the legendary nightmare of countless sailors, a place of no return.”

Fifteen hours from now, in less than a day.

Just as Song Ke was about to speak, her eyes suddenly froze.

A two-meter-long emperor crab crawled towards them horizontally, its eight long legs raised high.

Swiftly, Song Ke threw a flying knife, piercing through its crab shell and pinning it firmly in place!

The zombie emperor crab's green-bean-sized eyes twitched a few times, and it spat out a pool of foul-smelling pus.

“Wuwa wawa ah wawa, it's so scary!” Xu Xing agilely jumped onto a chair and pointed, “Sister, there are more outside!”

Song Ke suddenly looked up, and indeed, there were more than a dozen of the same creatures crawling quickly on the muddy streets.

“Ah—!!” Ear-piercing screams echoed from a distance.

Densely packed light flesh-colored sea rats emerged from the corners, resembling giant radishes with long tails, wriggling and crawling on the damp ground.

Song Ke's face turned pale. This was definitely not something that should be in the Elderly People's Nation. How did they manage to pass through the barrier?

The sound of engines starting came from above. A fully armed supersonic ship slowly took off from the helipad on the top floor of the splendid building.

Was it the team that had just planned to leave? Song Ke raised her head to bid them farewell. The supersonic ship ascended smoothly and, after a short while, plunged straight down with its nose into the sea!

Song Ke: “!!”

Suddenly, she felt like she had returned to Hua City, witnessing the meteor shower of starships crashing again.

On the faces of Lu Xiaoyu and others were expressions of uncontrollable surprise. “The energy source failed? No, the Yiyu was sucked away!”

All the flying terminals in the Alliance, to some extent, used the new energy source “Yiyu” to maintain their levitating capabilities. The Lu’s starships were entirely powered by this new energy source. Without Yiyu, they could only perform short-distance flights and needed to stop periodically to replenish their energy.

Zhuang Qingyan quickly scanned the environmental index, “The magnetic field is disturbed.”

As he spoke, the cup of corn juice on the table suddenly tilted, and with a “plop,” it spilled on the table, and the viscous yellow liquid oozed out.

In the blink of an eye, the earth began to shake violently. The dull vibrations came from the depths of the sea, and the thunderous sound waves rapidly spread upward.

“Crackle—”

A deep and bottomless crack tore open the ground beneath their feet. Lin Youyou almost did a split, but at a critical moment, Su Cha embraced her with one hand, and the two jumped to the other side, standing together with Song Ke, Fang Zhixu, and Xu Xing.

However, the crack became deeper and larger, unexpectedly splitting the island in half!

Song Ke and the other six people were dumbfounded.

The Elderly People’s Nation was splitting open!

Literally splitting open!

The seismic activity from the ocean floor continued. After the first crack appeared, numerous fissures followed closely behind. The irreversible trend of the island’s destruction quickly unfolded, and fragments of varying sizes fell from high above.

Crack—

As Song Ke stumbled, she reached out and steadied herself with one hand. She watched as the island fragment where Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu were slid away from her.

In a critical moment, Lu Xiaoyu's six mechanical arms extended, stabbing into the ground on the opposite side. With both the person and the wheelchair airborne, they narrowly landed on the opposite side. Due to the strong momentum, he inevitably fell out of the wheelchair, and Fang Zhixu and Su Cha hurried to help.

Zhuang Qingyan wasn't as lucky. He was closest to the crack, and as the ground tilted, his wheelchair rapidly descended. If he fell down like this, whether he could swim or not, being crushed to death was certain.

Song Ke took two steps back, then suddenly accelerated and charged forward. She leaped into the air, swiftly reaching the edge of the cliff. With a short spiritual dagger formed in her hand, she exerted all her strength to stab into the ground, grabbing hold of the falling Zhuang Qingyan with one hand!

Zhuang Qingyan's entire body swayed among the falling debris. His other hand tightly grasped Song Ke's hand. Song Ke's toes kept sliding forward. She gritted her teeth, her face turned red as she exerted all her strength to pull upwards. Suddenly, Zhuang Qingyan was lifted into the air, and Song Ke's arms encircled him. Due to the inertia, they both rolled on the ground.

After rolling out of the inclined area, Song Ke got up, kicked Zhuang Qingyan's shin, and roared like an angry dragon:

“Don't pretend to be a cripple, get up! Run!”

Zhuang Qingyan made a painful hiss and smiled bitterly, “Song Ke, you overestimated me.”

Did he pretend to be lame just now? Having used a wheelchair for almost a year, he was now a genuine weak researcher. No matter how fast his mind worked, his physical strength couldn't keep up.

The two of them crawled back to the elevated area where Lin Youyou and others were – a relatively intact fragment of the island. Song Ke, catching her breath after the ordeal, sat on the ground and suddenly saw something that left her stunned.

Among countless cracks in the islands, a colossal head emerged. Its face was covered in large black spots, two eyes shrouded in gray shadows, and it slightly opened its mouth, devouring several falling awakeners.

As this giant beast moved, Song Ke gradually saw its complete appearance. Its body length exceeded a hundred meters, covered entirely in a dark green hard shell, except for the head, limbs, and tail. The back shell was adorned with thousands of barnacles, creating a forest of barnacles that could instantly terrify sufferers of trypophobia!

With a splash, the monster's long forelimbs rose above the water's surface, patting the island where they were like oars.

Another round of earthquakes ensued, and the cracks underfoot grew larger and larger.

Song Ke suddenly realized that it was this monster that shattered the Elderly People's Nation!

The terminal beeped, and a new urgent message popped up:

“New Sub-Mission (Urgent): Please eliminate the level 5 zombie monster – the “Prism Shell Sea Turtle” – that has appeared in District A5 Elderly People's Nation as soon as possible.”