

Doomsday 161

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 161: Key (4)

Sister Song is right, everyone listen to Sister Song

Dazzling red lights flickered in the air, and the buzzing alarms annoyed people, creating a chaotic and discordant atmosphere. In this incongruous environment, Song Ke held onto the hanging rod with one hand. Her round almond eyes, like those of a cat, looked down on everyone in the field from above.

After a moment of silence, sporadic curses erupted from all directions.

“Who the hell are you?”

“What’s it to you? Mind your own business!”

Song Ke casually glanced at those who were deliberately causing trouble; none of them were from the Northern Base.

She didn’t release her awakened energy, her face backlit, her figure slender. She looked like an ordinary passerby, completely lacking any intimidating presence.

However, strangely, from the moment she appeared, the awakeners from the Northern Base seemed to collectively become mute. The guy who had just been cursing the most was dumbfounded. He couldn’t believe his eyes, rubbed them in disbelief, and others pushed and shoved each other, some sneakily opened their terminals, searching for the cherished video of “You’re not an Alliance person if you don’t watch.”

The boy who was cursing stared wide-eyed, pupils trembling. Isn’t she their S7 level?

The reverence and awe of awakeners towards S-level individuals are innate, especially those with strong attack abilities. It is a submission based on absolute strength. The renowned and mysterious S7 level made her first public appearance, and it seemed like she was here to support them. The feeling of having someone from their own side take charge, if you haven't experienced it firsthand, you wouldn't understand. The guy's throat felt sour, and hot tears welled up.

Several disrespectful awakeners noticed that the Northern Base, like a witch casting a spell, had suddenly fallen silent. They inwardly cursed, realizing that if this continued, they wouldn't be able to start a fight, and their mission would fail.

Someone lurking in the shadows had their fingers quietly turned into claws, awakened energy gathering. They raised their hand to initiate an attack—

“What, cramping up?” Song Ke asked casually.

Clang!

The chilling blade of a willow leaf knife swept past in front of his nose. The man's body hair stood on end, a gleam of light reflected in his eyes. He staggered backward, falling on his back.

However, the willow leaf knife wasn't aimed at him. It took a turn just before reaching him, swift, accurate, and fierce, stabbing towards a masked man in the shadows. The man's trembling fingers abruptly clenched into a fist, and if he had been a second slower, he would have been severed.

The willow leaf knife “thudded” into the ground, stopping right in front of Fujita Hiro's head, as if offering incense.

The man's spellcasting was interrupted, and he looked up coldly. Song Ke answered the previous question calmly.

“My team won the duel, willing to bet on losing. Let's settle the points.”

She casually lifted the lamp stand, brought it to eye level, and slowly drew out a nearly four-meter-long Fangtian halberd. With a backward flip, the icy tip pointed downwards, and on both sides, the crescent moon-shaped peaks faintly emanated a powerful awakened energy.

“–Until the points are credited, no one is allowed to move.”

The entire arena fell into silence.

The suspended light screen high above continued tirelessly broadcasting: “Which is the strongest in the end-of-days monster hunting? The Song-style spiritual weapons are truly amazing!”

Now, even the slowest-witted person knew who she was.

Song Ke, the highest-ranked S7 level in the entire Alliance, a metal-type and strong attack-type awakener. Not long ago, she single-handedly defeated a Level 5 ferocious beast, the Armored Sea Turtle. She is also the current captain of V587. Most importantly, at this moment, she was affiliated with the Northern Base.

Su Cha quickly took Fujita Hiro’s terminal, walked to the referee platform, and refreshed it. No one dared to intervene at this moment. According to the terms of the contract, all of “Kirigakure’s” points were transferred to “V587.”

Clap, clap, the masked man clapped his hands with a smile, his gaze fixed on Song Ke. In a tone that was neither friendly nor hostile, he sent shivers down the spine, “Majestic. Now that the bet is settled, who will take responsibility for Fujita’s death?”

Song Ke looked at him with clear eyes, puzzled, “Who are you?”

The masked man’s mouth twitched, and a trace of displeasure emerged from his otherwise indifferent tone, “I’m called Qing.”

“–Qing, from District B14, Miao Ying, S4 level, curse-type awakener.”

In the audience, Lu Xiaoyu pulled up information on the delicate-looking man.

Lin Youyou slightly furrowed her brows, “He’s not from Tokushima, why is he standing up for Fujita?”

“Because Fujita Hiro is just a pawn.”

Tap, tap, calm footsteps approached from behind. Zhuang Qingyan inserted his hands into his pockets, a light-colored shirt tucked into khaki-colored trousers, sleeves rolled up to his forearms, and the deep peach blossom eyes slightly lifted behind silver-rimmed glasses.

“The real meaning of having pawns on the stage is not to win but to humiliate, until the people from the Northern Base can’t bear it anymore.”

Fujita Hiro deliberately provoked several times, aiming to enrage the awakeners in the audience, accumulating resentment to the breaking point. His death was unexpected, but it happened at the right time. The opponent had played along, finding the best trigger and successfully igniting the conflict between the two sides.

“But what’s the benefit of taking action against them?” Lin Youyou still couldn’t understand.

“Of course, there is,” Zhuang Qingyan nodded towards the stage, lifting his chin, “Do you think there are only people from Tokushima down there?”

Lu Xiaoyu timely zoomed in on the camera, scanning their faces one by one, and sighed with a flat tone, “Tokushima, Baishen, Miao Ying... at least seven or more individuals from other District B. It’s quite lively. Is today the team-building party?”

Zhuang Qingyan sat down leisurely, propping up one long leg, “The death of an A9 level resulted in a brawl among District B awakeners. If it’s still initiated by the traditionally neutral Northern Base, it’s not just a fight, but a diplomatic incident.”

His expression gradually cooled down. When did these people, or rather, the District B they represented, reach a consensus?

In the arena, Qing took a step back, half of his face hidden in the darkness. His lips moved, and immediately an indignant troublemaker rushed out:

“You killed Fujita Hiro! Dare to admit it, you cowards!”

“Cowardly turtles, a bunch of turtle bastards!”

Obscene language and curses filled the air, as if today would be meaningless for the Northern Base if there wasn't a fight.

Most of the awakeners were not in a good state of mind. On the Northern Base side, some were stimulated, their eyes reddening as they took a step forward.

A Fangtian halberd descended from above, accurately and unmistakably inserted into the midst of the two groups, drawing a clear boundary.

Song Ke landed lightly, like a security guard maintaining order. She advised earnestly, “Don't fight.”

“I say, do you guys have a problem? It's normal for someone to die in a duel. This is the rule of the Silver Ring Arena. Why make a fuss?”

“Fujita didn't bet his life! You can't kill him!” No matter how much this side presented facts and reasoned, the other side remained adamant.

The cursing boy had trembling diamond lip piercings. He was about to charge forward recklessly when Song Ke gave him a light glance.

The cursing boy shivered, his pink hair standing on end. He immediately flattered, “No fighting... Sister Song is right, everyone listen to Sister Song.”

Song Ke looked across, tilted her head in apparent distress, seemingly pondering how to peacefully resolve the situation.

“Killing is wrong,” she sighed in a feigned manner.

“Yes,” Su Cha obediently lowered his head.

Song Ke patted his shoulder with emphasis, “Turn yourself in and go to jail.”

Let Ye Zimei fish him out later. Anyway, whether it was being in jail or escaping from it, V587 was highly skilled in both.

Su Cha: “...Okay.” The soon-to-be inmate nodded silently.

Not only the opposing side but even the people from the Northern Base were dumbfounded. What’s going on? Is this S7 level really going to uphold justice and send her own team member to jail?

“Is it okay now?” Song Ke looked towards the other side, her gaze piercing through the crowd, locking onto Qing at the back.

“No, we have to get justice for Fujita!”

“Is Little Idiot your father? So filial!” The cursing boy made a cheeky face towards the opposite side.

Seeing that the commotion was dying down, several awakeners, panting heavily, suddenly rushed forward with menacing faces.

The earth cracked open, and arm-sized spikes burst out, crossing the boundary set by Song Ke and expanding towards the other side.

Song Ke drew the Fangtian halberd and turned around, shouting, “Don’t move.”

The cursing boy retracted his outstretched foot with a “whoosh,” standing upright as if on punishment. He didn’t forget to supervise others, “Sister Song said it, no one is allowed to move!”

Song Ke moved forward, chaotic awakened abilities attacking her from all sides. Suddenly, she pivoted on her right foot, turning fiercely in a circle! The halberd’s tip swung, and the front-line melee attackers were sent flying.

Song Ke continued to charge forward, long-range attacks targeting her head. She dodged by tilting her head, her shoulder-length hair swaying in the wind. She avoided when she could, and when she couldn’t, she faced it head-on. Gripping the middle of the halberd, she slanted it upward! The crescent blade cut through the enemy’s collar, nailing over a dozen people in succession. She swung it around, knocking down a large group with a series of crashes.

Facing hundreds alone, she entered the enemy ranks like a breeze, and in less than a minute, chaos ensued. Yet, she remained as steady as a mountain.

Qing’s eyebrows and eyes turned cold. Just as he was about to add fuel to the fire, a cold mental force lashed out like a whip, delivering a harsh strike to his mind.

His consciousness suddenly became muddled. Curse-type abilities required a cooldown time, and this unexpected attack caught him off guard.

Qing raised his head abruptly, looking towards the spectator seats. V587, five people, sitting or standing, with calm expressions.

Three A-levels, two... ordinary people?

Qing’s gaze lingered on Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu. As an S4 level, he surprisingly couldn’t judge the depth of their awakened energies. But only fools would think they were ordinary people.

A ludicrous, unbelievable thought slowly rose in Qing’s mind: Could it be that the Northern Base still harbors unrevealed S-levels?

He stepped back slowly, lowered his gaze, and merged into the crowd without a word. Towards Song Ke, he silently conveyed, "Until we meet again."

His elusive figure transformed into a moth and disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Nearly a hundred awakeners wailed in pain, rolling on the ground. Song Ke poked one, kicked another, nodding with satisfaction:

"Not a single one died."

"Awakener Department is performing official duties, please cooperate!" A stern voice echoed through the loudspeaker.

Zhao Yuqing and another S-level, leading dozens of uniformed personnel, arrived. Zhao Yuqing's eyes were cold, and her water-type ability manifested, binding the necks and limbs of the fallen awakeners in water circles, preventing them from moving freely.

The Northern Base's awakeners scattered in panic, attempting to escape.

"All relevant personnel, please voluntarily proceed to the Awakener Department for investigation!"

"Ah—!" The cursing boy wore a miserable expression, passing by Song Ke with a dejected look, "It's over, it's over. I'm going to drink tea again."

The group of people reluctantly followed the officials, and the Silver Ring Arena was temporarily closed.

Zhao Yuqing walked over solemnly and stopped in front of Song Ke, "Captain Song, please come with me."

Song Ke blinked.

Zhao Yuqing couldn't hold back and smiled faintly, "I'm really unlucky, being drafted to handle this matter. I was even worried about fights on the way. Thanks for your help."

Song Ke waved at her, "No problem."

Zhao Yuqing spoke gently, "This matter needs to be thoroughly investigated. Please come and follow the procedure."

Song Ke glanced at the exit, where it was packed with either escorted or voluntarily cooperating awakeners, making it impassable.

"We'll go over by ourselves."

"Alright." Zhao Yuqing didn't insist.

"No need for tea," Song Ke thought for a moment and said. She had just consumed a lot of tea at Professor Ming's place and couldn't handle more.

Zhao Yuqing chuckled, finding her somewhat cute, "Not that kind of tea. You'll know when you come."

Song Ke returned to the spectator seats, receiving a kiss from Lin Youyou, a leg-hug from Xu Xing, a thumbs-up from Fang Zhixu, and... numerous orders from the top-notch salesperson Lu Xiaoyu.

Casually sitting down, she leaned back, and Zhuang Qingyan's knee naturally caught her.

Song Ke happily counted the points. It was indeed worthy of being a top-ten team in Tokushima. After adding the points from "Kirigakure", V587 soared to the 3rd place in the Northern Base and the 23rd place in the entire Alliance.

Song Ke was elated. In her excitement, she transferred another million to Su Cha.

Su Cha, shirtless, sat obediently in his original spot. When Fang Zhixu came over to treat his wounds, he remained silent for a while. Eventually, he hesitated, looking up at Lin Youyou like a puppy longing for praise.

Slap—!

Lin Youyou slapped Su Cha's bald head without holding back at all, leaving him stunned as he silently licked his wounded spot.

Lin Youyou's eyebrows furrowed in anger as she scolded, "Got arrogant, huh? Like to show off, right? Gambling with your life? I picked you up, and your life belongs to me. Who allowed you to squander it!"

Su Cha: "?" Why did she say something different to that person?

After counting the points, Song Ke waved grandly, "Let's go, send Su Cha away, to jail."

Su Cha: "..."

"Sister! I need to go to the bathroom. Wait for me!"

Xu Xing, legs crossed, twisted uncomfortably. He had been engrossed in watching the arena, drinking a lot of beverages, and now he couldn't hold it in.

"Who will accompany you..." Song Ke pointed around and found that none of the men present seemed to have the time.

"No need for company!"

After shouting, Xu Xing rushed to the bathroom. He ran too fast, collided with a man at the entrance, and the man's round belly bounced him away. He tumbled and rolled, and the man, absent-mindedly, lowered his head, muttering a vague "Sorry," and hastily walked past him.

"...The rat is lost, the crocodile is not very happy, quickly grab another batch of cats to replenish the grain bin..."

Xu Xing sat dazed in his original spot, recalling the time before the apocalypse when Xu Weiguo used to boast while picking his teeth, "The most profitable business? It's smuggling, just casually put in a few mice and cats, and you can make a fortune from those crocodiles."

"Uncle, your terminal fell." A voice of innocence sounded, and a boy timidly pulled at the man's sleeve.

The man impatiently looked down, only to find his terminal perfectly on his wrist.

"Not mine, you've got the wrong person..."

"Uncle, this terminal has no password. There's a lot of money inside, you're too careless."

The man abruptly stopped talking, snatched the terminal from Xu Xing's hand, "Ah yes yes, it's mine, thank you, little friend."

"You're welcome, uncle. It's what I should do."

Xu Xing smiled innocently, and with a small shake of his hand, a mini ladybug crawled into the man's pocket.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 162.1: Key (5)

After I die, I won't care about the raging flood

Two hours before the riot at the Silver Ring Arena.

In the Ancient Street villa area.

Lucia and Ming Gang, who worked in the living room, exchanged a few words. Lucia picked up the flower spray pot and walked towards the courtyard.

Just as she descended the steps, the access control system reminded her of a visitor. Lucia felt a bit surprised. They had refused visitors for many years, and their friends were aware of their habits and wouldn't disturb them casually. On this special day, who could be coming?

Lucia opened the terminal, and real-time images came in. A charming young girl's face was looking at the camera, with round eyes like a certain small animal, curiously looking around. Behind her was a tall young man.

Lucia sighed silently, signaled the access control to allow entry, put the flower spray pot aside, and adjusted her bun and outfit.

Not long after, Song Ke came over with a large bouquet of fragrant and vibrant lilies. Due to radiation, most plants had mutated after doomsday. She intentionally bought the restored version, several times more expensive than the ordinary ones.

Zhuang Qingyan gently pushed her back, and Song Ke awkwardly spoke, "Hello, Professor. Wishing you both a happy pearl wedding anniversary."

Extending her hand, Lucia took the bouquet and handed it to the robot butler for trimming and arranging. She then turned around and picked up the flower spray pot.

"Come in first; I'll go water the flowers."

Song Ke, with a smiling face, eagerly approached, "Let me help you!"

Before Lucia could react, the pot was taken away, and Song Ke happily ran away. Her enthusiastic attitude made it impossible for people to refuse.

Lucia could only lead Zhuang Qingyan inside first. When Ming Gang saw the newcomers, his face instantly turned serious, "If you want to inquire about Ming Zhi's news, I have nothing to say."

Zhuang Qingyan nodded slightly, with a polite attitude, "Professor Ming, rest assured, I won't do anything to upset you. I'm just here as Ming Zhi's colleague and friend to visit you on his behalf."

Ming Gang snorted coldly but didn't say anything to drive him away.

Zhuang Qingyan turned gently to Lucia, "Professor, I have a somewhat unpleasant request. May I see Ming Zhi's childhood photos?"

Lucia was somewhat surprised but agreed. She opened a dynamic photo album on the projection, apparently flipping through it regularly. She cherished every page and couldn't help sharing because of her longing as a mother, "This is when Xiao Zhi was just born, thin as a monkey... After much effort to fatten him up, you can see how cute he was at five, all chubby. This one is Askar's graduation photo; he was the youngest student in that year..."

Lucia's eyes gradually moistened, "I'm sorry; this album only goes up to the age of twenty. I didn't have the chance to see what he looked like afterward."

"It's not like there's no chance," Zhuang Qingyan pondered slightly, looking calmly at Lucia. "I'm quite good at drawing. If you don't mind, I can try to draw Ming Zhi's later appearance."

He carefully observed the photos and videos in the album, from the innocent childhood to the teenage years, flipping through until Ming Zhi was twenty and entered the Qinglan Research Institute. His life record stopped here.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhuang Qingyan took out a light screen and began to sketch. He first copied the appearance of Ming Zhi at twenty, as it was the most accurate with visual references. Then, based on bone structure and muscle development, he drew Ming Zhi at thirty, with a mature and stable

face. The last sketch depicted Ming Zhi at around seventy, with gentle eyebrows and eyes drooping slightly, wrinkles covering his face, lips slightly pursed, surrounded by a faint academic aura.

Lucia stared at the portrait of seventy-year-old Ming Zhi in a trance, “Ming Gang, this one looks a bit like you.”

Ming Gang glanced at it proudly, raising his chin, “Of course, my son looks like me.”

He pointed his finger, hovering over the sketch of thirty-year-old Ming Zhi, “Also like you, similar eyebrows, similar personality, the same soft heart.”

A tinge of melancholy and sadness surged in Ming Gang’s heart. He couldn’t bear it, turning his head away, eyebrows furrowing. Then, he covered his mouth, almost gasping for breath, “Stop—cough!! Is this your way of watering them? Are you trying to drown them?”

In the courtyard, several carefully cultivated biotic camellia plants by Lucia were soaked from roots to leaves. Song Ke, who was happily watering the flowers, looked up in confusion, startled by Ming Gang’s loud voice. She shivered, and the flower spray pot accidentally released a stream of water.

Ming Gang was so angry that he couldn’t speak, and Song Ke, summoned by Lucia, nervously entered the house. The couple stared at her in silence for a while, but in the end, they couldn’t bear to scold her. After all, this child meant well and didn’t intentionally cause trouble. Lucia pushed the tea set toward them, “Have some tea.”

Song Ke, with her head shrunk, dared not touch anything.

Lucia spoke softly, “It’s okay; the flowers I raise never bloom.”

Song Ke was surprised, “Huh?”

Lucia, seemingly recalling something, smiled lightly, “At that time, Xiao Zhi was just like you, always insisting on helping but unable to control the water properly. He often ended up drowning the flowers. I got used to it a long time ago.”

At her words, Zhuang Qingyan lowered his gaze, subtly moving his fingertips, "Song Ke, can I borrow the light screen?"

Song Ke retrieved the old light screen left by her grandfather and handed it to him. Zhuang Qingyan stood up and gestured, "Sorry for the interruption; I'll be back in a moment."

After leaving the living room, Zhuang Qingyan glanced at those drooping and seemingly lifeless camellia plants, shaking his head with a smile. Then, he put away his smile and brought up the portrait of Song Zhiyuan, drawn according to Song Ke's description, placing it next to Ming Zhi's portrait.

Clearly, Song Zhiyuan appeared even older, with numerous wrinkles and lines, a gray and lifeless complexion. To anyone looking at it, he seemed to be a pitiable old man tormented by illness. However, when Zhuang Qingyan overlaid the two images, the features of Song Zhiyuan and Ming Zhi mysteriously aligned.

Zhuang Qingyan hesitated for a moment, then placed the portrait of twenty-year-old Ming Zhi on top. His gaze gradually fixed.

Despite the noticeable differences in facial conditions, the alignment of bone structure and muscle development was consistent.

Zhuang Qingyan switched to another system on the old light screen, which contained a vast amount of cutting-edge research papers and data on genetics.

If Song Zhiyuan was from District F, could he have obtained this knowledge and understanding of the content? Unless... he didn't belong there at all, but instead came from District B, where knowledge access was easily available. Moreover, he might have been the once-acclaimed genius young doctor in genetics.

Ming Zhi, Zhiyuan...

Is it not true that without a tranquil heart, one cannot have a clear aspiration? Without peace, one cannot achieve far-reaching goals, right?

But why would a promising researcher turn into an elderly man plagued by incurable illness within a few years?

Zhuang Qingyan fell into silence for a moment, the clear answer forming in his mind.

Radiation.

Excessive exposure to radiation in a short period can lead to organ failure, causing rapid aging in the human body. So, Ming Zhi... became Song Zhiyuan.

There is only one possibility: after the Loak accident, Ming Zhi must have returned to the research institute or approached the nuclear explosion site, facing excessive radiation exposure, resulting in severe damage to his bodily functions.

But why did he go back? He clearly escaped with an experimental subject privately. Knowing the accident had occurred, why return to such a dangerous place?

What about LAK0017, taken away by him? With the initial cells dead, the experimental subject should not have survived. How did Ming Zhi handle it?

Zhuang Qingyan closed his eyes and then pulled up Song Ke's genetic report. Among the hundreds of unknown DNA sequences, only two were clear: Hook Snake and Wildcat. This did not prove anything, as he could list over a thousand cases of experimental subjects with a fusion of these two genes, including LAK0017.

In the prolonged silence, Zhuang Qingyan sighed deeply, his voice barely audible.

“You succeeded, Prometheus.”

“You found the true fire.”

In ancient myths, Prometheus stole the fire to rekindle the light for humanity, angering the chief god Zeus. As punishment, Prometheus was bound to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where an eagle would daily feast on his regenerating liver. Prometheus became a tormented martyr.

“But in this world, there has never been a Hercules.”

Zhuang Qingyan’s next sigh came instantly.

The myth ends happily, with Zeus’s son, the brave and strong Hercules, shooting the eagle with a bow and freeing Prometheus from his chains.

However, reality took an unexpected turn. Prometheus faced punishment for stealing the fire, and the greedy humanity transformed into the eagle, seeking his last moments of life.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his brows, a hint of resentment emerging in his eyes.

He systematically deleted all the portraits, like an indifferent deity indifferent to the suffering of all living beings.

In the laboratory of Qianzhan City, Ning Rong questioned him about why he refused to hand over the Fire Seed data.

At that time, Zhuang Qingyan’s response was: he couldn’t become a saint.

In fact, he lied. Not only did he not want to become a saint, but he also desired to be the tyrannical Zeus who actively extinguishes the flames.

“Après moi, le déluge. (After me, the deluge.)”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 162.2: Key (5)

After I die, I won't care about the raging flood

Song Ke, who had unintentionally caused trouble, immersed herself in drinking tea to disguise her embarrassment.

Lucia covered Ming Gang's hand, feeling it a bit cool, and tugged at the blanket, "Let's work on the paper tomorrow. Did you take your medicine?"

The irritable Ming Gang, in front of Lucia, seemed as docile as a lamb, "...Took half."

Lucia disapproved as she looked at him.

Ming Gang forced a smile and grasped her hand back without letting go, "It's not a big deal; why bother taking medicine all the time?"

The warm atmosphere between the two was indescribable, leaving no room for a third person to intervene.

Song Ke stared blankly at them, and the question Zhuang Qingyan had asked her during their time in Haimen inexplicably popped into her head: "Do you know what 'liking' means?"

The couple, Ming Gang and Lucia, turned towards her simultaneously. Song Ke belatedly realized that she had inadvertently spoken aloud.

Lucia pondered slightly, "Liking is the prelude to love. It's a superficial expression of love, encompassing attachment, altruism, and intimacy."

Holding the tea cup, Song Ke's eyes reflected a clear but confused expression, "?"

"Professor Lucia, forgive me if I can't agree with that," Ming Gang coughed lightly and said solemnly, "I believe liking and love are two completely different emotions."

“Oh? What is Professor Ming’s insight?” Lucia turned to him with a smile. When it came to professional matters, the two renowned cognitive psychologists engaged in a calm and amicable discussion.

Ming Gang, never one for humor, stated firmly, “Liking is an unrestrained infatuation, while love is an exclusive loyalty.”

“Liking a flower, you might pick it, but loving a flower, you’ll only nurture it.”

Song Ke’s head followed the two as they conversed, nodding and shaking her head in apparent understanding, “Oh~”

Lucia gently touched the coiled hair at her temple, her eyes reflecting a wise and bright light, “Who says love must be exclusive? Commonly recognized love can be divided into passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love is emotional, intense, stimulated by dopamine and adrenaline, longing to be with the other person. At this stage, perhaps there is what you call ‘exclusivity’ and the narrow swinging ‘suspension bridge effect,’ making one unconsciously yearn.”

Lucia subtly needed, even changing her address to “您” (a polite form of ‘you’).

Song Ke blinked in confusion: Dopamine? Suspension bridge? Once again, she couldn’t comprehend.

Ming Gang opened his mouth to retort, but Lucia forcefully interrupted, “However, the peak period cannot be sustained indefinitely. When the passion subsides, life becomes increasingly ordinary, ultimately returning to companionate love, the three elements I mentioned earlier – deeper attachment and longer-lasting intimacy, mutual respect, mutual support.”

“So, I believe that liking and love are connected,” Lucia smiled, “Professor Ming, do you agree with my perspective?”

“…You’re right.” Ming Gang cleverly stepped back, avoiding the discussion of liking and love, emphasizing the importance of family harmony.

Lucia handed a glass of water to him, “So, respect each other and take your medicine.”

Ming Gang choked up, silently taking the glass and swallowing.

Song Ke followed suit, lowering her head to sip her tea.

Lucia looked at her with maternal affection, like a patient teacher explaining patiently, “Did you understand?”

Song Ke mumbled in response, “I understood the earlier part.” She grasped the idea up to the point of picking flowers, but the rest became hazy.

Ming Gang and Lucia exchanged a glance, facing the first student who was so challenging to teach.

Lucia rephrased it, “Liking is when you see someone for the first time and know it’s him.”

Ming Gang held Lucia’s hand, and the two reached a silent consensus at that moment, “Love is when one day, you look back at her and tell yourself, ‘Thank goodness it’s her.’”

...

After leaving Ming Gang’s home, Zhuang Qingyan remained silent throughout the journey.

Song Ke approached him, tilting her head, “What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing, just feeling fortunate.”

“?”

Zhuang Qingyan held her hand, forcefully entwining his fingers with hers, lowering his head slightly, "Fortunate that I found you so early."

Zhuang Qingyan's face, though exceptionally handsome, seemed to carry an air of heavy color, forming a unique charm, especially when he spoke in a low voice. It felt like an irresistible vortex.

Song Ke corrected his statement, "It's not you who found me; it's I who saved you."

Zhuang Qingyan smiled slowly, gazing down at Song Ke, "Yes, you saved me."

—"Liking is when you see someone for the first time and know it's him."

Suddenly, Song Ke plunged into his gaze, momentarily stunned. It was strange looking back now; she wasn't someone who meddled in others' affairs. Why, when they first met in Hua City, did she impulsively rescue him from the pool of blood?

"Ah-choo!" Without warning, Song Ke sneezed.

She rubbed her nose and, when she looked up, noticed that Zhuang Qingyan had closed his eyes, lenses speckled with suspicious droplets.

"Ah! I'm sorry!" Song Ke hurriedly wiped them with her sleeve.

"It's okay." Zhuang Qingyan held her hand, kneading it in his palm, "Does something feel uncomfortable?"

Did she smell something strange again, or was there an issue with her recessive gene?

Song Ke honestly replied, "Feels like my eyes are a bit dry."

Zhuang Qingyan examined her carefully but found no abnormalities.

He looked up at the sky; the Northern Base also had a weather simulation system, labeled T005.

The terminal displayed normal temperature and radiation.

“Maybe it’s some allergies. Let’s go indoors.”

Song Ke nodded, and at that moment, the terminal beeped. Lin Youyou had sent a distress message.

...

Three hours later, at the Awakener Department.

The investigating officer in charge sat upright, looking serious and hesitant, “Um, would you... would you like some water?”

Song Ke frowned slightly, having consumed tea throughout the day already.

Thinking she might be dissatisfied, the officer suddenly stood up, “What would you like to drink? I’ll have someone prepare it!”

Obediently, he promptly left the room. He had been unlucky enough to visit Dr. Ning’s research institute and witnessed the formidable S7 subdue Zhigler and Xi Ze. In case he angered her, he didn’t want to risk losing his head.

Ye Zimei knocked on the door and entered. The investigating officer, as if granted a reprieve, said, “Xiao Ye, I’ll leave it to you. I have some other work to attend to.”

Without waiting for a response, he hastily left the room, looking as if he were being chased by a ghost.

With only two people left in the room, Ye Zimei deliberately drew out her words, "Captain Song..."

Song Ke raised her voice, "I didn't steal anything! Nor did I break anything!"

Unable to contain her amusement, Ye Zimei chuckled, "Don't be nervous. This time, considering your act of bravery, you actually have some credit."

Song Ke's eyes lit up, "So, Su Cha won't have to go to jail?"

Ye Zimei adopted a serious tone, "In the Northern Base, unless an awakener results in a fatal outcome during wartime, the consequences are severe. Luckily, he killed someone from the Tokushima faction, and they signed a life-or-death agreement before the duel. Otherwise, this would have been quite troublesome. Go and get him, and remember, there won't be a next time."

Song Ke went to the detention room to retrieve Su Cha. On the way, they encountered the rich cursing boy who had been beaten by his parents. Seeing her approach, the boy, with a bruised and swollen face, rushed over excitedly and rubbed his hands together, "Sister Song, can you give me an autograph? Sign it on my shirt!"

He quickly took off his T-shirt, revealing his bare upper body, then suddenly realized, "Oh! And the commission reward, I'll send it to you!"

After confirming completion on the terminal, another 800,000 points were credited to V587's account, and their overall ranking moved up one place.

Song Ke casually signed her name, patting the young man's shoulder as she did. With such potential, he had a promising future, and she enjoyed helping out newcomers.

The young man touched his shoulder, looking happy and somewhat dreamy, then walked away.

...

V587 left, chatting and laughing. On the first floor, they unexpectedly bumped into He Qihong. The second-in-command of the Northern Base had a serious expression, and behind her were six top-tier awakeners, forming an imposing lineup that had never been seen before. This group included the Ling siblings, the recently injured but now recovering Zhigler, Zhao Yuqing, and three new S-level combatants.

As the two groups met in a narrow passage, both sides stopped, and the atmosphere instantly became tense.

After a moment, He Qihong, with a cold expression, walked past Song Ke without a sideways glance. Zhao Yuqing discreetly turned around and nodded to her.

He Qihong had always valued awakeners. With so many unknown individuals infiltrating her jurisdiction, it could have led to significant security incidents. It was not surprising that she took action, mobilizing all S-level members. Excluding Song Ke was also not surprising, considering their conflict stemming from the kidnapping incident. Since then, the authority over V587 was no longer in her hands.

Song Ke nonchalantly turned her head, "Let's go, to catch the smugglers that Xiao Xing found."

"Ah-choo!"

Just as they walked out of the Awakener Department building, Song Ke couldn't control another sneeze.

"What's wrong, Captain? Catching a cold?" Lin Youyou asked with concern.

Song Ke waved her hand to indicate it was nothing.

Her eyes were dry, her throat was dry, and although there were no obvious discomforts, it seemed like her allergic symptoms had worsened.

Song Ke looked into the distance, where the scorching sun hung high, starships shuttled back and forth, and the transparent barrier seemed to appear and disappear. The Northern Base remained calm as usual.

Her jet-black hair gently fluttered in the wind.

The wind was picking up.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 163: Key (6)

Don't look, there's dirty stuff

Wulongwulong—

The three-dimensional subway descended vertically, slowly stopping at the platform, and passengers of all shapes and colors came down from the carriage.

A round-bellied man hummed an out-of-tune tune and casually tossed the terminal that had been emptied into the recycling bin.

Unexpectedly, by delivering a “package,” he could also receive a windfall of 500,000 Alliance coins for free. The man proudly patted his belly, crossed the transparent sky bridge, turned into the lower-level street, and left the bright sunlight behind.

Business has been good lately, coupled with unexpected income, enough for him to splurge for several years to come.

A mini ladybug peeked out of his pocket, its compound eyes gleaming, transmitting data along the way.

When the man was about to reach his doorstep, his footsteps halted.

“Uncle!” At the end of the road, a well-dressed Xu Xing raised a small hand, enthusiastically greeting him, “Do you remember me?”

The man stared at him suspiciously. Even though it hadn't been half a day, of course, he remembered. This kid was the silly-looking wealth-bringing boy at the bathroom door.

"Sorry, Uncle, I made a mistake. Actually, that terminal is mine." Xu Xing pouted slightly, with an innocent and cute expression. "Please, can you give it back to me?"

"Don't be ridiculous. How could you have so much money? And why would you be silly enough to give me the terminal?" The man instinctively retorted, "Regretting it now?"

"It really is mine." Xu Xing's watery eyes blinked, and a small ice cone slowly formed in his palm. Smiling like a cunning demon, he said, "If I didn't fish like this, how would I have hooked you?"

Foiled! This kid is definitely a person with abilities!

An alarm bell rang in the man's mind, and just as he was about to speak, a few clear coughs sounded behind him, causing him to turn abruptly.

In the lingering twilight, a group of six people blocked his retreat. In the middle was an eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl, her leaf-shaped knife flipping up and down at her fingertips. Behind her, tall men and women lined up, glaring at him.

The man thought it was bad, turned his head, and rushed forward, trying to break through from Xu Xing. Xu Xing eagerly waited with excitement in his eyes, and the ice cone in his hand instantly transformed into a solid ice wall, blocking his way. The man slammed on the brakes, regretting in his heart: I said, how can good things fall from the sky for nothing? This isn't a wealth-bringing boy; he's clearly a plague!

His eyes turned, and suddenly, gray hair grew on exposed skin, clothes fell off, and in the blink of an eye, he turned into a huge rat, scurrying into the sewer.

This unremarkable-looking man turned out to be a shapeshifter!

The awakener mouse squeaked and dashed forward, seemingly about to escape. Ding! A dark blue leaf-shaped knife flew accurately, piercing its tail. The mouse had just leaped out a bit when it was “thump” bounced back, rolling on the ground, stars swirling in its eyes.

Xu Xing was startled by the ugly large mouse and hid behind Song Ke, peeking with one eye.

The rhythmic footsteps stopped in front, and Fang Zhixu, with a playful twist to his hair, squatted down “kindly.” His hands moved, and two shiny dissecting knives appeared out of thin air. A smile resembling that of a twisted doctor appeared on his face. “It’s been many years since I last dissected a mouse, huh? Where should I start? Open the abdominal cavity first, then pull out the intestines...”

The cold surgical knife pressed against the thick fur, and the next second was about to cut through the flesh—

“Don’t, don’t kill me! What do you guys want? I’ll give you the money, isn’t that enough?” The awakener mouse struggled desperately, and begged.

Song Ke comfortingly patted Xu Xing’s head. “You go first, turn back into a human. I’ll ask you a few questions.”

Bang! The man obediently turned back, completely naked, blood flowing from his right ankle, shivering on the ground.

Zhuang Qingyan immediately covered Song Ke’s eyes. Song Ke’s vision fell into darkness, her fan-like eyelashes blinked. A low reminder sounded in her ears: “Don’t look, there’s dirty stuff.”

Lin Youyou was a half-second slow, suddenly turned her head, her expression was indescribable. “Help, I... faint at the sight of needles.”

Su Cha, with a dark face, stepped forward, firmly blocking her.

When the man clumsily put on his clothes, Song Ke finally lowered Zhuang Qingyan’s hand. “Are you a smuggler?”

“Injustice, sister! I’m just an honest scalper, selling tickets and collecting some service fees.” The man insisted, biting down on his story.

Song Ke naturally didn’t believe him and went straight to the point. “I ask you, what are mice, crocodiles, and... achoo! What are cats?”

The man didn’t expect Song Ke to speak in code right away, and his expression momentarily became uncertain.

Fang Zhixu smiled, raising the dissecting knife as if ready to cut into his mouth—

“I’ll talk! I’ll talk!” The man, terrified, trembled uncontrollably. “I really didn’t smuggle. I just... followed the big brother to do some smuggling business, find some channels, help people get short-term access, and send them into the base. The mouse is an awakener from another district, all with legal identities. We don’t dare deal with illegal immigrants!”

As a popular immigrant city in District B, the Northern Base had strict immigration procedures, and there was even a proactive city specifically handling related matters, receiving guests from all walks of life daily, making the city bustling with people.

V587 exchanged a silent glance, and it seemed Xu Xing had indeed guessed right; this man was indeed involved in smuggling.

“How many mice have you brought in?”

“Altogether, about five thousand people.”

Song Ke’s eyes turned cold. The awakers causing trouble on the Silver Ring Arena were only around a hundred. This meant that there were still many rats hiding in other corners of the Northern Base.

Lin Youyou looked down at the curled-up man on the ground with disdain and mocked, "Five thousand people? Are you a local? You have quite the guts, bringing in so many dangerous individuals. Aren't you afraid of trouble in the Northern Base?"

"With Director He and the Awakener Department here, what trouble can arise?" The man grumbled indifferently. "Go to Qianzhan City and see how many people want to come in every day. Besides, it's not immigration; it's just short-term entry. We're just helping out... and earning a meal on the side."

The brawl on the Silver Ring Arena had caused quite a stir, but it was suppressed. The order in the Northern Base had always been good, and with the wise management, even if something happened, there were big shots to solve it. They didn't need to worry.

"Don't embellish yourself. You're just a traitor!" Lin Youyou scolded. If they were bringing in exiled awakeners, that would be one thing, but it turned out to be people with sinister motives from District B. While the Northern Base had a good reputation, were the other areas in District B so disgraceful? Five thousand illegally infiltrated awakeners at the same time clearly indicated a conspiracy. These shortsighted fools only cared about their own interests, completely disregarding the consequences.

Lin Youyou kicked the man's chin with anger, causing him to scream in pain.

Song Ke pretended not to see and didn't stop her rude behavior, continuing to ask, "Who is the crocodile?"

The beaten man, now nodding obediently, answered, "The crocodile is... our boss. He pays to bring in rats. No one knows his real identity, but he is generous with his money every time."

Song Ke understood; it seemed that the crocodile was the mastermind behind the entire conspiracy.

"What about the cats? How many are there?"

The smuggler hesitated for a moment, his tone becoming uncertain. "Cats... there seem to be six or seven? Or maybe seven or eight? They are very expensive, not under my control. I only handle communication, but I've seen two of them. They don't have awakened energy; they are just ordinary people."

“Sister, you can rest assured; nothing troublesome will happen.” The man ingratiatingly grinned, as if saying, “I still love my homeland.”

After the man finished speaking, the seven people on the opposite side fell silent.

He shivered, a sense of unease gradually rising in his heart. “Did I say something wrong?”

Lu Xiaoyu’s wheelchair elevated, and his hazel eyes coldly looked down at him. “Hey, rat, do you think we are ordinary people?”

One woman and two men suddenly erupted with powerful awakened energy. The overwhelming pressure, like a tsunami, penetrated the man’s entire body with a pain of countless steel nails. His internal magnetic field went haywire, and gray fur uncontrollably appeared, his legs trembling, almost unable to maintain human form.

The man’s teeth chattered, and the only thought left in his extremely fearful mind was: ...S-level.

As long as there was an intention to conceal, low-level awakeners couldn’t feel the awakened energy of an S-level. This was why they mistakenly took them for ordinary people.

Lin Youyou completely disregarded her image, angrily kicking the man again. “That’s not a cat at all; it’s a jackal! Fools, you’ve invited a wolf into the house!”

Song Ke thrust a knife between the man’s legs. “Give up all the information about the cats.”

...

“The current situation is that at least six S-levels have infiltrated,” Zhuang Qingyan calmly stated.

V587 was holding a meeting at the top level of the starship port, offering an excellent view of the entire city. Despite the bustling crowds below, no abnormalities could be discerned for the time being.

During the Silver Ring Arena incident, S4-level awakener 'Qian' suddenly appeared, wanting to stand up for Fujita Hiro. They had sensed that something was wrong at that time. Since when did the relationship between District Bs become so friendly and cooperative? Now it seemed like a "cat crying for mice." Benevolence was false, intentionally provoking a war was true.

Lu Xiaoyu tapped his fingers, infiltrating the surveillance system, and within seconds, situations of awakens making trouble were happening everywhere. The S-levels in the Northern Base were suppressing them separately, overwhelmed with tasks. In the confinement room of the Awakener Department, it was probably already overcrowded.

Song Ke said, "I've sent the information to Ye Zimei and Bai Qi."

The quicker the intelligence was transmitted, the better. This way, both the Awakener Department and Ye Zheng's side could respond promptly.

"Achoo!" She sneezed again, this time with a muffled sound.

Zhuang Qingyan frowned. Song Ke's condition could no longer be described as an "allergy." There must be something wrong somewhere.

"I feel... the air is so dirty," Song Ke rubbed her nose and muttered.

Hoo—hoo—

A strong wind suddenly rose, and the biomimetic plants around them rustled, their roots skewed.

Bang! A giant billboard from a lower building fell from the sky, making a deafening sound.

Where did this storm come from?

The group looked surprised; T005 was operating normally, and there was a weather simulation system in place. How could such extreme weather, out of season, suddenly occur?

One strong gust of wind followed another, and in just a few seconds, a sudden change occurred! The sunlight rapidly dimmed, the sky was completely blocked, and at the distant horizon, a colossal sandstorm, carrying thousands of tons of dust, formed a massive wall of sand that engulfed the entire Northern Base!

“Get down!” Song Ke managed to shout, and the seven people tightly gripped the railing. The powerful storm shook their bodies, and Xu Xing’s feet left the ground, but he was pulled back by Fang Zhixu and Lu Xiaoyu.

From a high vantage point, the scene before them was extremely shocking. The vast city was instantly covered by yellow smoke. The fine dust fiercely struck buildings, emitting a muffled roar. Glass shattered, billboards and lampposts tore apart, and countless people, unable to escape in time, were swept into the vast sea of sand.

Five minutes later, Song Ke struggled to stand up, her nose, ears, and mouth filled with sand particles. Her senses were irritated, and she coughed incessantly.

All seven of them were covered in dust and dirt. Looking around, the visibility was less than five meters, the sky was dimly yellow, and everything was chaotic.

Song Ke barely opened her mouth, and sand fell out. “How could this happen...”

Zhuang Qingyan coughed twice. “It’s the side effect of Utopia.”

The rise of Utopia led to frequent occurrences of extreme weather. The periphery of the Northern Base was an endless desert plain, already dry and rainless throughout the year, relying on T005 for regulation. Now, with the sudden global climate change, the air conditions became extremely unstable. Strong winds easily caused sandstorms when the weather was unfavorable.

The weather simulation system had limited tolerance, and this level of disaster had exceeded its threshold.

The broadcast immediately sounded, "The Meteorological Monitoring Center issues a special red alert for an extremely strong sandstorm. Residents are advised to cease outdoor activities, close doors and windows, and refrain from going outside..."

Outside the transparent barrier, a layer of anti-sand net slowly lit up, enclosing the entire base, blocking most of the dust.

Song Ke spat out the sand and said, "As expected of District B..." They had a response plan so quickly.

After the anti-sand net was raised, the choking storm was blocked, though the environment remained harsh, at least making it possible to stand.

At that moment, the terminals of the group suddenly displayed an urgent mission: "B-level mission (limited to the region): Extreme sandstorm weather in the Northern Base. All awakeners are requested to join forces to eliminate it..."

The complete content had not yet emerged; the next moment, this mission quickly flickered, the previous text was wiped away, replaced by new information. When looked at again, its meaning became unclear: "A-level mission (limited to the region): Protect the Northern Base."

The New Asia Alliance's mission platform was automatically monitored, assessed, published, and adjusted by AI groups above B District. It had never made a mistake before, whether before or after doomsday. The fact that it had escalated from B to A indicated that the mission's difficulty had increased in just a few seconds.

However, this became even more peculiar. The sandstorm in the Northern Base had clearly been controlled. Could there be other severe weather conditions behind it? Moreover, the meaning of "Protect the Northern Base" seemed a bit vague.

Amidst the confusion, a slight sound came from above.

Song Ke's ears moved slightly; she suddenly looked up through layers of smoke and dust, only to see a strange bird with an entirely black body on the high-altitude anti-sand net. Its two wings shimmered with a metallic blue-purple luster, its feathers were messy and shaped like needles, and its irises displayed the gray-white characteristic of zombie creatures.

"A crow," Zhuang Qingyan's cold voice sounded. "Due to the large size of the brain area, it is recognized as a bird species with high intelligence."

"Don't be afraid, it's just a ferocious beast." Captain Song, a responsible captain, transformed a spiritual weapon rapid-fire crossbow and aimed it at the zombie crow.

Bang! The crow's body fell to the ground, caught on the edge of the anti-sand net.

However, Zhuang Qingyan's next words chilled people's hearts: "...Crows are strongly social and skilled in forming nests. In special situations such as foraging and mating, they often roam in mixed groups."

Next to the first crow's corpse, the second one quickly fell, followed by the third, the fourth... densely covering the ground.

In the midst of the yellow sand, they were like incarnations of death, pecking at carrion. Opening their wings, they emitted sharp cawing sounds, gurgling, and quacking.

Song Ke: "Uh..."

She looked at the crow flock, then down at the lone rapid-fire crossbow. For the first time, she hesitated about what kind of spiritual weapon she should transform.

...

In Qianzhan City, sandstorms and ferocious beasts wreaked havoc everywhere. Ruthless crow talons pierced human shoulder bones, pulling them into the air to tear and devour.

The sky no longer showed its original colors; the black and yellow symbols of death covered everyone's retinas.

“Ah—!!”

One after another, screams rang out, and both awakeners and ordinary people fled in panic.

“Quick, seek help from the Northern Base! Apply for urgent refuge; let us in!!”

...

Awakener Department building, second-top floor.

He Qihong placed both hands on her abdomen, looking at the real-time images being transmitted. Her expression was serious. “How many people are in Qianzhan City now?”

“6.5 million,” the administrative secretary reported quickly, “including 4.3 million awakeners.”

He Qihong stood up with a slender figure, her silhouette against the floor-to-ceiling window. Outside, everything was cast in a yellowish hue, and the outlines of buildings were vaguely visible.

“6.5 million population, more than two-thirds are awakeners, precisely at this critical juncture.”

“Conspiracy? Or coincidence?”

She repeated in a low voice, “4.3 million awakeners, what a waste...”

A group of those who did not pass or did not have time for the review process—inside, she did not know how many spies with ulterior motives were mixed in. If there was time, she wouldn't mind carefully screening and selecting talents to fill the ranks of the Northern Base.

Unfortunately, the current timing was too critical.

He Qihong did not consider herself a cruel person, but regardless of the timing, the interests of the Northern Base always took precedence. With the ongoing violent incidents in the city, as the person in power, she had to make some sacrifices and concessions.

After all, better to mistakenly kill three thousand than to let one person go.

“Director He, Qianzhan City has suffered heavy casualties. The Ministry of Transportation has arranged several evacuation routes. The expected open points are...”

The secretary flipped through the light screen data in distress, requesting instructions from the higher-ups as soon as possible.

“No need,” He Qihong’s voice rang out coldly.

“Ah?” The secretary was stunned, unconsciously making a small exclamation.

“Close all connecting channels with Qianzhan City, only accept flying terminals with the base’s identification.”

The secretary was dumbfounded for a while, and after realizing her intentions, a chill ran down her spine.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 164: Key (7)

Until the last person

“Xiao Ye, wait, don’t be impulsive, let’s talk things out!”

“Director He is in a meeting, you can’t just barge in like this.”

“Zimei, let’s wait for approval. Maybe there’s still a chance...”

Ye Zimei’s face was as calm as water. Striding through the corridor, she, an A3-level gravity-type awakener, raised her hand, and with a swift motion, her colleagues’ limbs felt as heavy as sandbags. Their knees gave way, and they knelt on the ground, unable to block her path any longer.

In the past, Ye Zimei, who always followed rules and regulations, would never have dared to use her awakened abilities so audaciously in the workplace. However, under the influence of the “lawless” Song Ke, after cleaning up messes several times, she gradually realized that sometimes solving problems with force could save a lot of unnecessary time.

Ye Zimei stopped in front of the meeting room, took a deep breath, and knocked on the door. Without waiting for a response from inside, she confidently walked in.

“Director He, this is the evacuation proposal I drafted. It outlines 13 retreat routes for the residents of Qianzhan City. Please review and approve it.”

The room fell silent, and the virtual projections of the participants all turned their surprised gazes towards this unexpected visitor.

He Qihong sat at the main seat, her expression unchanged. “Regarding Qianzhan City, I have already issued the order. You should proceed with normal execution.”

Ye Zimei gradually clenched her hands into fists and said, word by word, “No, we cannot execute it. What you represent is only your personal will, not the will of the Northern Base.”

This statement shocked everyone present. Who was He Qihong? The highest-ranking official in the Awakener Department, the second in command in District B10. Many people on the scene were unclear about Ye Zimei’s true identity. Her open defiance sent a chill down their spines. Was this young person so bold because she had lost her mind?

“Director He, you have always been my respected senior, and once, my goal to look up to.”

Ye Zimei stood tall, her voice slightly trembling, but her expression exceptionally firm.

“But it seems you do not understand the significance of the Northern Base. The purpose of establishing this city by Ye Zheng is to provide a refuge for all those who have suffered through wars. Whether in peace or turmoil, at any time, no matter what happens, as long as the Northern Base stands, its gates will open selflessly to fellow countrymen. That’s why it’s called—the last hope of humanity.”

After the devastating nuclear war, countless people were displaced, homeless, drifting with despair. Ye Zheng built a new city with his own hands in the wastelands, telling all survivors that this is your home. Half a century later, numerous prosperous cities had risen, but for the Alliance people, the Northern Base held a different meaning. It not only represented hope but also served as the final retreat.

Ye Zimei’s eyes were slightly red as she raised her voice, “The 6.5 million people outside are our compatriots; they shouldn’t be abandoned!”

“You are still young and haven’t considered the whole picture,” He Qihong, uncommonly not angered, sighed and opened real-time monitoring. “Now, within the city, there are hidden awakeners in various areas, and even infiltrators of S-level. They harbor ill intentions, attempting to provoke conflicts. What’s the use of bringing the people from Qianzhan City in? The wisest course of action now is to prioritize dealing with internal crises and minimize the risks.”

Ye Zimei questioned with difficulty, “Director He, in your eyes, is a person’s life only measured by its ‘usefulness’?”

He Qihong gently raised her hand, “In my position, I must consider the interests of the Northern Base.”

Pale-faced Xi Ze emerged from the shadows. The entire meeting room instantly became an awakened energy forbidden zone, impervious to the use of awakened abilities.

Xi Ze, having been knocked back from S3 level to A9 level by Song Ke, had disappeared from the public eye since then. Unexpectedly, he had surreptitiously surrendered to He Qihong.

Several security personnel entered and detained Ye Zimei.

He Qihong gazed at her calmly, "After this crisis passes, I will personally apologize to the teacher."

Ye Zimei struggled, unable to move. She closed her eyes, connecting her consciousness to the terminal. A faint light flashed quickly through her pearl earring.

...

After the appearance of sandstorms and a flock of crows, the awakeners of the Northern Base swiftly counterattacked. Various armed aircraft flew through the high sky, and colorful awakened abilities pierced through the murky sky filled with yellow sand. Due to the double barriers of the sand-resistant net and shields, the crow army couldn't break through, temporarily securing the base. However, they densely occupied the sky, with their numbers causing great anxiety. The only way to deal with them was to slowly wear them down using long-range awakened abilities.

Lin Youyou's long hair moved slightly as she sang an ethereal tune. The crow group within her range was afflicted with debuffs, drastically reducing their aggressiveness. Xu Xing became the top damage dealer for V587, unleashing a storm of ice needles. Lu Xiaoyu set up heavy machine guns, but due to the upward angle, their effective range was shortened, limiting the damage they could inflict.

Song Ke shook off the ankle-deep sand, raised her leg, and coincidentally met eyes with a slightly larger crow.

"You, come down!" Song Ke defiantly raised her arm, pointing at it and shouting.

"Caw!" A hint of disdain flashed in the crow's gray-white eyes, as if saying, "You come up if you dare."

Captain Song was incredulous, opened her mouth, and accidentally swallowed some dust. Pff, no, was she being mocked by a bird?

She wished she could have those weapons from TV dramas like “Peacock Feather” or “Pear Blossom Needle,” capable of releasing thousands of dark needles instantly. But aside from not knowing if those existed in the history of the old civilization, she had never seen them and had no idea of their specific structures. She was helpless relying solely on imagination.

Annoyed, Song Ke gritted her teeth, pressed one hand to the ground, suddenly leaped up, and, unleashing the full potential of her feline genes, jumped more than eight meters high. She climbed to the highest point closest to the sky along a lightning rod, throwing out a swallowtail dart. The arrogant crow was instantly cut down in large numbers.

However, as the first batch of beasts fell, more continuously replaced them. The number of crows seemed endless, “clang clang” striking the barrier. Cracks quickly appeared in the outer sand-proof net.

Song Ke jumped back to a slightly lower platform, her expression troubled.

No, the clearance efficiency was too slow, unable to keep up with their rate of reinforcement. How many beasts were there? Had all the crows in the entire Alliance come?

Boom—boom—

A sleek hovercar raced in, dangerously close to the sand-proof net, and narrowly grazed it. Crimson explosive shells were fired at close range, passing through the net openings and accurately hitting the densest area of crows. The explosions resounded, feathers scattered, and blood splattered, revealing the previously obscured sky.

The roof of the car opened, and a silver sniper scope was pushed onto the forehead, revealing a sharp-jawed face with cold gray eyes. He stared intently at the crow swarm, exuding a sense of oppression. When he looked down at Song Ke, his expression turned into a brilliant smile.

Perched on the car roof, Yin Xiao tilted his head slightly, covering his face with one hand, and asked in a low voice, “Daughter, do you think I have a chance if I confess again?”

Before Jennifer could reply, Yin Xiao convinced himself, “Never mind, how will I know if I don’t try?”

Like a soaring hawk, he leaped down, squeezed into the narrow platform, almost face to face with Song Ke, causing her to sneeze twice.

Yin Xiao was covered in sand; shaking himself, several pounds of sand fell off. It was evident that he had just rushed back from outside.

Song Ke rubbed her nose, slightly surprised, "You... advanced?"

In just a few days, Yin Xiao's awakened energy had unexpectedly reached S-level.

Croak! Caw! Crows gathered again overhead, but Yin Xiao didn't look up. Instead, he shot backward, dispersing the flock with a single shot.

"Just broke through S1, Captain Song. I've been trying to catch up with you."

A double entendre, but unfortunately, it was lost on Song Ke, who sincerely congratulated him, "Congratulations."

Yin Xiao looked straight at her, "I'm S-level now too. Do you want to consider leaving that man and be with me..."

"Song Ke, come down," Zhuang Qingyan's deep voice interrupted.

"Dad, save me, it's on fire!" At the same time, Jennifer wailed. The downside of AoE awakeners: they were prone to causing collateral damage. Jennifer's flames, while incinerating crows, unintentionally damaged the sand-proof net.

Song Ke turned her head and shouted below, "Xiao Xing, lend a hand!"

The feline genes kicked in again as the obedient little cat jumped several times, returning to the side of the summoned Zhuang Qingyan.

Yin Xiao met the annoying man's eyes from below, the latter smirking with icy eyes.

Yin Xiao rolled his eyes at the sky and jumped down following Song Ke.

Xu Xing hopped around doing calisthenics, changing the ice needles to a larger area of ice and snow to stop the spread of the fire. However, the area still turned dark, the sand-proof net teetered, and crow corpses piled up like mountains.

Members of the "Tustan" team landed on the rooftop one after another.

Jennifer, with her wavy long hair, threw herself forward with a coquettish gesture. "Oh~ my dear~ I haven't seen you in half a day~ I miss you so much..."

Thud! She unexpectedly collided with a hard chest, Su Cha's face darkened like the bottom of a pot. With two fingers supporting her forehead, he pushed her backward several meters.

Jennifer stumbled back to Yin Xiao's side, and the father-daughter duo pursed their lips, silently reaching a consensus.

Why is there always an annoying guy next to the cute crush?

Zhuang Qingyan glanced at the increasing crow swarm, his expression serious, "This is not good. At this rate..."

The number of these beasts was even greater than originally estimated. Although the awakeners at the Northern Base killed some of them, they also damaged the sand-proof net extensively. The sand and dust were raging again, the yellow wind howling, and the dirty dust desperately infiltrating the respiratory tract.

In the current situation, it was difficult to salvage it manually. The only effective solution was to activate the city defense mechanism.

Zhuang Qingyan spoke in a deep voice, "District B has a well-established city defense system. I need to see the engineering design drawings and come up with another plan."

Song Ke opened her terminal, about to contact Ye Zimei when she unexpectedly received a message from her, but the content was blank.

Song Ke called back, but there was no answer on the other end.

Lu Xiaoyu took the terminal and operated a few times, "Ye Zimei's signal has been blocked."

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes flashed slightly. Before they left, the sudden loss of contact with Ye Zimei could only mean one thing – she was under the control of He Qihong.

"Contact Bai Qi, we're going to find General Ye."

"Hey, Captain Song, let's go together."

The two teams hurriedly rushed to the official residence of the General.

...

Endless crows raged and roamed wildly, occasionally diving down from the sky. After seizing their prey with their claws, they cruelly tore open the entrails.

Panic-stricken people scattered and fled, seeking refuge in sealed buildings, hiding in basements, and taking cover in various modes of transportation. However, gates were shattered, windows were smashed, and even monsters emerged from the sewers, relentlessly attacking them from every possible angle.

Individuals with awakened abilities rose to resist, but their limbs were quickly grabbed, howling as they were dragged into the sky, torn apart in different directions.

Black ferocious beasts were everywhere, too numerous to count, leaving the residents of the once-prosperous city helpless in the face of their inevitable demise.

“Mom... sob, Mom and Dad, where are you...” A four or five-year-old girl stumbled through the streets, crying loudly. Surrounding her were dismembered bodies, the pavement slippery with piled-up flesh, and her white shoes stained with deep red blood.

“Gaa-gaa!” Strange cries echoed from above. The girl looked up in fear, her pupils reflecting the terrifying double wings of a crow, resembling the Grim Reaper wielding a scythe.

In the nick of time, a young awakener swiftly pounced, embracing the girl and rolling away. Vines flew out from his palms, one end wrapping around the crow’s neck and the other tightly coiled around a lamppost, narrowly intercepting its attack.

However, he inadvertently twisted his ankle and fell awkwardly in front of another group of crows. With his last bit of strength, he pushed the little girl away, yelling hoarsely, “Don’t look back! Run!!”

“Big brother... no, no!!” The helpless girl cried.

The streets and alleys were in ruins, a blood-soaked hand pressed against a tightly sealed passage, emitting a desperate cry:

“Open the door... to the North... base... open...”

Why? They set out from the low-level district, traversed mountains and rivers across the majority of the Alliance, all for the sake of finding a new refuge. Why did it end up like this? Were they wrong?

The eyes of the applicant gradually dimmed. Oh heavens, he was willing to give everything, just hoping for a miracle.

In the hazy moment of consciousness, the passage in front slowly opened, pouring down a dazzling light. A majestic figure walked out from inside.

The applicant's eyes widened slightly. Could it be... a miracle?

Boom!! The newcomer's fists hit the ground, and a terrifying pressure spread for miles. The crows in the sky lost control and fell uncontrollably, as if glued to the ground by strong adhesive, struggling ceaselessly.

Boom!!

The sound of fists echoed once again, and the bodies of ferocious beasts that roamed on the surface and underground stiffened. Under the force of gravity, their internal organs were compressed, twisting and bursting on the spot.

Fleeing civilians stopped in their tracks, and the little girl ceased her sobbing, staring blankly at the newcomer.

He was a weathered old man with a head full of silver hair, his face covered in wrinkles and furrows, appearing very, very old. However, he stood tall with a straight spine, his eyes sharp and bright. Dressed in a simple military uniform, he stood there like an unmovable anchor.

From both sides behind the old man, thousands of fully armed soldiers rushed out, including those with awakened abilities and ordinary people. Though no longer young, their gaze was resolute, and they were well-trained, all descendants of survivors who had experienced brutal wars. They silently crossed the streets, swiftly eliminating the crows controlled by gravity and organizing the orderly retreat of the citizens.

A deep and resounding voice penetrated the entire Qianzhan City and echoed through the ears of everyone at the Northern Base via the regional broadcast:

“I am Ye Zheng, the Magistrate of the Northern Base. According to Article 10, Section 13 of the Alliance Emergency Regulations during wartime, the Department of Transportation is ordered to immediately

open ground entrances numbered 5, 8, 13, 17, and 21, and open the aerial connection channel. We unconditionally accept all residents of Qianzhan City.”

“All officials of the Awakener Department, assist in organizing evacuation routes, ensure the safety of people along the way, and the Logistics Department is to designate temporary shelter areas within an hour for the treatment of the wounded and provide necessary supplies.”

“I’ll repeat once again, we unconditionally accept all residents of Qianzhan City, whether awakeners or ordinary people.”

“I, in the name of the Magistrate, swear that Ye Zheng will protect everyone’s retreat here until the last person safely enters the city.”

All the noise and clamor seemed to vanish at once, leaving only Ye Zheng’s concise and powerful commands.

– Until the last person evacuates.

He was General Ye Zheng, the founder of the Northern Base, personally coming to Qianzhan City to protect their retreat.

“General Ye... General Ye!!”

Someone couldn’t hold back anymore, bursting into tears, and the sorrowful emotions seemed to be infectious, spreading for kilometers in an instant, forming a deafening wave of sound. With 6.5 million residents on the brink of life and death, struggling through ups and downs, experiencing a post-apocalyptic world with zombies and ferocious beasts, at this moment, they finally felt genuine gratitude. Grateful that amidst the apocalypse, in the dangerous wasteland of zombies and beasts, they had found the correct path.

The last hope of humanity.

As long as Ye Zheng was there, the significance of the Northern Base's existence would not change, even across half a century.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 165: Key (8)

Determined Resolve

Under Ye Zheng's layered commands, the Northern Base entered a state of combat readiness, and the entire city operated in an orderly manner.

First, it was the annihilation of crows. Due to their large number, they couldn't be killed in a short time. Fortunately, District B10 had a well-equipped arsenal of thermal weapons. Battle-hardened soldiers suppressed them with heavy machine guns and rocket launchers, clearing escape routes in the dusky sand. Starships and armored vehicles loaded with civilians left through the ground-to-air passages.

Ye Zheng fulfilled his promise, standing like a towering mountain until the last civilian was safely evacuated.

The yellow sand whirled, and the pitch-black clouds pressed heavily on the sky, spreading from Qianzhan City to the Northern Base.

The once bustling streets were now in ruins, and the city's facilities were destroyed, but at least, most of the people survived.

As long as there are people, there is hope. Even on the ruins, a homeland can be rebuilt.

"General, please retreat as well," a nearby officer reminded in a hushed tone.

Ye Zheng nodded, turned around slowly, and Bai Qi silently handed him a cane. Ye Zheng took it, leaning on the ground, covering his mouth with one hand. The magnetic field inside him was in turmoil, and his vision was constantly darkening.

He swallowed the bloody smell in his throat, maintaining a calm expression. "Go to the City Defense Department. The barrier won't last long against a swarm of this scale."

Ye Zheng, an experienced battlefield commander, accurately predicted the situation. In the current circumstances, only he could personally command.

Bai Qi nodded and, commandeering a temporarily requisitioned hovercar, followed the last group of evacuees. They entered the 13th passage, the city gate slowly closed, the hovercar changed direction, detached from the main force, and headed towards the City Defense Department.

Faint energy fluctuations were sensed in the air. The officer in front, realizing something was wrong, suddenly turned back, but there was no trace of Ye Zheng behind.

"Not good! Quickly contact the Awakener Department. General Ye is missing!"

Swish—

Bai Qi's face was stern, realizing the urgency. He switched to manual mode, slammed on the brakes, and the hovercar emitted a piercing noise, abruptly stopping.

Bang! The body leaned forward due to inertia, then was forcefully pulled back by the seatbelt, crashing into the seat.

Through the swirling yellow sand, at the end of the road, a dozen figures were waiting indifferently. Intense mental powers mixed together, with most of them being S-class, and the terrifying pressure made the air tremble.

Bai Qi decisively pressed the warning button, but the signal failed, communication was cut off, and the outside sounds were completely sealed off.

The entire road was covered by an invisible ability barrier.

Ye Zheng, who had been resting with closed eyes, slowly opened his eyes. His gaze was calm like a deep pool. "...What is meant to come will always come."

As more and more "sparrows" appeared, no, since the moment of the apocalypse, this man, who saw through the world and experienced the vicissitudes of life, had a premonition of today's encounter.

The car door opened, and Ye Zheng, leaning on the cane, calmly got out, as if he were not facing a group of fierce S-class interceptors, but simply reaching his destination as usual.

If awakened energy had a tangible scent, the man in his forties at the forefront exuded a pungent diesel smell. He crossed his arms, his physique robust and muscular, the bulging muscles resembling hills grown in a savage manner.

Next to him, a seductive woman with purple eyeshadow, holding a lit thin cigarette between her fingertips, emitted the toxic scent of poppies. Despite the sandstorm weather, she opened her mouth, pursed her red lips, and blew out elegant smoke rings.

These two individuals had the highest awakened energy levels, conservatively estimated to be S5 or above.

The rest were unfamiliar faces. Ye Zheng scrutinized each one and then spotted Lei Zhao, a former S4-level lightning awakener who had belonged to the Northern Base but later defected to Tokushima. Catching his steady gaze, Lei Zhao's eyes flickered, quickly turning his head away, revealing a hint of embarrassment.

Lu Tao, the bulky S6-level diesel-scented awakener, raised his arm, offering a half-smile:

"General Ye Zheng, long time no see. I've been hiding these days just to have a chance to meet you. Finally, the day has come."

Ye Zheng's scrutinizing gaze fell on the group of awakeners at a safe distance. He pointed out bluntly: "I didn't know that S-level individuals from different regions would form alliances."

Several people's expressions changed slightly, not expecting Ye Zheng to see through their origins at a glance.

The seductive female awakener, Yina, chuckled lightly and flicked off some ash from her cigarette: "If it weren't for the circumstances, those of us who have no connection would never unite against an external threat, right?"

"General Ye, you are great and selfless. I grew up listening to your glorious deeds, and of course, I highly respect you," she continued. "Unfortunately, times have changed... Young people need to take over. As an elder, you should gracefully step down and exit the stage of history."

She looked around the surroundings, her eyes radiating intense enthusiasm: "Not all B districts have such excellent living conditions as the Northern Base. Why should we suffer in dire straits while you enjoy comfort? The Feng Shui paradise of District B10 is enough to make people salivate."

Miao Ying (District B14) is mountainous, Tokushima (District B15) is small in size, and Baishen (District B13) has harsh weather. The emergence of Utopia in the midst of these challenges forced them into a corner. So, these districts secretly united, directing their focus towards the Northern Base.

This fortress city, built before the New Era, occupied vast lands, had extensive territories, and boasted advanced and superior facilities. It was the perfect haven for human survival after the apocalypse. The only obstacle was Ye Zheng; as long as he raised the banner of war, the entire populace of the Northern Base became an army, making it nearly impossible to conquer.

Although Ye Zheng had not appeared for many years, reportedly suffering from poor health, as long as he was alive, he remained the greatest threat.

Once Ye Zheng was eliminated, the spiritual pillar of the Northern Base would collapse, and the other management layers would not be formidable at all. They would then have the freedom to invade, occupy, and subsequently partition this fertile land.

However, killing an S-class awakener is not that easy. They could only send people in first to gather information, provoke conflicts, and secretly look for opportunities. Unexpectedly, with the outbreak of the sandstorm and the invasion of crows, Ye Zheng appeared voluntarily, directing the military to assist

in the evacuation of civilians. Meanwhile, he became a commander without a visible force, and even the heavens seemed to be on their side.

“Attack,” Lu Tao didn’t waste any words and made an attacking gesture with a gloomy expression.

Bai Qi remained silent but stepped forward firmly, standing in front of Ye Zheng.

He didn’t say anything, but his intention was clear – if they wanted to kill Ye Zheng, they had to step over his dead body first.

Bai Qi possessed a rare all-encompassing aura-type ability called “Determined Resolve.”

This ability appeared ordinary below the S-class, with no special characteristics. Only when it broke through the S-class could it undergo a qualitative change. After activation, it could forcibly pull a person into the aura, significantly enhancing the owner’s various qualities and causing overwhelming damage to the enemy. The effect of the ability would only be broken if one of the parties died.

However, this “death” was not equal. The enemy experienced genuine death, while the owner of the aura would only suffer severe injuries in reality and drop one level.

Bai Qi was currently S5, meaning that after activating “Determined Resolve,” he could endure a maximum of five instances of “death.” Once he dropped to A9, the ability would become unusable.

Before the opponents could react, Bai Qi unhesitatingly pulled Ye Zheng and one of the closest S-class individuals into the aura.

The three of them disappeared on the spot.

Within the “Determined Resolve” aura, Ye Zheng swung his fists, forcefully controlling the gravity to subdue the isolated enemy. Bai Qi, as swift as lightning, grabbed the opponent’s throat, producing a teeth-grinding “crackling” sound of bones.

The opponent had yet to use their ability, but both arms and legs were already unable to lift. Snap! The neck was twisted by a terrifying force, and blood sprayed several meters high.

As the aura disappeared, a bloody corpse appeared on the ground. Bai Qi's cold face was splattered with blood, and Ye Zheng's breathing was slightly rapid. Together, they had successfully killed an S-level awakener.

The on-site awakeners looked determined, moving in unison, ready to disperse and surround. Bai Qi took the initiative, swiftly dragging in another S-class.

If surrounded, both he and the general would undoubtedly be no match for a dozen or so S-class individuals. The only way was to break them down one by one. Regardless, he had to persist... until when? A vague thought crossed Bai Qi's consciousness.

When the aura dissipated once again, Bai Qi and Ye Zheng were still standing in place. However, the second opponent seemed to be much more formidable, with several rugged wounds appearing on Bai Qi's body.

In the moment before numerous awakeners approached, he activated his ability again!

Bang! Lu Tao pushed away the unfortunate soul about to be pulled in, willingly entering the aura himself.

Clasping his fists, roaring towards the sky, Lu Tao's muscles surged, and a ferocious tiger phantom appeared behind him.

The tiger's roar swept across the entire scene as Lu Tao punched continuously, like a predatory tiger. Even under the pressure of gravity, it did not affect his attacks.

Lu Tao was a domineering, power-type awakener. When he mobilized his awakened energy to the extreme, Bai Qi, both in level and physique, was not advantageous.

Hiss! The rolling speed slowed by half a beat. He was caught by the fierce tiger on the neck and separated from his body on the spot!

As the aura disappeared, Bai Qi staggered backward, leaving behind several jagged wounds. The remaining pain radiated from his neck to the nerve endings.

Dropping to S4 level.

All the S-class awakeners charged towards Ye Zheng, disregarding everything. Bai Qi struggled to his feet and once again activated "Determined Resolve."

Lu Tao was closest to him. Before he could pull someone away, Lu Tao accelerated and charged in.

Boom!

Bai Qi was thrown out.

S3.

Seeing this, the remaining awakeners calmly stopped, showing great interest in Lu Tao's massacre.

Although Bai Qi stood in front, Ye Zheng suffered considerable injuries. The aura was an exclusive skill, restricting him at every turn. Coupled with Lu Tao's continuous tiger roars bombarding him, blood slowly dripped from the corners of Ye Zheng's mouth.

Lu Tao stepped on Bai Qi's head, a mocking curve appearing on the corner of his mouth. "A loyal dog indeed. Guess what? Will your master shed precious crocodile tears for you?"

Bai Qi thrust his elbow toward him. Lu Tao sneered, and the tiger's claw crushed his skull.

As the aura disappeared, Bai Qi's eyes tightly closed as he collapsed on the ground, covered in blood. His head was severely dented.

S2.

Ye Zheng's cane shattered, and he fell to one knee, spitting out blood with internal injuries.

Lu Tao smirked as he walked towards him, but his ankle was suddenly grabbed. Bai Qi, unable to speak, still held on tightly, refusing to let go.

"Seeking death? I'll grant your wish." Lu Tao raised his fist.

A cold and gentle hand rested on his shoulder, forcefully stopping Lu Tao's movement. An extremely suppressed voice spoke, "Who's seeking death?"

People around were astonished, their eyelids twitching. How did she enter without a sound?!

The next second, the barrier was torn open.

Flames and frost rained down, and a crimson shell exploded with various AoE abilities pouring down, instantly disrupting the formation.

The person who had been lurking at the back, the dreamweaver who constructed the barrier was about to raise her hand to mend it when, snap! Six mechanical arms swung through the air, entwining around her limbs like coiling ropes, suspending her entire body upside down.

"Poor trick." Lu Xiaoyu's luminous prosthetic arm flashed with a dazzling light. The overwhelming flow of data scattered, completely dissolving the barrier.

Bang! A warning flare shot up into the sky, bursting into a bloom, startling crows into flight high above!

Awakeners across Northern Base were shocked, looking up.

Yi Na and others attempted to go for reinforcements but ran into Su Cha, Lin Youyou, Jennifer, and Yin Xiao head-on. The four stood like a wall, facing the overwhelming S-level pressure, gritting their teeth and refusing to back down.

Fang Zhixu rushed into the battlefield under the protection of Xu Xing. Just as he was about to support Ye Zheng, he was pushed back by Ye Zheng. Turning his head, he, at the risk of his own life, transferred healing energy into Bai Qi, pulling him back from the brink.

The petite girl's eyes were determined. Standing in front of the tiger-like Lu Tao, her slender fingers clenched into a fist, stopping his actions.

“Whom do you want to kill?”

“Did I give you permission?”

Lu Tao's expression became solemn, evidently recognizing the person in front of him — Song Ke, an S7-level strong attack-type awakener.

A tough nut.

Tsk, it seems the intel about her and the Northern Base management being at odds was incorrect.

The tiger's head in the void emitted a fierce roar, and Lu Tao's awakened energy surged. Strange patterns appeared on his skin.

Song Ke squinted slightly as her cells felt an unknown stimulation, growing hotter and hotter. Something seemed about to burst out of her body. Suddenly, she opened her mouth wide, emitting a deep roar from the depths of her throat. A massive shadow faintly appeared behind her.

It was a bear, resembling a mountain peak. Its fur was deep red, thick, coarse, and twice as big as the tiger form of Lu Tao. The formidable tiger, which had just been fierce, whimpered in fear and retreated its head.

“Crafty...” Zhuang Qingyan massaged his forehead and sighed, realizing that it was another gene.

Two top-level powerhouse awakeners, one in the form of a bear and the other a tiger, faced off. The surrounding environment trembled violently. The already shaky sand defense net shattered into pieces, leaving only a thin barrier. Countless crows dove down, approaching closer to the heads of everyone.

In the midst of the chaos, Ye Zheng breathed heavily and urgently called out to Zhuang Qingyan.

“Xiao Zhuang, come here.”

Zhuang Qingyan walked forward in large strides, reaching out to support Ye Zheng’s arm. Ye Zheng’s fingers trembled as he took out an old and worn pocket watch, his terminal and a symbol of the highest authority of District B10.

“Do you know how to operate the city defense system?”

Zhuang Qingyan was stunned. The city defense system was the highest military secret of each district. Due to its complex structure and precise design, only those who had received professional training could operate it. This level of authorization was always held by the ruling magistrate unless delegated to their designated successor.

Unless the magistrate or their appointed heir were present, no one else would have the chance to access such core information.

Ye Zheng’s breathing was strained as he spoke, “I know this is quite demanding, but two days ago, General Xie from Beijun and I had a conversation. She entrusted me to take care of the son of... an old friend.”

The content of that secret conversation was evidently more than just this, but Ye Zheng didn't have time to explain everything in detail. The little information he revealed was enough.

Zhuang Qingyan's fingertips tightened gradually, and deep waves surged in his profound eyes. He looked towards Song Ke not far away, the members of V587, and the overwhelming flock of crows. Finally, his gaze met the weathered eyes of Ye Zheng.

In the end, what did the survival or demise of the Northern Base have to do with him?

Zhuang Qingyan sighed silently, "...Quite a coincidence. I can do it."

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 166.1: Key (9)

Unprecedented S9

The barrier constructed by the Dreamweaver has been broken, the warning signal has been successfully transmitted, and if everything goes as planned, reinforcements from the Northern Base will soon arrive.

However, the situation remains dire, with over a dozen S-level threats on the scene, revealing themselves and charging towards Ye Zheng without hesitation.

Only two chances left.

Bai Qi's fists trembled as he struggled to get up. Warm, sticky blood dripped down from the sun, and he wanted to invoke the "determined resolve". He had already dropped to S2. If he activated the light circle again, regardless of who won or lost, his own life might not be guaranteed.

Song Ke stared at the approaching enemies, picked up Bai Qi with one hand, and gently placed him next to Ye Zheng. "Stay put."

Bai Qi wanted to move again, but his shoulder was held down by a huge bear paw. Song Ke turned around, her expression incredibly serious. "I'll handle this."

She turned her neck, the bones cracking, and the shadow of a brown bear behind her followed suit, as if warming up before a hunt.

"Just S-level, I can handle it."

Even though they were both S-level, there was a vast difference in strength. The people in front of her were just numerous; individually, not even one could surpass the bloody hunter, Punk. If she could overpower Punk, she could naturally kill them too.

Song Ke firmly positioned Ye Zheng and Bai Qi behind her and walked forward.

There were only six S-level opponents on their side, and Ye Zheng and Bai Qi had lost their combat capabilities. Facing more enemies with fewer forces, she couldn't afford to be careless.

Fang Zhixu bent over to traverse the battlefield, taking the opportunity to run back and treat Ye Zheng.

Ye Zheng gasped and asked, "Xiao Fang, I heard you have a potion that can restore combat capability. Give me one."

"No! You can't use it!" Fang Zhixu categorically refused. With Ye Zheng's current physical condition, severe injuries combined with organ aging, sealing it off with an injection, even if effective, would bring along side effects that could cost him his life.

Zhuang Qingyan said in a deep voice, "General, the Northern Base still needs you. Please trust Song Ke and trust us."

Ye Zheng looked at his determined eyes, remained silent for a moment, and finally nodded, no longer insisting.

Bang! Song Ke and Lu Tao met at a narrow passage. The brown bear's body stood upright, and with a mighty swipe of its front paw, it slapped the fierce tiger, causing it to stagger.

Lu Tao's sharp claws dug into the ground, barely stopping the retreat. He wiped away the blood from the corner of his mouth and raised his chin to Song Ke.

“There's something I can't figure out. You, an S7, can be treated well wherever you go. Why are you tied to this withered tree named Ye Zheng?”

“Abandoning the dark and turning to the light, isn't it better to enjoy the good life with us? After we divide the territory, endless benefits await you.”

Song Ke felt a bit absurdly amused, coldly uttered, “Are you here to teach me how to do things?”

Lu Tao, seeing that she wouldn't listen to advice, roared, tilting his head upward like a crazed tiger tearing into its prey. He swung a fist towards Song Ke's face.

Song Ke, with strength gathered in her waist and abdomen, transformed her fingertips into phantom blue claws. The bear paw acted like a layer of metallic armor, and with a loud bang, she countered his powerful punch with one of her own.

The phantom tiger's front claws shattered, and Lu Tao was knocked off balance, his mouth letting out a “puff” as he spat out blood on the spot.

Song Ke landed safely, stepping on Lu Tao's mouth with one foot and raising her fist high.

Indeed, she had conflicts with He Qihong, and she had considered leaving the Northern Base. However, during this time, she had seen more: Tustan, Zhao Yuqing, Ye Zimei, the Ming couple, the thousands of ordinary people striving to live in the central ancient street, the united and passionate awakeners in the Silver Ring Arena, and even the hopeful applicants in Qianzhan City who hadn't received admission yet but already had a glimmer of light in their eyes. The Northern Base was a city with a “soul.”

In the cruel background of the apocalypse, where human morality had plummeted, cities with a “soul” were few. Having traveled through much of the Alliance, from Tongwan to Haimen, and now to the Northern Base, cities like this, and the people living here, deserved to live well and should not become sacrifices in the power struggle.

Boom! Boom!

Metal burst, and shards of rock scattered as Song Ke punched Lu Tao’s mouth, causing it to cave in. The terrifying pressure that could force internal organs to shift descended, and the massive phantom bear bit onto the phantom tiger’s neck, snapping it off with a crunch.

The animal forms disappeared, and Lu Tao’s body collapsed to the ground.

“Kill!”

“Kill Ye Zheng!”

“Don’t let him stand alone, attack together!”

After Lu Tao fell, the remaining S-level team formed a tighter formation, encircling in a half-moon shape. At the forefront, Yi Na raised her hand and snapped her fingers.

Her ability “Blossom” activated, and a giant man-eating flower burst from the ground, resembling fresh red meat. The central part opened with jagged teeth, contracting and wriggling. Five colorful petals opened and closed, emitting a foul stench that rivaled the rotting zombies.

A Tustan team member was accidentally bitten on the calf, and the flesh and blood instantly rotted into corpse water. He reacted quickly, heroically severed the part below his knee, and Fang Zhixu, carrying a medical kit, carefully maneuvered through various attacks, running to the injured person to treat and bandage him.

Yi Na sneered, another snap of her fingers, and one by one, man-eating flowers surrounded Fang Zhixu. The thick fissures suddenly widened—

Bang! A grenade fell from the sky, cutting through the yellow sand and various obstacles with pinpoint accuracy. It exploded towards the crimson gap, foul blood sprayed, and petals scattered. Yi Na staggered, no longer looking composed.

Yin Xiao was wearing a sniper scope, his expression couldn't be seen clearly, only catching a glimpse of his stern lower face. After successfully exploiting his "weakness detection" ability, he quickly adjusted his aim and shot at the next one, tirelessly removing the blossoming man-eating flowers.

Lin Youyou ran quickly, chanting lyrics in her mouth and a thin mist of knives descended, while Su Cha's poisonous gas came out and melted into her ranged attack. The two of them cooperated seamlessly—Lin Youyou became the lurking assassin, and the sandstorm concealed the mist. Many awakeners, unaware, were cut with small wounds. Powerful neurotoxins invaded their brains, causing limbs to convulse, and they fell to the ground.

Tustan and V587, a group of advanced awakeners, unexpectedly managed to block over a dozen S-level opponents.

"Aoo—!" A terrifying bear roar echoed, freezing all S1 and S2 opponents in place.

Fearlessly, Song Ke charged into the enemy ranks. The blue phantom claw slashed horizontally, piercing the throat of the first S1. Blood spouted like a fountain as Song Ke slid on the slippery blood, akin to a wolf entering a flock of sheep. She swiftly pounced on the second S2, reversed her grip, and slashed from top to bottom, splitting the person in half, organs and intestines cascading down. Blood blurred the vision of those around, and their pupils continuously contracted in fear.

"Aahhhhh—!"

The imposing brown bear bit off the head of the third S2, brain matter splattering. Then, with two claws, it grabbed two S1 awakeners, slamming them fiercely onto the ground. Snap! A leg was thrown away, and then, with a head-on collision, limbs shattered and fell apart, accompanied by the thunderous sound of bones breaking.

In the blink of an eye, five S-levels perished.

Song Ke's blood-stained phantom bear raised its head, and the brown bear's hind legs stood upright. Its rigid fur bristled, and it roared towards the sky, the roar echoing through half of the Northern Base.

Song Ke's lips curled up, and the chilling curvature of a dimple appeared on her cheek.

“Either leave, or die.”

“Who dares to step forward?”

On the opposite side, they hesitated, stopping in their tracks. Even though only S1 and S2 had died, Song Ke's combat power was too terrifying.

Some people shivered all over, and strange thoughts gradually emerged. Could this person really be just S7?

Silence enveloped the surroundings.

At this moment, a violent energy fluctuation came from above them.

A deep spatial crack slowly opened, and a tremendous force emanated from the black hole. A figure, with a half-male half-female mask, sinister and evil, leisurely stepped out. Smiling, he applauded, “As expected of an S7. Not bad, but unfortunately, your heroic moment ends here.”

Behind the person, over a thousand advanced awakers followed suit, their eyes revealing a fierce and cruel glint.

Lu Tao and Yi Na seemed to receive some instruction. Suddenly, they pulled out a crimson Level 4 crystal, shattered it without hesitation, and the rich energy replenished their bodies. The two, whose awakened energy had been depleted, recovered, standing up simultaneously.

Zhuang Qingyan abruptly looked up, and the streets in all directions were eerily silent, devoid of any presence.

How could this be? According to the time of the warning flare launch, the supporters from the Northern Base should have arrived by now.

Sensing his gaze, the masked figure sneered, "Waiting for reinforcements? I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

...

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 166.2: Key (9)

Unprecedented S9

Half an hour ago, at the Awakened Department.

In the administrative office, the administrative secretary cautiously spoke, inquiring about the stiff figure in the shadows, "Director He, all departments have taken action, the relocation of Qianzhan City residents is completed. Do you have any further instructions?"

After a while, He Qihong's hoarse voice sounded, "Follow General's command in everything."

The secretary breathed a sigh of relief, not daring to glance at her expression, and hurriedly said, "Then I'll go help too..."

Almost impatiently, she turned around and left the oppressive atmosphere of the office.

He Qihong looked through the floor-to-ceiling window, overlooking the entire city at her feet. For twenty years, she had poured all her efforts into governing the Northern Base. Why couldn't it develop as she had envisioned?

Shoo—

A spatial tunnel suddenly opened, and two elusive figures appeared out of thin air.

One person was entirely covered in a black robe, with unclear features. The other was a man wearing a half-sinister-looking mask.

At this moment, the Awakener Department's defense was at its weakest, with ninety percent of the officials running around outside. Unexpectedly, S-level spatial awakeners had entered.

“Who are you?!” Xi Ze shouted, raising his hand to activate the vacuum domain.

“Just an A9, overestimating your abilities.”

Qing uttered a cryptic incantation, and Xi Ze's entire body twisted in pain. In just a few seconds, he transformed into a wriggling pupa.

He Qihong turned her head to press the alarm, but Qing, with a gesture, drew symbols in the empty air. She was uncontrollably drawn towards him, and with a thud, she collided with the floor-to-ceiling window.

Blood trickled down her forehead. With B3-level strength, she was extremely vulnerable in the face of an S4.

Qing seemed somewhat surprised, “It's quite amusing. Hasn't the Northern Base always valued strength?”

“He Qihong, right? How did someone like you, a B3 level, manage to attain your current position?”

He Qihong struggled desperately, “Who are you? Why do you want to kill me?”

Qing smirked and skipped the first question, "I won't kill you. You're just an ant, not worth my effort. We want to kill Ye Zheng."

He Qihong's face turned purple, but she remained resolute, "Delusional. You won't be able to kill the teacher."

Qing dismissed it, "I heard you were Ye Zheng's student. You must have worked hard to take over the leadership from him. Now that he's on the verge of death, why not lend us a hand?"

He Qihong gritted her teeth, "No way. He is my... mentor. I won't betray the Northern Base."

"Hahaha!" Qing burst into laughter, a laughter that was coarse and yet melodious, carrying a discordant and piercing sensation.

"Do you really think you're someone important?"

Qing's chilly lips approached He Qihong's ear, whispering like a devil, "Now I understand why Ye Zheng didn't completely delegate authority to you."

"In the end, it's because you're incompetent."

He Qihong's pupils contracted.

Qing slowly smiled, his tone seemingly regretful, "You, someone with cunning schemes and a dirty heart, might be passable in peacetime. But in times of war, look at yourself, easily controlled. Therefore, you're destined to be an inadequate leader."

"I heard you value awakeners highly. Controlling them in your hands, is it because of fear?"

“You’re constantly afraid, afraid of being replaced, afraid of being killed, afraid of losing power. You have nothing at all.”

“Tsk tsk, being incompetent is the original sin, after all.”

Qing recited a chilling incantation, and before He Qihong’s eyes, a black sphere with insects fluttering appeared.

“This is called a silverfish. It amplifies the evil in a person’s heart. Let’s see if Director He is as selfless as you claim.”

The insect ball entered He Qihong’s mouth, and she writhed in pain, memories flashing before her eyes.

When He Qihong was born, the nuclear war had already ended, and the Northern Base was becoming stable. She received an elite education from a young age and learned about “genetic selection” and “early awakeners” from various sources. She firmly believed in the inequality between people. After the apocalypse, she finally awakened but only achieved a mediocre B3 level due to inherent limitations in her aptitude, making her promotion prospects almost non-existent.

Becoming the successor of the Northern Base was a difficult task. Initially, Ye Zheng favored another student named Chen Xuerou, who was optimistic, positive, and an A8-level early awakener with better social connections and assessment scores than He Qihong.

During a peacekeeping mission, they encountered a powerful earthquake. Chen Xuerou, attempting to save a group of students, got trapped under collapsed debris and remained buried in a deep hole for two whole weeks. Ye Zheng never gave up on the rescue efforts.

He Qihong volunteered and accompanied the rescue team to find Chen Xuerou. Fortunately, she was the first to discover Chen Xuerou, who was on the brink of death with her lower body in a gruesome state. With timely treatment and the installation of bio-mechanical prosthetics, Chen Xuerou could still survive.

Looking at her, He Qihong muttered, "Senior Chen, they are just ordinary people. Why bother saving them?"

Chen Xuerou, struggling to speak, asked, "Qihong, are they... okay now?"

"I don't know," He Qihong answered indifferently. She had no interest in those students; her sole focus was finding Chen Xuerou. Once she found her, she became less anxious. Her tone carried a slight reproach, "You see, you saved them but sacrificed yourself. People like you are simply not suitable to lead the Northern Base. Rest assured, I will do better than you."

Chen Xuerou couldn't speak anymore; she could only stare at He Qihong with wide eyes.

He Qihong waited silently in place until, a day later, Chen Xuerou breathed her last breath. He Qihong stood up, patted her stiff knees, and stumbled out, shouting, "Senior... Senior's here!! I found Senior!"

"Ah—!" He Qihong let out a heart-wrenching scream. Her consciousness gradually blurred, and tears streamed down her cheeks. For the Northern Base, she had burned twenty years of her youth. She only wanted to build an ideal city according to her own will.

She searched everywhere for scientists involved in the "Eternal Life Plan." Publicly, she claimed to want to cure Ye Zheng and secretly supported research on excessive radiation. Only she knew that deep within her heart, a hidden voice kept calling out: Do I still have a chance to advance?

He Qihong's pitch-black eyes, immersed in endless agony, recalled Ye Zheng's reprimand:

"Qihong, treat awakeners the same as ordinary people. You can't discriminate."

"Remember, the foundation of the entire city is the tens of millions of residents in the Northern Base. Some things should not be inverted."

He Qihong gripped her own neck and screamed, "No! That's not true! Teacher! It's different! Awakeners are born noble. We are meant to have more status and power than ordinary people... Chen Xuerou is wrong, and so are you. You're all wrong!"

···In this world, we, the awakeners, should rightfully hold it in our hands.

The silverfish fully invaded He Qihong's brain, and her intense anger turned into tranquility. Her eyes became completely black.

Mechanically, He Qihong stood up, like a puppet, and pressed the terminal:

“A district-wide announcement is now being issued. Everyone is to stand by immediately. No matter what happens, you are not allowed to leave your posts. Otherwise, residents of District B10 will have their identities revoked and be treated as rioters, and they will be killed without mercy.”

“I repeat: No matter what happens, everyone is to stand by in place.”

Beside her, Qing laughed, his smile becoming increasingly radiant.

The term “Silverfish” refers to villains who harm collective interests. He Qihong was indeed a hypocritical pretender.

The spatial rift reappeared, and the two S-level awakeners disappeared on the spot.

He Qihong's inexplicable command carried a strong sense of oppression. People dared not resist and stood bewildered in place. Murmurs spread, and just a few seconds later, the terminal beeped again.

*

Near the 13th channel, with Song Ke's position as the center, a straight line formed. Behind her was Ye Zheng, whom she vowed to protect to the death, and in front were thousands of advanced awakeners.

Qing exaggeratedly applauded, a cold smile playing on his lips, “I can't deny it, you're formidable. You can handle one against ten, but what about one against a hundred, or a thousand?”

“You can try,” Song Ke replied coldly. The phantom bear paw lifted, and a massive, cold jagged blade slowly drew out.

Qing withdrew his smile, gazing deeply at her, “Then... I’ll kill you first, and then Ye Zheng.”

Boom! Flames, wind blades, thunder, ice and snow, thorns... Countless awakeners attacked Song Ke, swallowing her slender figure.

Bloody ghost hands grabbed her calves, vicious man-eating flowers crawled towards her, opening their blood-filled mouths.

Song Ke cut through with her sword, leaped out of the landing point, lifted the cold jagged blade, and fiercely slapped back.

Bang! There was no escape from the dense attacks, and she was harshly hit from behind. Seizing the opportunity, Lu Tao swung his tiger claw forward, slashing open a wound on Song Ke’s abdomen. She rolled and fell into a trap, where a radiation-type awakener had long been waiting for ambush. A powerful electric current erupted, convulsing her entire body, even the phantom bear curled up.

“Song Ke!”

Zhuang Qingyan’s expression changed suddenly, and Lin Youyou and others were all anxious to rush over but were unable to break free.

Seeing the situation on the brink, in the nick of time, chaotic footsteps echoed from all directions on the street.

As if sensing something, Ye Zheng suddenly looked up.

“Who dares to kill General Ye? I’ll f***ing fight you all!!”

“To hell with being on standby! Even if I’m not from District B, I’m coming!”

“General Ye, you saved us, and we won’t abandon you!!”

A sea of people rushed towards the battlefield, each face either familiar or unfamiliar, fearlessly approaching through the swirling yellow sand.

Leading the charge were the Ling siblings, Zhigler, Zhao Yuqing, and other S-level awakeners. Behind them trailed a diverse army of awakeners labeled ABCDE, consisting of people of all ages and genders. Their expressions were uniformly resolute, with even ordinary citizens raising weapons.

The moment Qing appeared, Lu Xiaoyu, under the name of V587, posted a private commission on the platform. There was only one location and a brief message, no rewards, no points, and the danger level was marked as the highest, the red level.

—” Ye Zheng is under attack, urgent rescue needed.”

Such a commission, especially under the threat of “expulsion and killed without mercy,” logically should have received no takers. However, without a second thought, residents of the Northern Base spontaneously accepted it. The number even exceeded the A-level tasks the system had issued.

The buzzing of voices filled every corner. Outside the encirclement of Qing and others, the arriving reinforcements turned the tables on them.

Amidst the sizzling and dazzling electric currents, Song Ke slowly stood up, clutching her abdomen. She opened her eyes, revealing deep blue pupils.

A radiant and dazzling light erupted in a circular pattern beneath her feet. The phantom of a brown bear rose to the sky, doubling in size, bringing a devastating sense of oppression. Her other hand lifted slightly, and the cold jagged blade quietly disintegrated, fragments falling in all directions. The surrounding ruins trembled violently, as an unprecedented powerful awakened energy surged out from every limb and bone, like a storm.

Without relying on any external objects, large and small blue light orbs rose from the ground, instantly transforming into thousands of sharp swords. Song Ke raised her hand gently, and the tips immediately aimed at Qing and other awakeners, like a spectacular and eerie will-o'-the-wisp. The flow of yellow sand seemed to freeze, the restless flock of crows collectively fell silent, and the dazzling blue light illuminated half the sky.

Everyone on the scene stared in shock. This was completely different from summoning through spells or relying on external forces to condense a sword array. Each one was a genuine and pure metal spiritual weapon – the ultimate manifestation of the explosion of metal-type ability!

‘All things in heaven and earth are my weapons.’

Song Ke stood in the center of the storm, with a brutal beastly shadow behind her and a myriad of sword lights swirling around her.

If an R-type testing device were used at this moment, it would reveal a stunning fact.

Song Ke’s awakened energy intensity had reached an astonishing value.

An unprecedented S9.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 167: Key (10)

qinf was kiLd by me. I wil1 come back by mys%lf

Sword light spiraled, and thousands of spiritual weapons emitted a buzzing resonance. Song Ke and the brown bear stood up simultaneously.

The pursuers in the inner circle and the reinforcements in the outer circle fell into silence together.

Everyone involuntarily looked towards the War God-like figure. The emotions on both sides were completely different – one side filled with joy, the other with fear.

A reinforcement from the Northern Base squeezed to the front, lowered their head, and looked at their spiritual weapon, a wolf teeth club, purchased at a high price in their arms. Their eyes sparkled: “Wow, I’m using the same model as the S7!”

Song Ke looked indifferent. She pulled out a roll of bandages from the pocket connected to the space, bit the end, and wound it around the back of her hand, which was bleeding incessantly.

It wasn’t because of the injury but because two finger joints had just been swallowed by the man-eating flower. The area became incomplete, and now it was both painful and itchy. In case her self-healing ability took effect and fingers grew out of thin air in front of everyone, it wouldn’t be good.

Song Ke casually bandaged herself, glanced at the opposite side with a slight lift of her eyes, and said nonchalantly:

“Since you’re here, might as well stay.”

The words were light, but they spread to everyone’s ears with the wind.

No fool would mistake her for a hospitable host. This S7 clearly meant only one thing – leave the corpses behind.

Thousands of swords hummed together as Song Ke, like a drawn blade, led the charge into the enemy camp, enveloped in the overwhelming awakened energy like thunder.

With an S7 leading the charge, the reinforcements, filled with fervor, followed suit, shouting:

“I’ll go first! You guys protect General Ye!!”

“I’ll fight with you guys!”

“Outsiders, go back to your territory!”

Qing sneered, and coldly uttered three words without caring: “A motley crew.”

His ten fingers intertwined, suddenly spasmed and trembled. With the appearance of a strange seal, countless soul phantom figures emerged from the ground! The Northern Base had once been a fierce battlefield, burying countless lives. Although the souls summoned by Qing had no physical form, they were full of gloomy evil, and upon emerging, they crazily pounced on the living. The possessed awakeners became mentally confused, attacking indiscriminately.

Lu Tao and Yi Na, along with other S-levels, jumped into the battlefield, taking the opportunity to slaughter at will.

The scene descended into chaos, and the lower-level awakeners from the Northern Base fell one after another.

Ye Zheng suddenly threw a punch, and the attacks in the sky were affected by gravity, stagnating in mid-air, saving a large number of awakeners who couldn't escape in time.

“All... good soldiers, but still need a commander.” He struggled to stand up, the coughing sound resembling a dilapidated bellows.

On the battlefield, having fearless soldiers alone was not enough; a well-organized commander was also needed.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his eyes to the pocket watch in his hand, sighed slightly, and then intercepted him, “General, let me do it.”

Ye Zheng, with eyes that had seen many vicissitudes, showed a hint of surprise, “You can command?”

Zhuang Qingyan modestly replied, “Not quite, just a little understanding.”

Ye Zheng pondered for a moment, silently smiled. Yes, that General Xie from Beijun was also an excellent battlefield commander.

“Alright, very well...” He patted Zhuang Qingyan’s shoulder heavily, “It’s up to you.”

Zhuang Qingyan turned his head and shouted at a figure waving six arms, “Hey, 5.0, come and help.”

Lu Xiaoyu’s movements stopped, rolled his eyes at the sky, and muttered discontentedly, “Arrogant 4.2...”

Complaints aside, he still came over.

Lu Xiaoyu’s alloy arm connected to the pocket watch terminal. With Ye Zheng’s highest authority, he instantly decrypted all databases.

Zhuang Qingyan, with extraordinary memory beyond ordinary people, swiftly copied and imprinted the information of all awakeners in the Northern Base. Then, his light-colored eyes shimmered as he scanned the reinforcements on the scene, quickly memorizing each face and matching them with the information in his mind.

An excellent commander must learn to understand and use people.

Know the people, then use them well.

Among these reinforcements, some were brave and skilled in combat, while others rarely took on combat missions and were flustered in the face of a large-scale battle.

Zhuang Qingyan’s commanding style was straightforward. He directly gave commands to people in their consciousness. Because of the lesson from Song Ke’s previous experience, he dared not use professional terms and chose plain language.

“Li Qiang, turn around immediately and run in the opposite direction.”

This individual, with an extremely poor sense of direction in the group attack category, rushed into a deserted corner. His ability struck down, not hitting any enemies, but frightening away two crows that were cawing loudly.

“Oh, oh!” Li Qiang stepped on the brakes, obediently turned around, and ran in the opposite direction, coincidentally joining the large forces of Tustan.

Lin Youyou sensed the opportunity for a counterattack, sang an ethereal song, maxing out the buff, and Li Qiang, along with Jennifer and others, bombarded wildly. The brilliant light of their abilities erupted, the range doubled, and it fell into the most densely populated area of the opposing crowd, harvesting lives in swathes.

“Zhang Wei, focus your attention, listen to my prompts and release your ability.”

Zhang Wei’s ability is called “Demoralizing Roar.” Continuous use of this ability lowers the enemy’s desire to attack, putting them in a state of despondency. It is an advantageous support ability in group battles, but he obviously struggles with the intervals. Every time he is disrupted, he unconsciously exposes vulnerabilities.

With Zhuang Qingyan as a guide in his mind, constantly reminding him, Zhang Wei displayed his skills, timing his roars perfectly.

“Wang Qianqian, come back, you are a long-range type...”

Wang Qianqian, holding a large spiritual weapon, looked like she was about to charge into the enemy’s face.

“Huh? Who should I attack?” She looked puzzled, scanning around, wondering who was speaking.

“At six o’clock, see that 1.3-meter-tall kid?”

Wang Qianqian nodded, "Got it!"

"Follow him, attack whoever he attacks."

Xu Xing was hiding in a corner, sneakily launching ice spikes, when a girl approached from behind.

He shot ice spikes, and the girl dispersed them with a wind circle, instantly freezing a large area on the opposite side, displaying astonishing power.

"Wow!" Xu Xing marveled, "So awesome!"

"Cool, little brother! Sister will team up with you," Wang Qianqian applauded.

Zhuang Qingyan named a few more people, "You guys, go protect General Ye."

The named awakeners ran to Ye Zheng's side, surrounding him like mother hens protecting their chicks.

They were all in the defense category. Although their levels were not high, their abilities were extremely rare and difficult to break through easily.

Zhuang Qingyan quickly surveyed the battlefield and suddenly noticed a figure in the midst of a killing spree. In his cold gaze, there was a gaze that stared at dead things.

"Lao Mu, go pull out Lu Tao."

Lao Mu was an A4-level, with the ability of "Forced Taunt." After releasing it, the opponent would involuntarily attack him.

"Liu Hao, Zhao Xiufen, Qian Miao... Group together at seven o'clock, prepare for a surprise attack."

“Cough, cough... don’t look towards Lu Tao’s direction, pretend to do something else.”

Liu Hao whistled while looking at the sky, Qian Miao lowered her head to sweep the ground, and Zhao Xiufen pulled out a cross-stitch and started sewing... Their acting skills were extremely stiff.

Zhuang Qingyan couldn’t help but hold his forehead. Fortunately, the chaos on the battlefield made it difficult to observe carefully, so their deception went unnoticed.

Lu Tao’s direction was twisted by Lao Mu’s taunt, and uncontrollably, he took two steps forward, falling into the center of a trap.

An awakener threw a club at him, forcing him to be motionless. Everyone rushed forward, mercilessly beating the old master, ruthlessly using hands and feet. The tiger’s fur was completely plucked, and he fell to the ground completely bald.

Lu Tao bled profusely and took out a crystal from his pocket, preparing to crush it with gritted teeth.

“Give it to me!” A young man lurking in the shadows activated his ability, “Fetching Objects from the Air” and stole Lu Tao’s supplies.

“...” Zhuang Qingyan retracted the command on the tip of his tongue, staring at the face of that young man for a second, his eyes understanding.

This person used to be a professional pickpocket before coming to the Northern Base.

Lu Tao: “???” The tiger fell down and was bullied by the dog.

He was already seriously injured by Song Ke and was now being beaten by a ragtag army. He was at the end of his strength.

An elusive figure appeared behind him, and a triple-edged military dagger brutally stabbed into his throat.

The exhausted tiger completely lowered his head, unable to lift it again.

—Lu Tao was killed.

Although the process was full of comedic effects, the miraculously organized reinforcements from the Northern Base gained the upper hand.

Some assassins keenly noticed that the opposing cannon fodder army seemed to have suddenly become organized, acting swiftly and cooperatively. They became more troublesome and difficult to deal with. To make matters worse, new reinforcements were constantly joining from the ends of the roads in all directions.

Zhuang Qingyan pushed his glasses with one hand, looked towards Qing from a distance, and smiled faintly, “The real motley crew is you.”

A group of greedy rats colluding for their own interests, like the ubiquitous yellow sand, dispersed with just a casual strike.

Endless lost souls attached themselves to the awakeners. Zhao Yuqing’s eyes were cold, and her water-based abilities were unleashed, purifying! A torrential rain poured from the sky, and the purifying water droplets dampened the possessed bodies, instantly generating white steam. The painful howls spread as the possessed individuals felt a lightness throughout their entire bodies, breaking free from control.

Ling Yan and Ling Yue cooperated seamlessly, almost synchronizing their moves. With S6-level strong attack abilities, they teamed up to crush two S-levels on the opposite side!

Compared to the uneven mix of the miscellaneous army, the top power of the Northern Base erupted with astonishing suppression at this moment.

Song Ke confronted the bright red man-eating flower head-on. Her heart moved casually, and the sword light around her spun, cutting the colorful petals into pieces!

The squirming fat mouth fell in front of Song Ke. She pointed, and the phantom claws erupted with crackling and dazzling blue light, transforming into boxing gloves that wrapped around her hands. She then grabbed the crown, filled with sharp teeth, one on each side, and with a great force, she tore it apart—

The shadow of the brown bear roared like an earthquake, and the fierce man-eating flower was torn in two!

Yi Na's face turned deathly pale, and she suddenly spewed a mouthful of blood, her magnetic field shattered.

Song Ke indifferently stood up, shook off the flesh on her boxing gloves, crushed the two broken pieces under her foot, and approached Yi Na's direction.

Yi Na stumbled backward, panicked, and threw the man-eating flower, covering the path ahead of Song Ke.

The brown bear began to run. Despite its massive size, its movements were exceptionally agile. Its hard paws stepped on the flesh, and the terrifying force, weighing a thousand tons, ruthlessly crushed these demonic flowers, as well as Yi Na. She bled from seven orifices, blood vessels burst, and her skin looked like a rotten tomato, with juice flowing, spitting out fragmented black and red organs from her mouth.

The summoned objects suffered destruction, and the summoner's body bore an equal amount of damage. By the time Song Ke reached her, Yi Na was already lying in a sorry state on the ground.

Song Ke stepped on her mouth, applying a slight force.

“No, you can't kill me!” Yi Na's mouth emitted a large number of blood bubbles, speaking unclearly, “I am S4 level, I am... cough... the daughter of Baishen's magistrate's wife's uncle...”

Countless swords were simultaneously released, piercing Yi Na into a hedgehog. Before she could finish her self-introduction, her eyes widened in anger and she lost her breath.

Song Ke showed no expression. "Sorry, too complicated interpersonal relationships, I can't understand."

After killing Yi Na, Song Ke raised her head, her gaze piercing through the chaotic crowd, fixing onto Qing.

"It's your turn," she said each word heavily.

The smile disappeared from Qing's face, and his two completely different faces seemingly merged into one, becoming equally cold.

Countless wailing souls rushed towards Song Ke, and she controlled floating swords to counterattack.

Qing took a step back, his sleeve covering his fingers, nervously twitching in the shadows.

"You're using sealing spells?" Song Ke tilted her head, expressing a knowing look.

Just a step behind, a slanting street lamp suddenly transformed into a long spear, thrusting out of the void and nailing Qing's palm.

Qing couldn't care about his injuries, raising his head in surprise.

How could this be possible? How did she discover it? Was it just a coincidence?

With a feigned move, Qing cast a spell, his lips moving slightly, silently reciting an incantation. The air became hazy, and a plague spread.

Without looking at his hands, Song Ke launched a lightning-fast attack, a bear paw cleanly slashing diagonally—

Smack! She slapped Qing across the face.

Several teeth, accompanied by bits of flesh, fell out, and half of Qing's face swelled up like a steamed bun.

The curse was interrupted.

Song Ke landed gracefully and raised an eyebrow, "Too slow."

Qing suddenly raised his gaze, as if a cold poisonous snake was staring fixedly at Song Ke, and attempted to use his ability again.

Interrupt, interrupt, and interrupt again. Regardless of his mouth or hand movements, no matter how many feints he made, Song Ke could accurately predict his true attack intent. He couldn't release a complete spell, and he was helpless against Song Ke's relentless attacks.

Qing's shoulder was pierced through, half of his face was severely swollen, and his finger joints were completely severed. The blood accumulated into a crimson lake.

Song Ke clapped her hands lightly and said casually, "I've seen more powerful enchantment awakeners than you."

"—You are far behind."

Her senior brother, Zhang Ci, was even more talented than Zhang Ting in both the true skills and enchantment. He could be called a "genius." Song Ke had sparred with him countless times since childhood. She was familiar with the prelude to every spell and every seal, as if etched into her bones. She could instantly think of ways to break them.

Even so, unless she held back, Zhang Ci never won against her.

Compared to Zhang Ci, Qing seemed like someone who had just started. He was a flashy counterfeit, and his crude tricks could be seen through at a glance.

Qing's chest heaved up and down, and the half of his face behind the mask was clouded with gloom.

The over a thousand advanced awakens he brought with him were defeated, and the outcome was clear. People from the Northern Base were cleaning up the final battlefield.

Ultimately, it was all because of the S7-level awakener in front of him.

Qing looked at Song Ke, his voice fluctuating between light and heavy, piercing to the ears:

“Congratulations, you saved Ye Zheng.”

“But hell will come, looking forward to meeting you again next time.”

A faint sense of unease rose in Song Ke's heart.

Qing's face, with a sinister-looking half-mask, seemed to split in half, half smiling and half crying, half happy and half sad, appearing extremely bizarre.

Swish! Behind him, a narrow space crack appeared, and a thin, bony hand reached out, grabbing Qing's shoulder, about to take him away.

Not good, it's that S-level spatial awakener. They're trying to escape!

Song Ke rushed forward regardless of everything. All the floating swords merged into a massive pair of scissors.

Clang! The blade fell, freezing the expression of the black-robed spatial awakener. His neck was twisted, and the head rolled off.

“Ahhhh!” Flesh and blood sprayed as Qing’s arm was severed, and a wailing scream echoed.

However, it was too late. More than half of his body had already entered the spatial crack.

As the caster died, the crack showed violent fluctuations. Song Ke’s pupils contracted, her awakened energy surged, the phantom bear behind her disappeared suddenly. Her entire body shrank quickly, and she uncontrollably spat out a long, thin tongue. Before the crack completely disappeared, she was forcefully sucked in by the powerful force.

The battlefield fell into dead silence.

Only V587 exclaimed in shock, “Sister!” “Captain!” “Song Ke’er!”

Zhuang Qingyan furrowed his eyebrows deeply, his face as calm as water.

Everyone had witnessed the scene just now, where Song Ke transformed from a brown bear into something else.

Zhuang Qingyan sighed deeply and turned to Lu Xiaoyu, “Erase all videos and surveillance, leave no traces.”

Mistakes like Yang Xiaobo’s should not be repeated. Today’s events must not have any visual evidence leaked.

Fortunately, communication devices were still functional. Zhuang Qingyan quietly called through his earpiece, “Song Ke? Can you hear me? Respond if you can.”

After more than ten minutes, a message suddenly appeared in V587’s group chat: “qing was killed by A*%.”

Song Ke’s profile picture flickered, displaying for a long time: “The other party is typing...”

“The other party is typing...”

“The other party is typing...”

“qinf was kiLd by me. I wil1 come back by mys%lf.”

Zhuang Qingyan: “...”

Hundreds of corresponding gene sequences flashed through his mind, but the features were too vague to make a judgment.

What has she turned into this time? How come she can't even type properly now?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 168: Key (11)

Where did this ugly creature come from?

Swoosh—

The spatial rift violently fluctuated, dispersing and disappearing in an instant. Qing, dragging a severed arm, fell out of thin air, stumbled two steps, lost balance, and fell to the ground.

Where he passed, a shocking bloodstain was left behind, nerves cut, awakened energy stagnant, difficult to mobilize. The destructive power of the metal-type ability was formidable, causing the magnetic field within his body to completely lose balance.

Qing's face, like golden paper, leaned against a tree trunk and slowly sat down, supporting himself to observe the surroundings. Sand and dust raged in the air, a dense flock of crows squatted overhead,

peering, with gray-white pupils silently watching, as if patiently waiting for his death, ready to feast on his flesh.

The barrier of the Northern Base had anti-space ability devices, and Qing couldn't escape directly. His original plan was to retreat to a safe house first and then figure out a way to leave the area. However, his spatial-type companion was killed instantly, the teleportation path went wrong, leading him to a desolate forest somewhere.

Faint rustling sounds came.

Qing raised his head alertly, branches swayed with the wind, and a light green leaf gently floated down.

The surroundings were eerily quiet, only the coarse and rapid panting of Qing could be heard.

Qing's eyes were sinister, and after a while, a smile of relief and self-mockery appeared.

That S7 didn't chase after him.

He lifted his left hand, which had only two remaining fingers, took off the blood-stained mask, revealing a half-female face.

This S4-level sorcerer turned out to be a "hermaphrodite" with both male and female characteristics!

Qing muttered obscure and difficult-to-understand spells, switching the mask to the other side as he put it on.

With his movements, those fatal injuries were magically transferred away. Although the severed arm and fingers couldn't regenerate, the pain lessened, and Qing's complexion improved slightly. Unfortunately, the other half of his face, his male face, was completely ruined.

At this moment, Qing had completely transformed into a woman with delicate eyebrows and eyes.

A very light breathing sound echoed in his ears, as if someone gasped.

“Who’s there?” Qing suddenly stood up. “Come out!”

Several nesting sparrows were startled and flapped their wings, flying to higher ground. Qing coldly raised his hand, two fingers trembling, and the sparrows fell, instantly stiffening and turning into corpses, not one left.

Qing’s gloomy gaze swept around, finding no anomalies. She returned to the shade of the tree, activated the terminal, and a deliberately lowered voice faintly came through, “...It’s me. Ye Zheng isn’t dead. The operation failed.”

On the other end, who knows what was said, Qing’s hoarse voice suddenly rose, “Why not kill him?!”

“...Temporary change of plans, no time to notify us? Heh.”

The dust invaded, the lush trees were covered in murky yellow soil, and one green leaf suddenly shook, with sand falling rustlingly.

“Utopia? What new policy?”

“Forget it... let’s talk when I get back. Send someone to the safe house to pick me up. Qi is dead.”

Qi was the name of that spatial-type awakener.

Qing hung up the terminal, exhausted, leaned back against the tree trunk, and closed her eyes to rest temporarily.

Whoosh—

Whoosh whoosh—

Without warning, the nearby forest suddenly shook violently, and a deep blue light crackled. Countless leaves turned into sky-covering flying knives, all shooting towards Qing. She abruptly opened her eyes, but it was too late. Her body was pierced like a hedgehog, breathless, falling to the ground.

How is this possible...

Clearly, there were no anomalies. When did she catch up...

The shocked and angry expression froze on her face. Until death arrived, Qing still couldn't figure out the answer.

Plop.

A small thing fell down.

Triangular head, two bulbous protruding eyeballs resembling light bulbs, a plump body, a tail rolled into a ball like a bubblegum, and nanocrystals on the surface of the skin constantly changing colors with the environment.

This was a chameleon from the lizard suborder.

It was also due to the radiation impact that an unknown gene broke out and Song Ke was transformed again.

Song Ke quickly climbed onto Qing's corpse, stomped back and forth, confirming that she was dead beyond revival.

Then she exposed her claw tips, tried to pry Qing's terminal, cleverly stored it in her own space, and turned to let Lu Xiaoyu crack it.

With the mission accomplished, Song Ke's cone-shaped eyeballs rotated 360 degrees, attempting to speak through her main body.

Swoosh! A long and thin tongue stretched out, and in a fleeting moment, it quickly swept away a jumping cricket.

Song Ke: "...?" She spat out, and the unlucky cricket limped away.

Oops, it seems the tongue is a bit unruly.

Song Ke stood still for a moment, seemingly lost. She struggled to retrieve her small terminal, and the messages from her teammates calling out to her had already flooded the screen.

Awkwardly, she opened the group chat, attempting to type a message to report her safety. However, chameleons have fused toes, and what does fused mean? It means the first three fingers are a group, and the fourth and fifth fingers are another group, very uncoordinated. She often accidentally touched the wrong keys, producing a string of strange characters for no apparent reason.

Song Ke became increasingly frustrated, her tail straightening into a line, but the more anxious she got, the worse she typed.

In the end, giving up, she reluctantly managed to type the message "I'll come back by myself," closed her eyes, and pressed the send button with determination.

The small chameleon confirmed the direction, changed its skin to a deep brown color, perfectly blending into the dusty ground, and swiftly crawled away, shaking its head and tail.

*

Bang! Bang!

The ferocious flock of crows crazily collided, like an endless black cloud covering the city. The fragile barrier finally couldn't bear the weight, flickering in and out of existence. In that moment of disappearance, tens of thousands of ferocious beasts rushed in, and cries of alarm echoed incessantly. The awakeners on the scene grumbled while clearing them out. Fortunately, in the next moment, the barrier reappeared, keeping the majority of the forces outside.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the Martian language message sent by Song Ke, with mixed feelings in his heart.

The assassination attempt on Ye Zheng had been resolved, and the scattered remnants had also been controlled. However, the crisis at the Northern Base had not been lifted. Due to wasting too much time at the 13th channel, the city defense line was on the verge of collapse.

Two fully armed bulletproof vehicles rushed in, and before coming to a stop, elite guards and medical teams jumped out. "General!"

Healers nervously surrounded Ye Zheng, setting up a ventilator and a mobile nutrition chamber for on-the-spot first aid. Bai Qi was also carried away on a stretcher.

Ye Zheng was on the verge of collapse. He looked up at the sky, as if about to move forward.

"General, please don't move. You must receive treatment immediately!"

"You can no longer use your awakened abilities, and you must avoid mental and physical exertion, or your body won't be able to take it..."

"City Defense Department..."

Ye Zheng murmured a sentence. If they couldn't stop the flock of crows in time, the tragedy at Qianzhan City would repeat.

Through the crowd, Ye Zheng and Zhuang Qingyan locked eyes, the handsome young man gripping the pocket watch in his hand, nodding solemnly towards him.

...

Zhuang Qingyan's clothing fluttered in the wind as he, led by the elite guards, smoothly entered the City Defense Department.

The harried staff, noticing an unfamiliar face intruding, hastily interrogated, "Who are you? How did you get in? Hurry and leave—"

Without a second word, Zhuang Qingyan shoved his terminal onto his face, and the "highest command authority" representing Ye Zheng conspicuously appeared.

Two nearby elite guards quickly explained, "From now on, Mr. Zhuang will fully represent the General, and all commands will be under his authority."

"Bring up the entire city map," Zhuang Qingyan said coldly.

His deep and mysterious eyes seemed to contain endless pressure, making people involuntarily submit.

The broadcast across the entire Northern Base echoed again, "Attention, one minute from now, the City Defense Department will launch a counterattack against the ferocious beast tide. Everyone pay attention to terminal messages and follow the commands."

"Ancient Street, Tangning Road, Inner Ring Commercial District... residents in the following areas must evacuate immediately. Evacuation routes have been sent to your terminals."

"Second and Sixth squads, provide cover."

Disciplined soldiers executed their tasks with precision and determination.

Orders were issued steadily by Zhuang Qingyan. His mind calculated rapidly, fingers inputting commands skillfully.

Schools, hospitals, stations, and other public places were quickly cleared, and residents entered underground shelters as instructed.

“Suppress.”

The transparent skywalks that traversed the entire city dissipated into thin air, replaced by the rising barrels of pitch-black cannons. This batch of munitions, named “Hell Fireworks,” originated from Mu City and represented the highest lethality of the Alliance’s weaponry.

Boom—

Boom boom—

Dazzling fireworks bloomed, painting half the sky in burning red. The stench of charred flesh wafted through the air. Countless crows fell like hail, and hundreds of wind-type awakeners arrived at designated positions, activating their abilities simultaneously. Fire took advantage of the wind, and the wind fueled the flames. The roaring fire spread like wild grass. The eyes of every defender reflected a resolute determination.

The patrolling teams hovering between ground and sky were responsible for the finishing touches. Logistic cleanup vehicles shuttled back and forth, sweeping away the piled-up crow corpses.

“Sector Clear.”

In the west of the city, where lush woods were ill-suited for artillery attacks, Zhuang Qingyan entered commands into the console. Within seconds, the barrier switched through hundreds of forms. Suddenly, a mistake occurred—a gap appeared.

The crows, possessing rudimentary intelligence, seized the opportunity and swarmed in through the opening.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled coldly, easily deceived.

“Flash.”

The newly replaced barrier suddenly emitted a glaring white light, illuminating the group attack-type awakeners lying in ambush below, as well as the ultra-low voltage electric grid.

The densely packed crows were caught in a trap, their small grayish-white eyeballs faintly showing fear.

Simultaneously, various awakeners and electric lights lit up the sky, accompanied by excited cheers. The awakeners at the Northern Base were ecstatic.

“Darn, I killed over 300 of them! So satisfying!”

“This wave is a bloody profit. I’m getting rich!”

“Points~ Little money~ Here I come~”

These were not ferocious crows; they were clearly angels sent to the Northern Base to deliver money and points, improving the quality of life for the awakeners!

Under Zhuang Qingyan’s command, the entire city operated in an orderly manner, resembling a massive machine.

At the City Defense Department, numerous eyes from all directions secretly assessed the calm and composed young man in front of the console.

One official muttered sarcastically, “What’s so remarkable? This kind of aggressive approach is bound to destroy a large amount of infrastructure. When it’s time to rebuild, you’ll be the one to suffer. Let’s see how you restore it!”

Zhuang Qingyan, holding a transparent screen, continued to work diligently. Amidst the busy atmosphere, he spared a glance at him, lightly smiling, "Send the design sketches to Oda Ken. The Northern Base doesn't keep idle people; let him do some work."

Oda Ken, an S2-level engineering awakener, arrived at the Northern Base on the same day as V587, even taking the VIP route in front of Song Ke.

Zhuang Qingyan didn't think of himself as someone who held grudges; he simply believed in making the best use of resources.

Official: "... With an S-level engineering awakener around, what's so difficult about rebuilding? He could even construct an entirely new city!

At the bustling entrance of the command room, Ye Zheng, draped in a coat, silently observed the figure inside through the glass door.

Having just received emergency treatment, he had his injuries under control. Due to concerns, he insisted on coming to take a look.

However, the situation was somewhat unexpected. It was even better than he had anticipated. Zhuang Qingyan knew everything about the facilities, city defense passwords, and personnel information, and he operated flawlessly, achieving victory in the counterattack with minimal casualties.

It was as if he were a born commander.

"General, where did you find..." The nearby official was dumbfounded.

Ye Zheng smiled faintly, covering his mouth as he left, "Just an old friend... My body can't take it. Standing for a while tires me out. I'll go back to continue treatment. Oh, by the way, call Xiao Fang."

In the moment he turned around, Ye Zheng's smile disappeared, and his expression gradually turned cold.

While he could still stand, it was time to settle scores.

*

The Awakener Department building, second-to-top floor.

After Qing's death, the parasite lost control. He Qihong regained consciousness from the manipulated state, her hair disheveled. She crawled to the floor-to-ceiling window, staring blankly outside.

T005 was operating again, and the raging sandstorm was rapidly receding. With the concerted effort of the Northern Base, the crow population decreased rapidly, and the night sky returned to its initial tranquility.

This round, the Northern Base had overcome the challenge.

The office door suddenly swung open, and several military personnel wearing supervisory uniforms entered with solemn expressions.

“Director He... He Qihong, you are arrested for treason. Come with us.”

Cold iron shackles locked her hands, eliminating any use of abilities. He Qihong became what she feared most – an ordinary person. She was numbly dragged away.

What awaited her would be the most severe trial.

...

The chaotic day finally came to an end.

When Zhuang Qingyan left the City Defense Department, it was nearing midnight.

The other members of V587 were waiting outside. Fang Zhixu threw a bottle of water towards him, and Zhuang Qingyan caught it without drinking.

Feeling mentally exhausted, he took off his glasses, rubbed his temples, and let a few strands of bangs fall on his forehead. "Where's Song Ke? Any news?"

Lin Youyou opened her terminal, and ten minutes ago, Song Ke sent a message in Martian script: "\$#on."

"I know, I know!" Xu Xing eagerly answered, "Sister must be saying, 'soon'!"

"Wow, our Xiao Xing is so clever." Lin Youyou covered her red lips and exaggeratedly praised.

"..." Xu Xing pursed his lips, unsure if she was sincerely complimenting him or teasing him.

Just as Zhuang Qingyan was about to speak, his expression suddenly froze, and a chill ran down his spine.

A cold creature jumped onto his foot. "Swish," it slipped into his pants, crawled over his thigh, narrow waist, chest... finally, it nestled in the hollow of his clavicle. It poked its head out from the open neckline, breathing in the fresh air.

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes turned dangerously cold. He pinched the troublesome creature and slowly raised it to eye level.

The camouflage faded away, revealing a clueless chameleon. Its flat head turned left and right as it was being held.

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes showed disgust, feeling an itch all over his body. He wished to immediately return to his apartment for a hot shower. Clenching his teeth, he asked slowly:

“Where did this ugly creature come from...”

The chameleon’s tail stood upright with a bulging belly, angered. Its long tongue darted out and bit Zhuang Qingyan’s slender finger.

The saliva of reptilian creatures was sticky and viscous. It slid down the finger, and Zhuang Qingyan’s forehead veins throbbed. He shook his hand forcefully but couldn’t get rid of it.

Ting! A familiar small terminal fell with a clang, rolling to his feet.

Zhuang Qingyan froze for three full seconds, his actions stiff. “...Song Ke?”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 169: Key (12)

Strange Rumors

Ting! A familiar little terminal fell to the ground.

Fang Zhixu’s eyes were blank, and a mouthful of water sprayed out: “Puff—!!”

Xu Xing couldn’t hide his thoughts either. Juice flowed down as his mouth opened wide. He was so shocked that his expression went blank: “Sister...”

Lin Youyou picked up the little terminal, shocked as if struck by lightning: “Song Ke’er? How did you become like this?”

Song “Chameleon” Ke, recognized by her companions, happily nodded and shook her head, as if saying, “Yes, it’s me. Unsatisfied?”

V587: "... It's hard to imagine a chameleon having such rich expressions.

They knew there were some issues with Song Ke's DNA sequence, and they had witnessed her incredible combat power after gene fusion, like the hook snake before and the brown bear just now. But to turn from a pure human into a pure animal, far beyond the normal scientific understanding of humans!

Even the usually silent Su Cha couldn't help but comment: "...not as good as the snake, at least the hook snake is fierce in a fight, and communication is not a problem."

"Hey, Princess Zhuang, am I not dreaming..." Lin Youyou rambled, supporting her head and blurting out Zhuang Qingyan's nickname: "She won't be like this forever, right? You should have a way to change her back, right?"

Zhuang Qingyan's face was cold, his eyes like dark stars. Upon closer inspection, his body was slightly stiff as he silently stared at the transformed Song Ke hanging from his finger.

The results of this genetic transformation were truly unexpected.

"Let's pause for a moment. Are you sure you want to discuss this here?" Only Lu Xiaoyu among them remained calm.

Although it was midnight, the busy cleanup vehicles were still collecting crow corpses in the streets and alleys. Occasionally, awakeners passed by, casting suspicious glances at them lingering at the entrance of the City Defense Department.

"Let's go back to the apartment," Zhuang Qingyan said in a low voice.

Song Ke crawled 200 kilometers, already exhausted. Upon hearing this, she climbed into the pocket of Zhuang Qingyan's shirt and lay down comfortably.

Zhuang Qingyan's pupils slightly widened, staring at the conspicuous mud spots. Thinking of how Song Ke had climbed up his pants leg just now, not only his body but even his expression stiffened.

Lu Xiaoyu glanced at him, suddenly recalling that during their time in Liuponi, this princess's cleanliness reached an unbearable level—he brought his own mattress to sleep, covered the swimming pool while swimming, and strictly prohibited the presence of any crawling animals within his field of vision.

Lu Xiaoyu's lips curled slightly, and with a strange tone, he said, "Oh, my friend, why don't you like lizards, they're so cute..."

"Shut up." Zhuang Qingyan's expression was cold, glancing quickly at the sleeping Song Ke in his pocket, and squeezed out a voice from between his teeth: "Don't make baseless speculations about my preferences."

...

At two in the morning, Garden Apartments.

The sound of water splashing in the bathroom.

The mirror, steamed up by the hot vapor, reflected the blurry light on the upper body. The muscles were thin and tight, the shoulder and neck lines were smooth, and water droplets splashed along the graceful curve of the chin, quickly forming a small pool.

Suddenly, the lights dimmed, and the showerhead abruptly stopped.

Zhuang Qingyan wiped his face and looked up. The temperature control panel showed "off", and the tranquil moonlight shone through the window.

This style of not knocking, who else could it be?

He spoke to the empty outer room, helplessly saying, "Song Keke, don't play around, let me take a bath first."

Moist fingertips groped for a moment, and Zhuang Qingyan pressed the “on” button on the panel, and the sound of flowing water slowly began.

Two seconds later, click, like a circuit breaker tripping, the bathroom equipment was once again shut down.

Zhuang Qingyan’s wet and messy hair accentuated his handsome profile, and he sighed deeply. It seemed like this bath wouldn’t be a peaceful one.

He casually took off the towel, draped it loosely around his waist, and came out of the partitioned space, leaning against the sink at the back.

“Come out, let’s talk.”

As soon as the words fell, a greenish chameleon appeared out of nowhere. Its fleshy claws pressed on the temperature control panel, its belly bulging, looking quite angry.

Zhuang Qingyan couldn’t help but laugh.

Hook Snake, Wildcat, Brown Bear, Chameleon... the first batch of four unknown genes fully manifested.

Overall, the performance of the wildcat and brown bear was more stable, while the hook snake and chameleon showed a high degree of transformation, low activity, and the risk of solidification. It would be best to replace them as soon as possible. There were four days until the next wave experiment. During this period, Song Ke could only temporarily maintain her current state.

Seeing him lost in thought, Song Ke knocked on the sink discontentedly.

She clumsily operated the terminal, projecting a page that displayed the “World’s Cutest Species Ranking,” with the chameleon prominently placed at 17th.

Song Ke shook her tail, pointed heavily at the “cutest” category, then at the “17th place.” The meaning was obvious – she came to demand an explanation. Why did he call her an “ugly creature”?

Zhuang Qingyan awkwardly averted his gaze and quickly apologized, “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said you were ugly. Actually, looking at you closely...”

Confidently, Song Ke raised her spine, lifted her head, and her copper-bell-like eyes rolled.

Zhuang Qingyan chuckled softly, insincerely praising, “...you’re quite cute.”

He reached out with two long and beautiful fingers, gently rubbing Song Ke’s flat head. As he rubbed, the motion suddenly stopped without warning. Blame it on his excellent memory. He suddenly remembered a similar situation a long time ago in the research institute in Loak.

Zhuang Qingyan discreetly glanced at Song Ke, luckily she didn’t recall it.

“When the laboratory in Qianzhan City is restored, we’ll conduct reverse radiation tests to try to change back as soon as possible.”

“For these days, can you stay in the apartment?”

Song Ke laboriously clawed out: “Ok.”

Under the warm light, Zhuang Qingyan’s peach blossom eyes looked affectionately at the lizard.

He naturally picked up Song Ke, placed her in the sink, squeezed some foam, washed her toes, and then massaged the soft belly along the spine. He washed without distraction, without any whims or ulterior thoughts while facing a chameleon, purely focused on getting rid of the dirt.

Song Ke: “??”

Grandpa had said that no matter what happens, she should never let others help her bathe. Even if she turned into a lizard, probably, maybe, she still shouldn't allow it, right?

A surge of heat instantly rushed to her head, and Song Ke blushed all over. Due to the intense shame, she struggled vigorously. Her tail flailed, splashing water, and Zhuang Qingyan subconsciously closed his eyes. He dared not increase the pressure in his hands and could only grope by feeling. Inadvertently, she managed to break free.

Song Ke, dizzy and disoriented, flew up and thudded! She hit Zhuang Qingyan's abdominal muscles and slid down, panic in her eyes. She stumbled on top, leaving a few red marks, suddenly hooked onto something, and pulled downward.

The towel loosely fell to the ground, covering the small chameleon.

Zhuang Qingyan: "..."

Song Ke, who finally emerged from under the towel: "!!!!"

She froze for a second, her skin changing colors in red, orange, yellow, and green, and suddenly disappeared in place in a panic. Under the confusion, she dragged the towel along, creating a tent-like structure.

...

In the following three days, the Alliance's situation was tumultuous, experiencing severe upheavals.

Due to the attack on Ye Zheng, the Northern Base showed a tough diplomatic stance. They launched a series of inquiries against the hidden manipulators such as Miao Ying, Baishen, and Tokushima. At one point, they even had a standoff, breaking the surface peace between the various districts and completely tearing apart the facade.

Representatives of Miao Ying and Baishen readily admitted their wrongdoing at the negotiating table, but refused to apologize. Only Tokushima played dumb, stubbornly refusing to admit being the “crocodile” and denying sending out the “rat” and the “cat.”

Miao Ying’s representative shouted hoarsely, “We won’t survive, and no one else will either. Let’s all perish together!!”

Baishen’s representative tearfully accused, “Look at this tornado, two-thirds of the city is destroyed. What choice do we have?”

Tokushima’s representative: “It’s their doing, and nothing to do with us!”

The diplomats of Miao Ying and Baishen next to Tokushima looked at him disdainfully: Well, traitor.

Tokushima could be so arrogant because their name wasn’t on the list of captives released. However, two days later, with the arrest of the smugglers and a confession letter from Lei Zhao breaking the deadlock, evidence of their heinous acts was clear. Tokushima was shocked and denounced Lei Zhao as a three-time traitor. Playing both sides, the negotiation table turned chaotic.

Chaos erupted between the B districts, with awakeners frequently engaged in battles.

Zhuang Qingyan had to get up early every day, and with Ye Zheng still not recovered and He Qihong’s trial approaching, the Awakener Department was leaderless. Entrusted by Ye Zheng, Zhuang Qingyan dealt with tasks such as eliminating the remaining crows, overseeing city construction, and diplomatic negotiations.

After three days of non-stop work, in the quiet early morning, Zhuang Qingyan pushed open the apartment door wearily, saying, “I’m back.”

The living room was brightly lit, with a warm and harmonious atmosphere.

Fang Zhixu was still not back from Ye Zheng’s place, while Su Cha silently lifted dumbbells for exercise.

Xu Xing held a pile of snacks, a small chameleon perched on his head, and the two were fully focused on watching Lu Xiaoyu's technologically restored ancient civilization family ethics drama – "XX Temptation."

"Why are you wearing Pinru's clothes? And using her things?"

"Since you want to pursue excitement, you must follow through to the end~"

"...You're quite naughty."

On the screen, a man and a woman rolled into a ball, and robes scattered all over the floor.

Lin Youyou cleared her throat and, as the lively ending song started playing, sang out loud, "For all the pain of love~"

Xu Xing hummed along, and Song Ke's tail swayed, clearly immersed in the scene.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the scattered bathrobes on the screen, his eyelids twitching.

Song Ke turned her head and noticed him. Startled, she jumped in place, then hurriedly leaped onto the mechanical arm of Lu Xiaoyu beside them.

Taking advantage of the situation, Lu Xiaoyu tried to get some pocket money, "Generous captain, respected captain, I want to buy this, this, and also this."

Song Ke's paws stomped randomly, "m%buy!" and promptly disappeared from everyone's view.

Zhuang Qingyan sighed, feeling mentally exhausted. Since the bathroom incident, Song Ke had been avoiding him for three days straight.

He sat down on the sofa, took off his glasses, and rubbed his temples. "Has any video leaked out recently?"

Lu Xiaoyu, in a good mood now, replied, “No, but there are strange rumors.”

The A-level mission guarding District B10, after the system’s judgment, credited V587 with a significant portion. The points successfully propelled them to the first place in the Northern Base and sixth in the entire Alliance. This mysterious team, rising out of nowhere, sparked a lot of speculation in the Star Network discussions due to their rare appearances.

“Everyone should check this out.” Lu Xiaoyu pulled up an image, covering the paused “XX Temptation.”

A brown bear, a steel six-armed giant, a poisonous snake, and a three-meter-tall ice and snow mage corresponded to Song Ke, Lu Xiaoyu, Su Cha, and Xu Xing, respectively. Even Lin Youyou was depicted as an eight-foot-tall man shrouded in mist with an unclear face.

“It’s a new manga called ‘Anecdotes of Awakeners.’ It’s said to faithfully recreate the scene of the assassination.”

The awakeners present at the scene were placed under a gag order that day, not allowed to reveal V587’s true identity. However, unable to resist the desire to share gossip, they invented various stories. Since there were no visual materials, they relied on storytelling, and each “informant” provided vastly different descriptions of V587. Rumors even included absurd claims like “All members of V587 are steel macho men who refuse interviews due to their ugly appearance.” This led to the creation of this ridiculous manga.

However, no one took it seriously, and Xu Xing was particularly pleased with his own image.

“Oh, by the way, Captain, I checked the terminal you picked up, and I found something interesting.”

Lu Xiaoyu, without any disguise at home, his ice-blue eyes gleaming brightly, infiltrated the terminal of Qing, bypassing ubiquitous surveillance in the data stream, and reconstructed the last communication before Qing’s death: “The information is currently in the hands of the District B magistrate and has not been made public yet.”

Everyone’s spirits lifted, and they looked up at the screen.

“Utopia, the former Central Court, is about to announce a new policy. A year from now, they will open a challenge to awakeners worldwide. Those selected will receive a pass and become legal residents of Utopia.”

Qualifying for residency through a challenge? What kind of approach is this?

Lin Youyou was puzzled, “What does this mean? They conspired against the world back then, and now they remember us? Slap us in the face and give us candy afterward?”

Su Cha coldly commented, “It’s insidious.”

“Agreed,” Lu Xiaoyu nodded. “I also find it strange, especially after the recent assassination attempt on Ye Zheng.”

Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped his fingertips and smiled coldly, “It’s just a delaying tactic. Utopia has just risen, and many things need to be done. Now, the survival environment on the ground is harsh. If all districts unite to attack, this S-level city may not survive long enough for development and might face destruction.”

“Taking advantage of the chaos in District B, they throw out the bait of ‘boarding passes.’ It serves to sow discord and pacify.”

At such a time, Utopia releasing a new policy is like a blatant insinuation of hypocrisy: “Look, we haven’t abandoned you. As long as you pass the selection, you can live happily in Utopia.”

In the harsh background of the apocalypse, most people couldn’t resist such insinuations.

“Should we participate?” Lin Youyou asked for everyone’s opinion.

“In such matters, the captain should make the decision,” Zhuang Qingyan said casually.

「Investigate again, and report @」

The little terminal moved, and a line of text appeared.

Zhuang Qingyan, with quick eyes and deft hands, pulled out a shy and timid chameleon from a nearby pillow.

Song Ke started changing colors again.

“You guys chat first. I’ll have a ‘heart-to-heart’ talk with the captain.”

Zhuang Qingyan, carrying Song Ke, walked quickly into the bathroom and gently closed the door.

He lifted Song Ke in front of him, leisurely unbuttoning with one hand, slightly pulling down the neckline, revealing a large expanse of skin.

Song Ke’s eyes widened in surprise, wondering: What are you doing? What are you doing?!

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his voice, sounding aggrieved, “Don’t hide, just look, I don’t mind.”

His tired peach blossom eyes drooped slightly, appearing pitiful. “I’m showing you. Just remember to take responsibility. In the future, whether it’s Yin Xiao or Hei Xiao, don’t get involved with any of them.”