

## **Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master**

### **Chapter 21: Rainy Night in Hua City (13)**

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Song Ke and Jiang Rui held the entrance of the parking lot.

The engine of the bus behind them roared, and the headlights in front flickered, casting a dim light through the pouring rain.

People kept rushing over, putting all their strength to climb onto the bus, collapsing onto the seats, gasping for air. At this critical moment of life and death, no one cared about their appearance anymore; it was considered fortunate to save one's own life.

Song Ke and Jiang Rui waited for a full five minutes, but very few of the expected arrivals made it here.

"No one's coming, let's go," Jiang Rui closed his eyes, his voice hoarse.

Due to the sudden attack of the zombie cockroaches, their escape this time was rushed, resulting in more casualties than anticipated. Out of the originally over one hundred people, almost half were lost, leaving less than fifty. Jiang Rui clenched the whip of fire in his hand and at that moment, he realized very clearly that he couldn't save everyone.

Any movement in the rainy night would be magnified infinitely. From their direction, a faint light penetrated and caught the attention of the dark creatures. On the playground a hundred meters away, thousands of zombies raised their heads and started moving toward them.

"Hurry, get on, we're closing the door!!" Zhang Hao leaned half his body out of the driver's window and shouted at them.

"Wait!" Song Ke slammed her palm against the bus door. She saw Kongzi Qi and Tian Yi stumbling towards them, followed by several hideous-looking zombies and a tide of cockroaches.

Her wrist moved slightly, the spear flew out like lightning, and with incredible speed, it pierced through the enemies. Song Ke sprinted forward, using a move called “Whirlwind Snow Sweep,” creating a powerful airwave that knocked down the pursuing zombies and cockroaches, giving them a momentary buffer.

Kongzi Qi and Tian Yi scrambled and managed to get onto the bus.

“Let’s go!”

Zhang Hao roared, started the engine, and in the rainy night, the bus swerved and accelerated. It crashed into the path, overturning the zombies and cockroaches in its way. It then rushed through a gap in the iron fence and onto the road. After more than ten minutes, they finally shook off the densely packed pursuers.

The bus was an old model with hybrid power. Even if it lost its automatic driving energy, it could still be manually controlled. In recent years, automated driving had become popular in the Alliance, and fewer and fewer people were getting driver’s licenses. Zhang Hao had repeated a year and was two years older than them. Last year, he had casually taken a driver’s license for fun, never imagining that this seemingly useless skill would become a life-saving straw.

It normally takes about two hours to drive from No.1 Middle School to the downtown area of Hua City. However, it was raining now, visibility was poor at night, and there might be zombies and insect swarms appearing at any moment. Zhang Hao didn’t dare to be careless. He slowed down and drove forward vigilantly.

Three hours later, the bus neared the city area of Hua City, and Zhang Hao was the first to notice that something was off.

It was nearly 5 o’clock in the morning, but the highway was still packed. Many private cars were heading in the same direction as them, all rushing towards the city.

They were being chased by zombies and insect swarms. So why were these people doing the same thing? Why were they heading back to the city at this time?

“Thump, thump, thump!”

A series of intense pounding sounds shattered the silence, and the people in the bus looked out immediately, startled.

A young woman was pressed against their bus, weaving through the traffic without any care. Her shoes were gone, her toes covered in blood. She ran while desperately pounding on the bus door. From her lip movements, you could faintly make out the words, "Help me."

Her actions were extremely dangerous. Lin Xia's face showed sympathy, "Should we... save her?"

Zhou Anqi suddenly stood up, her voice sharp and cold, "Don't open the door!"

Her sudden shout startled the others. No one spoke, and no one moved. They all sat stiffly in their seats, as if the person outside didn't exist.

The woman saw that the bus door was not opening, and the light in her eyes gradually dimmed, eventually giving way to despair. The people on the bus averted their gazes.

Several fierce zombies stomped on the roof of the car, leaped from the other side, and pounced on the young woman.

Looking from the rear window, her outstretched hand gradually fell.

"Look at this! She's been bitten! We can't let her on," Zhou Anqi muttered nervously to herself, "We can't let her on..."

In the back row of the bus, Song Ke was observing the outside environment when she heard the commotion and turned her head.

Zhuang Qingyan approached her, his voice soft, "Don't you think she's too noisy?"

Song Ke was briefly taken aback and upon closer thought, it was indeed the case. Since Zhou Anqi awakened her ability, it seemed like her emotions had become increasingly uncontrollable. She either shouted loudly at the slightest provocation or spoke incoherently, making it hard to comprehend.

"Someone is controlling her using spiritual power."

“Zhou Anqi is an E-level awakener; someone who can silently influence her behavior and character, the other party is at least a C-level awakener with mental ability.”

“Care to guess who’s the one behind the scenes?”

Zhuang Qingyan’s breath was close, and the warm air made Song Ke’s ears itchy.

When did this person get so close?

Song Ke extended two fingers, pushed him away with a slightly disgusted expression, thought for a moment, and provided an answer.

“Xu... Li... Ren.”

She recalled the peculiar sensation when she locked eyes with Xu Liren on the first day she arrived in the safe zone.

At that time, Xu Liren must have released his mental ability to try to influence her, but he failed. This led him to suspect that she was an awakener, and thus began the various tests and manipulations. After realizing that Song Ke was difficult to control, he seemed eager to drive her out of the safe zone.

“Bingo!” Zhuang Qingyan snapped his fingers.

“He can control even E-level awakeners; of course, he wouldn’t spare ordinary people. In his eyes, these people are all his puppets, expendable scapegoats when necessary. No wonder he’s willing to keep so many ‘wastes’.”

“This Mr. Xu is a complete fake Holy Father, the true hypocrite~”

At the mention, Song Ke looked at Xu Liren. He was sitting in the front row of the bus, his frameless glasses set aside with visible cracks. He was wiping his face with a towel, his current expression unclear.

Zhuang Qingyan followed her gaze, saying, “You want to expose his true identity? Don’t forget, we’re the ‘outcasts.’ They won’t believe your accusations.”

“Don’t worry, Xu Liren’s tricks can deceive all of you... those naive high schoolers because they were all in a safe environment. But the more life and death situations arise, the more his sinister thoughts will be revealed.”

...

At 5:40 in the early morning, the bus entered the inner ring of Hua City.

The sky was as gloomy as if it hadn’t even lit up yet. The city was in chaos, with collapsed buildings from impacts, debris and wreckage of starships scattered around, and the piercing sound of air raid sirens echoing through the streets and alleys.

“This is a Level 1 alert,” Kongzi Qi stood up, gripping the back of the chair with a serious expression. “My dad is the designer of the Bagua Formation. He once said that a Level 1 alert only sounds when Hua City experiences the most severe natural disasters.”

Lin Xia added with a pale face, “I’ve participated in safety drills in Hua City. I remember that the highest priority order during a Level 1 alert is to enter the Bagua Formation as quickly as possible.”

“That’s right, the Bagua Formation is Hua City’s last line of defense. Once activated, it means the outer perimeter of Hua City is completely abandoned.”

Hua City is naturally a basin-like terrain, with lower elevation in the center. The concentric transportation network extends downward layer by layer, reaching the central eye of the Bagua Formation—an airborne mall, also the most famous landmark in Hua City. Whether day or night, it shines brightly and is bustling.

When Hua City faces an unstoppable disaster, the eight entrances leading to the eye of the formation will close urgently. The entire Bagua Formation will hide underground, forming excellent air-raid shelters.

Kongzi Qi listened carefully to the frequency of the alerts, becoming anxious. “Quick, Zhang Hao! Drive forward quickly! The entrance is about to close!”

In the distant sky, the floating mall was slowly descending. As the alarm became more urgent, enormous cracks appeared all around the ground, making way for its descent.

Zhang Hao pressed the accelerator like mad, rushing forward. The streets were filled with people running in panic, various vehicles, and the ever-present shadows of zombies, making it nearly impossible to move. Even the survivors who had been hiding in their homes came out, desperately sprinting toward the various entrances of the Bagua Formation.

The entire Hua City was in the process of falling.

The cracks in the ground grew deeper and deeper. Tall buildings and circular skybridges lost their support, swaying and collapsing, crashing heavily to the ground.

Suddenly, a steel bar pierced through the bus's window. The glass shattered like a spider's web, and wandering zombies crawled in through the window. They grabbed Lin Xia's arm and pulled her out. She didn't even have time to scream before she was dragged out. The others inside the bus looked bewildered, not knowing whether to save her or not, but Song Ke had already jumped out right after her.

"Zhang Hao, slow down!" Jiang Rui stood up suddenly.

Zhang Hao was nervous and sweating profusely. He clenched his teeth and pressed the brakes hard.

In mid-air, Song Ke had already swung out her spear. In one swift motion, the spear was like a snake darting out of its hole, its tip like a snake's fang, piercing through the zombie's head in an instant, firmly pinning it to the ground! Then, she swiftly picked up Lin Xia, ran, and with one hand, grabbed onto the window, flipping back into the bus.

Lin Xia tightened her grip on Song Ke's arm, trembling uncontrollably. Luckily, she was wearing long sleeves and pants today, and she had put on a thick raincoat on top. Apart from a few scratches from the fall, she hadn't been bitten by the zombies.

However, with this delay, the crack from behind had already caught up to the bus's wheels.

"Ah—!!"

Zhang Hao pushed the accelerator to the floor, and the bus lost control, swerving forward. The intense acceleration made the passengers dizzy and disoriented.

Amidst the chaos inside the cabin, Kongzi Qi grabbed Tian Yi's shoulder.

"Tian Yi, Tian Yi, listen to me!"

"After entering the Bagua Formation, there's a hidden door inside. It's right below the main control room. This is the 'Life Gate' of the Bagua Formation, and it's the most crucial design my dad was involved in. It's not on the map. I'm going to tell you the route and the password now. You must remember it!"

Tian Yi had a bad feeling, "Kongzi Qi, what's wrong with you... You, you just remember it. I'll follow you."

Kongzi Qi fell silent. A few seconds later, he rolled up his pant leg.

"I was bitten by a zombie."

Tian Yi's eyes widened, looked down in disbelief, and the next second, tears burst forth.

On Kongzi Qi's calf, there was a clear torn wound. After a few hours, the surrounding veins turned a dark black, and the whole leg had become swollen and festered.

"How is this possible? When did this happen..."

Tian Yi suddenly went quiet. He remembered just outside the dormitory building, when Kongzi Qi had accidentally bumped into a zombie while trying to shield him from Xu Liren's view. Could it be, was it that moment?

Kongzi Qi's eyes were red, "During that incident at the cafeteria, I didn't intentionally leave you and run. I just didn't react in time.

"I, Kongzi Qi, am not that untrustworthy. Plus, you're my best friend."

Tian Yi held back tears, "Kongzi Qi, you're also my, my best friend."

Kongzi Qi wiped his tears, his expression turning serious. He glanced toward the front of the bus, "Did you see it?"

“...Yeah.” Tian Yi knew what he was referring to. Both of them had just witnessed how Xu Liren, to ensure his own survival, callously pushed others to their deaths.

“Remember, no matter what happens later, don’t follow Xu Liren. Stay as far away from him as possible.”

Kongzi Qi took out the indigo leaf-shaped knife from his pocket and handed it back to Tian Yi, “Go find Jiang Rui or stick with Song Ke. Song Ke managed to save Lin Xia, so she definitely won’t abandon you.”

Tian Yi held onto his sleeve, “Kongzi Qi, let’s think of a solution. There must be a way!”

Kongzi Qi tugged at the corners of his mouth, “There’s no solution, Tian Yi. I’m feeling really uncomfortable. Look, my hand isn’t listening to me anymore.”

His eyes were bloodshot, and the base of his nails had a faint grayish-white hue. His fingers were twitching uncontrollably.

“I want to live too. I want to remain human. I don’t want to turn into a zombie...”

Kongzi Qi’s smile was uglier than crying.

“Tian Yi, you must stay alive.”

## **Chapter 22: Rainy Night in Hua City (14)**

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On the shattered ground, a bus wobbled and slid forward.

At the center of the formation, there was a floating mall with eight glass suspension bridges, each connecting to one of eight entrances: Qian, Kun, Kan, Li, Zhen, Xun, Gen, and Dui.



The entrance closest to them was the “Kun Gate.” Zhang Hao tightly gripped the steering wheel, driving the bus towards the direction of the suspension bridge. With less than fifty meters remaining, an unexpected event occurred.

A high-rise office building suddenly crumbled and collapsed, falling directly in their path.

Zhang Hao slammed the brakes, but the bus was moving too fast, already out of control. It executed a 180-degree sideways drift, spinning wildly around bends, causing passengers inside to see the world spinning, their insides almost shifting.

“Boom—”

Tons of steel and concrete came crashing down, hitting the middle of the bus precisely, splitting it into two. The people seated in the middle were instantly crushed into a bloody pulp.

Zhou Anqi and Cao Yiyi were sitting in the rear seats among those people.

Zhang Qi acted swiftly, covering Zhou Anqi’s eyes. Cao Yiyi, however, wasn’t as fortunate. Confronted with the approach of death, she witnessed people who were once whole turn into mush, smashed into a bloody mess. A suffocating fear surged into her mind, leaving her brain blank.

The severed bus body experienced a tremendous force of impact, sliding in two different directions. The front half, with Xu Liren and Zhang Hao, continued rolling towards the Kun Gate due to inertia. The back half, carrying Song Ke, Jiang Rui, and Zhuang Qingyan, was pushed towards the direction of the Gen Gate.

[Kun Gate]

Zhang Hao’s forehead slammed against the steering wheel, blood soaking his eye sockets. Amidst a continuous buzzing sound in his ears, he faintly heard an anxious shout from a distant place: “Brother Hao, wake up! Wake up quickly!”

Zhang Hao was irritated by the noise, struggling to lift his head. The aftermath of the concussion was evident; he felt an urge to vomit. After a moment, he managed to open his eyes with difficulty, only to realize that the one who had been calling his name was Tian Yi.

Tian Yi's foot seemed to be trapped by the door, and he lay on the ground, desperately tugging at Zhang Hao's pants leg, trying to wake him up.

Kongzi Qi was on the side, pushing against the door panel with all his might, but his efforts alone were insufficient.

Zhang Hao held his head, stood up dizzily, and said, "Don't move, I'll help you..."

Tian Yi's voice was hoarse, tears streaming down as he yelled, "Don't worry about me, Brother Hao. Run, quickly!"

Zhang Hao half-crouched down and, together with Kongzi Qi, exerted force. They finally lifted the door, but the significant movement caused his dizziness to worsen. He had to lean against the front windshield, gasping heavily.

"Where are the others? What happened to all of you..."

Before he could finish speaking, Zhang Hao's eyes suddenly widened, shocked and speechless at the strange scene before him.

The floating mall ahead had descended below ground level. The Kun Gate's suspension bridge was gradually retracting, but at the gap between the ground and the bridge, there was actually a road built from people, forming a living ladder!

Some were natives running towards the entrance, but most were survivors from their bus. Once their comrades, now each of them had a vacant expression, mechanically moving forward, using their bodies to construct an escape ladder.

Behind this group of people, Xu Liren stood abruptly, his face dark and gloomy, resembling a corpse driver.

The people in the safe zone, to varying degrees, had been subjected to mental suggestions by Xu Liren, making them easier to manipulate. However, even this was pushing the limits of his mental ability. Dividing his focus to control ordinary people would likely overwhelm his mental strength.

No, he absolutely, absolutely couldn't die here. He was so close, just a little bit more, just a little bit more.

One more person, just one more to fill the gap, Xu Liren's expression grew anxious as his eyes scanned around.

—Then he spotted the three individuals in the driver's seat.

Zhang Hao struggled to comprehend what was happening before his eyes. Suddenly, his pupils trembled, and all thoughts in his mind vanished. His brain became empty, devoid of any content. He stiffly stepped out of the bus, walking slowly towards the human wall.

Tian Yi's body shook slightly, his thoughts gradually becoming chaotic... At that moment, the willow leaf knife in his pocket flew out uncontrollably. A faint blue light floated calmly before his eyes. Tian Yi's daze flickered and immediately snapped back.

“Brother Hao! Don't go over there!”

“Kongzi Qi! It seems like Brother Hao is being controlled!”

Kongzi Qi was already half-zombified, black veins spreading to his right jaw, making him look eerie and terrifying.

Ironically, it was these zombie-like traits that prevented Xu Liren from controlling him immediately.

Kongzi Qi shook his head, fully aware that his human thinking was slowly fading. He used his last bit of willpower to take a few steps forward and heavily hit Zhang Hao's head from behind!

Zhang Hao's head was already injured, and this caused even more pain. His vision went black, and he instantly broke free from Xu Liren's mental control. Kongzi Qi pushed him in Tian Yi's direction and, looking at Tian Yi, shouted his last words:

“—Run!!!”

Tian Yi's tears streamed down as he rushed over, helping Zhang Hao up and running towards the back of the bus.

...

Xu Liren struggled to do anything, his attention fixed on the progress of the human wall. Managing his puppets had become difficult, and he managed to

steal a glance in the direction of the bus. Seeing the approaching figure, he furrowed his brow.

What's going on? He had focused his control on Zhang Hao, so why was it Kongzi Qi coming over?

...Never mind, Xu Liren consoled himself. Their heights were similar. As long as he could make it onto the last section of the human ladder, he could ascend to the focal point. Once inside, he could carefully scheme and continue to manipulate his puppets...

Kongzi Qi's steps were sluggish, getting closer and closer to Xu Liren. An abnormal whiteness faintly appeared in his eyes. He stiffly extended his hands, reaching out to the person in front of him. His arms were just long enough to touch the slowly descending gangway.

Xu Liren's heart eased. He could go now!

Stepping on the backs of those people, on this ladder of bodies he had personally constructed, gruesome and blood-soaked, he couldn't wait any longer. He ran forward unhesitatingly, getting closer and closer to the entrance of Kun Gate.

Almost there, almost there—

Suddenly, intense pain shot through his shoulder. Xu Liren couldn't believe it, he turned around, and Kongzi Qi's face was twisted, biting onto him fiercely.

Xu Liren's eyes widened, his body staggered as he climbed onto the platform, forcefully pushing Kongzi Qi away. Kongzi Qi's arms left the gangway, taking the entire string of people down with him.

Trembling, Xu Liren unbuttoned his collar. There was a bleeding, distinct bite mark on his shoulder.

### **【Kun Gate】**

The situation at Kun Gate was even worse. This place used to be the main street of a commercial district, bustling day and night even before doomsday. Now, it had amassed the largest number of zombies. Coupled with the fact that most of the gangway had been torn away by zombies, the fragmented

terrain had formed steep cliffs, making conventional methods utterly impassable.

“We don’t have time,” Zhou Anqi muttered, her face ashen.

Zhang Qi turned to her, gritting his teeth. “We have time!”

He frantically searched around like a gust of wind sweeping fallen leaves. Astonishingly, he actually found a trailer iron chain as thick as a thigh. He picked it up and dashed towards the edge of the cliff.

As he passed by Song Ke, she lent him a timely hand, her palm flashing blue light, using her ability to reinforce the steel claws at the end of the chain. Zhang Qi shouted loudly and threw it, hooking precisely onto the entrance of the gangway.

“Anqi, you all go first. Don’t worry, I’ll hold onto you!”

Zhou Anqi stared blankly at him, as if she was only just recognizing him now.

These days, her head had been muddled and confused, often unable to distinguish between illusions and reality. Sometimes, she even forgot things she had said and done. However, in this moment, the downpour seemed to wash away the water that had entered her mind. Her thoughts broke free from their constraints, and she had never felt so clear.

“Anqi, let’s go quickly!” Cao Yiyi tugged at her sleeve, her tone urgent.

People who had survived until now, even the girls, had extraordinary physical abilities and determination. Otherwise, they would have died when escaping from the No.1 Middle School. There were no complaints from the girls in the group. They held onto the iron chain for dear life and slowly climbed across the gap.

After landing safely, Zhou Anqi, Lin Xia, and the other girls anxiously turned around to look at their companions on the other side.

There seemed to be a dispute over there. Some survivors who were also headed for Kun Gate had spotted their escape route and tried to cut in line. Jiang Rui’s face turned cold as he stopped them, saying, “Let our people go first.”

Those who were still persistent pushed Jiang Rui aside and leaped to catch the airborne iron chain. However, they overestimated themselves. Perhaps they were afraid of heights, or perhaps the surrounding zombie cries had shattered their courage. After only a couple of attempts, their hands went weak and they let go. In a state of terror, they fell into the chasm, devoured by the thousands of zombies below.

Zhang Hao and Tian Yi had gone through hardships and finally arrived at this point.

“Brother Jiang!” Seeing Jiang Rui at this moment was like seeing a savior.

Jiang Rui patted the backs of the two without wasting time saying much. “Can you hold on? Hurry over!”

Zhang Hao clenched his teeth. “Yes!”

In a life-and-death situation like this, you had to be able to, even if you didn’t want to!

...

Due to the collapsing earth, a massive sinkhole formed beneath the focal point, filled with countless zombies crawling up ceaselessly. The fastest ones were almost reaching the end of the iron chain.

Across from Zhou Anqi and the others, the last group of companions was moving slowly, still some distance away from the entrance of the gangway.

Suddenly!

Cao Yiyi pushed past Zhou Anqi and went madly to dislodge the iron hooks stuck in the gangway. Her movements were too swift and too aggressive, catching everyone off guard—originally, they had all planned to deal with the zombies that were climbing up together.

After just a few attempts, the steel claws loosened and fell from the edge of the gangway.

Zhang Qi, who was already on the edge of the cliff, kept sliding forward. He barely managed to stabilize himself, but the support from the opposite side

suddenly disappeared. Unable to stop his steps, he plummeted down from the edge of the cliff.

Zhou Anqi's eyes widened, futilely reaching out her hand. "Zhang Qi!!"

Not just Zhang Qi, but also Zhang Hao and Tian Yi, who were on the iron chain, along with Jiang Rui—all of them fell down.

Zhou Anqi couldn't contain her anger, rushing forward to give Cao Yiyi a hard slap. "What did you do?!"

"Do you realize you just killed someone?!"

Half of Cao Yiyi's cheek was swollen, but she still covered her face with a cold smile. "Fool."

"The zombies are climbing up, can't you see? They're coming up, and it's us who are going to die!"

"If you want to die, go die yourself. Don't drag me down!"

Cao Yiyi was terrified. She feared being crushed like the people in the bus or bitten by zombies. She knew Jiang Rui hadn't come over yet, but wasn't she in danger too? Who could save her? She was only sixteen years old; her beautiful life hadn't even started. She could only save herself.

In that moment, extreme selfishness overpowered everything else, but she didn't regret it.

Cao Yiyi didn't even glance back at her former companions. She turned around and ran into Kun Gate.

...

At the verge of falling, Jiang Rui whipped out his fire whip, looping it around the steel beams of the gangway. However, with both ends of the iron chain losing their supports, it swung uncontrollably downwards. Jiang Rui's feet were just a few meters away from hordes of roaring zombies below.

"Zhang Qi!" Jiang Rui yelled in anguish.

Zhang Qi had completely vanished after falling into the sinkhole.

“Damn it! Damn it!!!” Jiang Rui’s eyes turned bloodshot as he cursed profusely.

He truly hadn’t expected such cruelty from a fellow student like Cao Yiyi, someone who was utterly indifferent to the life and death of others.

The fire whip couldn’t support the weight of so many people. It had already started sliding down, and Jiang Rui’s strength was insufficient. His arms trembled, and he was about to lose his grip.

In his gradually blurred vision, a lithe figure jumped over.

Like a swiftly flying falcon, Song Ke moved rapidly through the air. In one move, she leaped onto a slanted lamppost, and in the next, she grabbed hold of a protruding rock in the middle of the cliff. Maintaining an upright posture, she moved forward like walking on a tightrope.

The long spear in her hand had transformed into a nine-section whip chain. Utilizing the power of her entire arm, she swiftly spun the whip, then flung it out, one end hooked the gangway and then went to Jiang Rui’s side. “Catch it!”

Jiang Rui reached out, the scorching fire whip intertwining with the cyan nine-section whip chain, inseparable from each other. Song Ke exerted force from her waist, pulling backward. The people on the iron chain suddenly rose significantly, returning to mid-air.

Next, she demonstrated what was meant by “whip tossing” from a textbook.

With her right hand holding the iron chain and her left hand conjuring another long whip, she swung it in mid-air, catching Zhang Hao and the others hanging on the iron chain. Then, she tossed them upwards, the group resembling a silk-wrapped gourd, accurately landing and disappearing into Kun Gate with a “thud.”

Zhou Anqi and Lin Xia, still on the platform, hurriedly went to help them.

Song Ke retracted her whip, then swung it again, throwing a few more people over. A third time, a fourth time...

Lastly, it was Jiang Rui’s turn. Utilizing the two entangled whip ropes, he swung like a swing and flew over, tumbling to the ground.



In the next second, he stood up in a flurry and hurriedly ran forward.

—It was too late. The entrance of Kun Gate was slowly closing before his eyes. The Bagua formation was descending rapidly, falling into the sinkhole amidst the encirclement of countless zombies.

“Song Ke!!!” Jiang Rui shouted with heart-wrenching pain.

At the edge of the sinkhole, Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan watched as the Bagua formation fall with their own eyes.

Zhuang Qingyan applauded slowly, a playful glint in his eyes. “Heroic sacrifice, a tearjerker indeed.”

Song Ke didn’t pay attention to his ambiguous words. She turned her gaze directly to his eyes. “Just now, why didn’t, didn’t you leave?”

When Jiang Rui threw away the iron chain, Song Ke had suggested that he could send him over, but Zhuang Qingyan had refused.

Zhuang Qingyan didn’t answer directly. Instead, he spread his palm and caught the falling raindrops. “Look, the rain has lessened.”

He smiled. “Since the rain has stopped, everything should come to an end.”

Song Ke’s brows knitted into a “川” character.

She couldn’t fathom what Zhuang Qingyan was thinking, but she also didn’t believe that he would give up his life so easily and wait for death obediently.

Why did he always have to speak in riddles? Why couldn’t he just be straightforward?

“Annoying,” Song Ke grumbled unhappily.

Zhuang Qingyan had a slight objection to her complaint. “I’m not the one who’s annoying. They are.”

The two turned their heads, and a swarm of black insects was pouring in from all directions, surrounding them.

## **Nine Section Whip Chain**

## Chapter 23: Rainy Night in Hua City (15)

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#### ©Found you, little thing©

After the central eye of the formation fell into the sinkhole, the surface of Hua City became a wasteland.

Song Ke pushed Zhuang Qingyan as they swiftly moved, reaching the rooftop of a skyscraper. This was the only tall building nearby that hadn't completely collapsed and was currently the highest point in the area.

The elevated terrain granted them a moment to catch their breath.

Looking down from the city's highest point, in the east, south, west, and north directions, an endless tide of insects formed a black expanse.

This horrifying sight was suffocating. Song Ke deeply questioned what the top student had said earlier. Wasn't it claimed that cockroaches had been officially eradicated? Then what were these? Where did they come from? Ah!!

Rain still fell from the sky, transitioning from a heavy downpour to a drizzle, without any sign of stopping.

The damp rainwater trickled down through their hair. Splashes of tiny water droplets scattered at their feet. Song Ke was dressed in combat gear, her posture straight like a spear. She zipped up her jacket all the way, pressing it tightly against her chin.

Perhaps this was the most dire scene she had encountered since the apocalypse began, Song Ke thought solemnly.

Even though awakeners had extraordinary abilities, there were limits to human physical and mental capacities. She could face the endless insect tide alone, but there would still be moments of exhaustion, times when her spiritual strength would be depleted, and she might not return.

However, hiding here would eventually result in being overwhelmed by the endless horde of zombie cockroaches that would overrun the entire city.

She wasn't going to sit and wait for death. If hiding wasn't an option, then it was time for battle!

Song Ke raised her hands and formed a tiger seal with her fingers.

“Sword cuts sight, slays ghosts, tigers, wolves, insects, and rodents, blow, pinch.”

Then, she pressed her two thumbs together and curled the index, middle, and ring fingers, while keeping the little fingers extended, forming a hand seal. The hand seals were intricate and incredibly fast.

This was the Daoist secret technique of the Golden Sword, a technique representing the divine sword for vanquishing ghosts and demons. Song Ke was that divine sword.

Of course, her execution of the technique wasn't perfect. She couldn't employ it in battle like Zhang Ting and Zhang Ci did. At most, she could go through the motions to stack up a psychological buff. But this was the rule of the Yue Mountain Martial Arts School, and more importantly, Zhang Ting's rule. Song Ke had always been obedient.

Different hand seals held different meanings during formal competitions, duels, and challenges.

The hand seal Song Ke was currently forming meant – to fight to the death.

Fight only, no retreat.

With the determination to fight her last battle, she was about to take a step forward –

“Wait.” Zhuang Qingyan grabbed her hat, causing Song Ke's foot to halt mid-air, and her momentum was greatly reduced.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at her with a bit of a headache. “Don't be so reckless. There's a way out.”

“What... way?” Song Ke's round eyes widened. If there's a way, why didn't you say so earlier!

“I just confirmed it myself,” Zhuang Qingyan adjusted his expression, speaking seriously, “Within this batch of insect tide, there's a 'King' presence.”

“Earlier, I had suspected that this wave of insects wasn’t solely a natural disaster. Do you remember? The zombie cockroaches first appeared in the western mountainous areas, then followed you all to the safe zone, and accurately traced a path from the safe zone to here. Their actions exhibited logic, completely confirming my speculation.”

“Similar to the relationships between male bees, worker bees, and the queen bee in a bee colony, the ‘King’ within the zombie cockroaches possesses commanding authority. It can command and control all its kind. So, as long as we take down the ‘King,’ the remaining cockroaches will surely become leaderless, scattered and disorganized.”

The Qinglan Institute had once conducted a secret biological research project for the Alliance known as “Plan Eternity.” Zhuang Qingyan had reviewed the confidential information of that project, which included various experimental specimens of arthropods, many of which could be considered monstrous.

Song Ke blinked and asked, “But how can we find and locate that ‘King’?”

Below, in the dark abyss, there were easily over tens of thousands of zombie cockroaches. Trying to pinpoint this ‘King’ from among them seemed like a far-fetched idea.

“Don’t worry,” Zhuang Qingyan slid forward two steps, “I’ll figure something out.”

The black tide had already overrun the surface of Hua City, crawling upward along the shattered walls and debris. If not restrained, in another ten minutes or so, they would have no escape route left and be completely consumed.

Zhuang Qingyan’s beautiful peach blossom eyes gradually deepened. The countless zombie cockroaches below seemed like faded black-and-white silent films in his eyes. His gaze swiftly swept around – north... no, east... no, south... wait a moment!

In a corner to the southeast, there was a cluster of filthy and chaotic black energy, that was it!

Zhuang Qingyan made a quick decision and deduced the direction using the remaining Bagua formation on the ground. “The sound of roaring thunder, Xunfeng advance and retreat. Third Zhen, fourth Xun, then rotate to the right and move out.”

Song Ke: “?”

Zhuang Qingyan: “...?”

They exchanged puzzled looks.

Two seconds later, Zhuang Qingyan cleared his throat lightly and rephrased, “Go east first, reach the end, then head southeast for about two hundred meters.”

Song Ke, once again: “??”

East? Where is East? And where is the southeast??

Zhuang Qingyan: “...”

He saw a bewildered look on Song Ke’s face.

Had the collective education in District D reached such a dire state?

At that moment, Zhuang Qingyan rubbed his forehead helplessly and attempted a third phrasing, “Head straight towards the 3 o’clock direction until the end, then turn right. Head towards 5 o’clock for approximately 200 meters.”

“...The ‘King’ will emit strong radiation. Pay attention to fluctuations in energy around you,” he added.

Song Ke’s face remained expressionless: “Oh.”

She thought, couldn’t he have explained it this simply earlier?

Zhuang Qingyan: ... Should he feel fortunate that Song Ke can at least read a clock?

Song Ke carefully turned 90 degrees to face the east, then uncertainly glanced back at Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded with a deadpan expression.

Receiving confirmation, Song Ke tightened her grip on the spear with a determined air. “I’ll go and take it down.”

She leaped down from the high point.

Her tiny figure crashed into the ground and was instantly engulfed by the swarm of insects.

However, in the next moment, the long spear burst forth from the ground with an unstoppable force, flipping countless cockroaches over, their six legs flailing in the air.

With just a single person, she defied an army!

Song Ke supported herself with one hand, executed a mid-air somersault, and used her foot to kick the spear. The icy-cold tip of the spear continued its assault, the blue light almost leaving an afterimage as it shattered the oncoming swarm of insects like fragments in the wind. One person against thousands!

Song Ke had no intention of lingering in the battle. She broke through at the fastest speed, her goal being to locate the Insect King.

Near the Xun gate, the magnetic field fluctuations twisted and tangled chaotically. Song Ke's steps abruptly halted. She closed her eyes, and her psychic power surged out, quickly sensing something amiss.

She snapped her eyes open and looked straight ahead. Within the encircling mass of zombie cockroaches, there was one with unique patterns on its back. Its body was as round as a basketball, but its head was incredibly small, like a badminton shuttlecock, and it was squeaking loudly.

Found it. Song Ke's face lit up with a satisfied smile.

She released her grip on the spear, and like a lightning bolt, it shot toward its target. Surprisingly, fear flickered in the Insect King's compound eyes, and it was about to turn and escape.

"Thunk—" The first shot lodged into its back. The shell there was unusually tough, and though the spear went in, it didn't penetrate completely. Instead, it left a deep dent, followed by a gush of black fluid.

"Swoosh—" The second shot. The Insect King flapped its wings, narrowly evading the attack. Its panicked squeaks grew more urgent as it fled toward the nearest drainage pipe, intending to burrow underground.

Song Ke couldn't let it succeed. Her spiritual power surged, and with the third shot, a blue light brimming with the force of a thunderbolt slashed forward.

"Thud—" This shot pierced the Bug King's small head. It collapsed at the entrance of the drainage pipe, its antennae broken.

Song Ke retracted her spear and calmly delivered another strike, ensuring the Insect King's thorough demise.

However, after the Insect King's death, the surrounding swarm of cockroaches didn't disperse; instead, they seemed to be provoked, converging on Song Ke from all directions.

Before she could even be shocked, she was already caught in an endless cycle of battle.

She could only curse silently in her mind, "Zhuang Qingyan, you bastard!!!"

...

High up in the skyscraper, Zhuang Qingyan quickly realized that something was amiss.

Why? Ordinary zombie cockroaches didn't have any self-awareness to begin with. So why, when the Insect King died, did their aggressive tendencies not recede, but instead intensify?

Suddenly, a dreadful conjecture dawned on him.

Unless... there were two kings.

Not just one "King."

Within the bee colony, fortunate larvae could occupy the royal platform, enjoying royal jelly for their entire lives, eventually transforming into Queens. However, there wasn't just one royal platform. If two Queens emerged from their pupae simultaneously, a battle to the death between them would inevitably ensue, continuing until one emerged as the ultimate victor.

What if these two insect kings were in the midst of such a battle?

Zhuang Qingyan fell into deep thought. If he was one of those insect kings, he wouldn't foolishly expose himself. He would hide in the shadows, using the

help of these foreign creatures (humans) to eliminate his competitor, and then... proceed to eradicate humanity without any reservations.

Using others to do the dirty work, huh? Perhaps the “King” that Song Ke eliminated was just the bait it released.

The true commander of this swarm of insects was still alive.

Amidst the patter of raindrops, faint sounds of movement seemed to echo.

Zhuang Qingyan abruptly turned around. Cockroaches had already climbed up to the edge of the rooftop behind him!

So fast? They had occupied the rooftop nearly seven to eight minutes earlier than anticipated. No, not all of the zombie cockroaches had arrived. It was only a few thousand, acting like a vanguard. When did he expose himself?

These zombie cockroaches seemed even fiercer, their gray-white cloudy compound eyes fixed on him, seemingly contemplating where to strike.

At this distance, even Song Ke herself couldn't ensure his safety, let alone save him!

Zhuang Qingyan released his spiritual energy, rapidly surveying the approaching horde of cockroaches.

None of the zombie cockroaches charging at him possessed the energy of a King?

How was that possible?

But Zhuang Qingyan, after all, was Zhuang Qingyan. He was stunned for less than a second before devising a strategy.

You're hiding and refusing to show yourself, right? I'll make sure you have nowhere to hide. Even a low-intelligence bug dares to play tricks with him?

Zhuang Qingyan raised a crossbow and swiveled his wheelchair half a turn, pretending to aim towards the left with apparent clumsiness. He deliberately exposed a vulnerability on his backside, while the approaching zombie cockroaches mindlessly charged forward.

Not on the right side, huh...



He feigned defeat, awkwardly turning his wheelchair rightward in a panic, pushing it as if he were trying to escape, his retreat appearing desperate and disheveled.

The horde of cockroaches behind him suddenly erupted into frenzy, collectively changing their direction to converge on him.

It's on the left!

Zhuang Qingyan's fingers danced rapidly, typing a series of commands on the panel. The wheelchair shot out uncontrollably. As the rooftop's edge drew closer and a fall seemed imminent, he suddenly—swiftly turned around, his head snapping back.

Within the chaotic swarm of charging cockroaches, a smaller figure stood out. It remained stationary, wings fanned open on its back, antennae raised high, and its mouthparts buzzing rapidly as it issued instructions.

Found you, little thing, Zhuang Qingyan's lips curled into a cold smile.

A sharp killing intent condensed into a thin line, shooting toward the smaller "King" at lightning speed.

Mental force piercing!

The tiny insect king, which had been hiding in the shadows all this time, was ensnared by invisible threads. It was suspended in midair, its small six-legged body swaying as if it were dangling. The intense and rapid mental force impacts caused its antennae to tremble violently. Finally, with a resounding "pop," it burst open. Its components shattered and scattered, accompanied by bursts of foul-smelling viscous fluid.

With the true insect king dead, the remaining cockroaches clearly lost their sense of direction, becoming a disorganized rabble. These lower-level zombie creatures lacked intelligence, rendering them impervious to spiritual attacks. Zhuang Qingyan raised the multi-shot crossbow attached to his wheelchair, taking aim. Dozens of powerful energy arrows whizzed through the air, quickly clearing the area.

Zhuang Qingyan concluded the battle, steering his wheelchair toward the southeast. He lowered his head, gazing at the ground.

The terrifying cockroach army was rapidly retreating. Amidst the endless waves of black, standing in the distance was a slim figure. She stood on a piece of debris, gripping a spear dripping with a malevolent aura. The spearhead pointed downward, dripping a black, murky liquid. Her whole body was covered in filth, as if she had been pulled from the mud, except for her eyes, which shone remarkably through the rain.

Separated by a hundred meters, they couldn't clearly discern each other's expressions, yet it felt as though their gazes had locked inescapably.

For no apparent reason, Zhuang Qingyan smiled.

**\*\*TN**

The sound of roaring thunder... – Zhuang Qingyan was using a mantra here for the footwork of Tiangang Bagua Step, I'm not familiar with it, but each step has a mantra