

Doomsday 26

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 26: Rainy Night in Hua City (18)

A small white lotus flower

As Song Ke chased Zhuang Qingyan around the room, the sound of faint movements reached them from the doorway.

The door of this room had been mostly broken for a while now. Through the gap, a strange little boy peeked in, secretly observing them. Upon meeting their gazes, the boy's shoulders trembled, and he quickly ran away in fear.

Embarrassed, Song Ke put down the half-folded table she had been holding. Had she scared the boy away?

After about half an hour, the boy tiptoed back, still hesitant to come in. His curious eyes lingered on Zhuang Qingyan's right leg and wheelchair for two seconds before swiftly moving away and landing on Song Ke. He stared at her with curiosity.

Song Ke felt stiff under his gaze, refraining from making any sudden movements. She had never been good at dealing with these soft and delicate human cubs. The only one she could somewhat consider familiar was Uncle Bing's son, Xiao Bao. However, that rascal was always throwing stones at her, giving her a bad impression. Whenever she saw him, she just wanted to kick his butt.

This boy was different from Xiao Bao; he was much more timid.

Nervously, Song Ke sat on the chair. Her gaze coincidentally met his. The boy had soft brown hair, with curls falling around his ears. His small face was fair, and he wore finely crafted long sleeves and pants that made him look like a model from a magazine.

Song Ke glanced at him, then took another look. Huh? He seemed oddly familiar?

Wait a minute, she remembered. Wasn't this Xu Weiguo's son? Called... Xu Xing? The day Song Ke left F177 District from Fools Wharf, Xu Xing had lost control of his abilities due to a scare involving Aunt Qing and Xiao Bao. Wu Juemin and the others had knocked him unconscious and taken him away. She didn't expect to meet him again here.

So, in a way, they were still from the same hometown!

Song Ke nervously fiddled with the hem of her clothes, building up her courage for a while. Finally, she mustered the bravery to greet Xu Xing.

But as she lifted her head, the boy had run away.

Song Ke: "..."

The second day, the third day, the fourth day...

For the next week, Xu Xing would come by Song Ke's door, circling around, checking if she was there. Sometimes he caught glimpses of her testing new spiritual weapons. He would linger at the door for a while, his eyes curiously fixed on her. However, he was very shy and well-behaved, always smiling innocently at Song Ke with his eyes bent, yet he never dared to come inside.

During this time, Zhuang Qingyan was often not in the room. The control center of T014 was successfully transported to the base, and every day, he would be escorted under the vigilant gaze of Maeda Jiu for "troubleshooting and maintenance," although according to Zhuang Qingyan, it was more like "breaking through the firewall." Of course, Song Ke could tell he was just slacking off. He would spend about ten minutes typing away at the screen every day and shamelessly pass off the rest of the time by saying, "The terminal can run automatically."

Maeda Jiu and the others were skeptical but had no choice. After all, they didn't understand the technology. If they hadn't confirmed Zhuang Qingyan's work credentials countless times, they probably wouldn't have tolerated him for so long.

As for Wu Juemin, he led his team members to clear out the zombies, remove obstacles, and worked with clear divisions of labor. They took turns resting, staying busy non-stop.

The high members of the Phoenix Military squad were not easy to get along with. If you wanted someone easier to talk to, An Qiwen could barely pass as one. After a few days of observation and with occasional leading questions from Zhuang Qingyan, Song Ke gradually understood the specifics of this team of awakeners.

The legendary Phoenix army was indeed an army composed entirely of awakeners.

The team led by Wu Juemin, called the 11th Squad, was labeled a “squad,” but in reality, it had a full forty members. The highest-ranked awakener was the squad leader Wu Juemin, an A-level speed type. According to An Qiwen, the teleportation Song Ke had witnessed was just a part of his ability. Wu Juemin’s true strength was unfathomable.

An Qiwen was a B-level electric-type awakener. His primary focus was on large-scale group damage, making him the main force against the insect tide.

Once, Song Ke secretly climbed onto a rooftop to observe. When An Qiwen released his ability, the sky within a radius of two kilometers dimmed as if it were night. Occasional lightning arcs and thunderous roars filled the air. The pure purple light almost seemed to tear through the sky, its power incredibly astonishing.

If a B-level awakener was this powerful, how strong would an A-level be?

Song Ke’s competitive spirit was itching to challenge Wu Juemin to a fight, to test their strengths against each other.

Of course, that desire was currently only in the “thinking” stage.

Song Ke was confident in herself, but if she were to win a fight against Wu Juemin and he got angry and captured her, she felt that would be quite troublesome. Ah well, best to just forget about it.

Apart from Wu Juemin and An Qiwen, the other team members were C-level and D-level awakeners. For instance, Ouyang Pei had C-level earth-type abilities, Maeda Jiu had a C-level defensive barrier, and Wang Qiang had D-level wind-type abilities, and so on...

In addition to the official members, there were also temporary members in the base's logistics, such as Xu Xing. They were originally civilians from various regions. Before the apocalypse, Wu Juemin had a awakener detection device, and through it, he discovered many newly awakened ability users. After doomsday, these people had nowhere to go, so Wu Juemin temporarily incorporated them into the team, having them take care of transportation and cleaning work.

Excluding these logistics personnel, Song Ke counted and realized that the true number of Phoenix Military squad members was down to twelve people.

When Wu Juemin revealed his identity to Zhuang Qingyan, he had mentioned that they were carrying out an important mission. However, regarding the details of the mission, everyone had tacitly agreed to keep their lips sealed, showing a strong sense of secrecy.

From An Qiwen, Song Ke also learned another piece of less favorable news: the Bagua Formation's core couldn't be activated from the outside.

The Bagua Formation was the strongest defense mechanism in Hua City. When it detected a serious natural disaster from the outside, it would abandon the vehicle to protect the commander and cut off all communication with external facilities. The entire core of the formation would be hidden in a pit several kilometers deep. The core was stocked with ample supplies that could last around five years for thirty thousand people. Because it was the final resort, once activated, it meant being cut off from the outside world. The core could only be reopened through an internal control console.

Wu Juemin had attempted to access the communication channel of the core but with limited success. This frequency band required specialized access permissions. The activation of the core had been so rushed that there was no guarantee that the personnel inside were even alive.

In short, the chances of seeing those people from No.1 Middle School again were extremely slim. Song Ke could only hope that Jiang Rui and Tian Yi were able to survive inside.

...

The days passed uneventfully for a week until there was finally a turn of events – Xu Xing came in.

Song Ke heard a knock on the door and looked up, seeing the small figure of Xu Xing holding a large bag of supplies, with only his fluffy head visible.

Carrying too much, his balance was off. Xu Xing wobbled his way in and gave a shy smile. After observing the door for the past few days, his courage had grown slightly. “Uncle An asked me to bring some things over.”

“Thank you,” Song Ke expressed her gratitude as she took the supplies with one hand.

Neither of them was skilled in social interactions. After Xu Xing put down the supplies, Song Ke awkwardly said, “Sit,” and they both quickly fell silent.

Seeking help, Song Ke looked towards the only articulate speaker in the room, Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan just smiled elegantly and said, “I’m going to check on T014.”

That’s it? He was just leaving?

It felt like he was impatiently leaving to escape from playing with a child, just like an irresponsible parent using any excuse to get away.

Watching his carefree figure as he left, Song Ke’s swallowtail dart flipped up and down in her hand, seemingly with a hint of sharpening.

Xu Xing’s short legs swung up and down on the stool, and after watching her play with the dart for a while, he clapped his hands enthusiastically, saying, “You’re so amazing!”

Song Ke paused for a moment, her dart becoming even more haphazard in her hand.

"I've seen you," in the quiet atmosphere, Xu Xing suddenly spoke up, "Uncle An said that you and my dad were in the same cabin."

His big watery eyes looked at Song Ke, a hopeful expression on his face. "Sister, can I ask you something?"

Song Ke couldn't possibly refuse, "Ye-yes."

"Do you know where my dad went?"

"Huh?"

"My dad, his name is Xu Weiguo, contact number is 042xxxx..."

The child had pretty good memory, he immediately recited his parent's information.

Thinking for a moment, Song Ke recalled that the civilian starship had last landed in a food factory in the northeastern suburbs of Hua City. If nothing unexpected happened, Xu Weiguo should still be there, but that's assuming nothing unexpected... In the events of doomsday, no one could say for sure.

Seeing her not answering for a while, Xu Xing's big eyes filled with tears, and he started crying like dropping pearls, saying, "Sister, I want to find my dad."

"Wuwu, dad..."

Song Ke: "..."

Don't, don't be like this. How did you end up crying while talking?

...

During this period, Zhuang Qingyan hadn't been resting well.

During the day, he had to deal with the gloomy Maeda Jiu and also divert his attention to breaking through the firewall of T014. He wasn't lying about this point; although he owed a bit to a "friend" who shared knowledge on how to bypass AI monitoring on the star network, it wasn't his expertise. He had to grope through each step, and he had to make Maeda Jiu believe he was "repairing and troubleshooting." It was far from easy.

At night, when he stayed in the same room with Song Ke, the girl would just flop onto the bed without a care and fall asleep. But Zhuang Qingyan couldn't do that. He had been extremely cautious since childhood. He absolutely didn't allow anyone near him when he rested. Otherwise, with his vigilant consciousness, he wouldn't be able to fall asleep no matter what.

If he were to tell this to Song Ke, that little girl would probably widen her eyes and mutter incomprehensibly, scolding him, "So... so troublesome."

Zhuang Qingyan tiredly pinched his brow, tilting the back of his wheelchair 45 degrees to transform it into a recliner mode. He relaxedly lay on it, hands resting on his belly, his mental ability gently enveloping the surroundings. He closed his eyes.

Outside, raindrops pattered rhythmically. Amid the monotonous and repetitive white noise, his breathing gradually became calm.

Suddenly, a clear child's voice rang out, "Uncle An, tomorrow, I'll continue monitoring those two people, alright?"

"Xiao Xing is so active?"

"Yeah, I want to help you with more work, so Uncle and the others can rest more!"

"You're such a good kid." An Qiwen patted Xu Xing's head.

“Uncle An, when are we leaving this place?”

“That’s a question for the captain.”

“Wuwu, the captain is so strict, I’m scared.”

“Uncle An, are you hungry? I have cookies here, want some~”

“Uncle An...”

Zhuang Qingyan opened his eyes, and his mental ability spread outward, quickly locating the source of the voice.

The spot where the two were talking was quite far from Zhuang Qingyan, and Xu Xing and An Qiwen hadn’t noticed him at all.

Xu Xing was hopping around An Qiwen like a little bird, cheerful under the sunlight, speaking sweetly with every “Uncle An,” making An Qiwen smile from ear to ear.

It was a complete contrast to the shy and timid demeanor he had shown in front of them these past few days.

Zhuang Qingyan tapped his wheelchair’s armrest, gradually narrowing his eyes.

Ah, so it was a small white lotus after all.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 27: Rainy Night in Hua City (19)

Your father is dead

“Xu Xing wanted you to accompany him to find someone?”

“Yeah.”

“You agreed?”

Song Ke nodded, she had no resistance to the soft and gentle human cub. When Xu Xing cried, she surrendered.

“With so many people in Azure Phoenix, Xu Xing didn’t go to them for help, but came to you?”

“I, I don’t know, maybe, he’s, timid?”

Thinking about Wu Juemin’s stern expression, it was indeed quite intimidating.

Zhuang Qingyan emitted a soft hum from his nose, as if Song Ke were a foolish ruler bewitched by a femme fatale.

“Timid? Didn’t you say his father was a smuggler? A sly and cunning merchant can raise an innocent son?”

“Have you heard an old saying from the ancient civilization? A mouse’s son can make holes.”

“?”

“Don’t understand?”

“You don’t even understand this, and you dare to believe strangers so easily?”

Song Ke gazed at him with pure and clear eyes, murmuring softly, "I also, believe in you."

When we first met, weren't we strangers too? You even lied to me that you were a pharmaceutical researcher!

Zhuang Qingyan's movement paused, evidently that example was quite a failure.

"Aren't you afraid he'll deceive you? That child is an ice-type ability user of unknown level."

"Not afraid."

What's there to deceive her about? She doesn't have money, and she's not as knowledgeable as Zhuang Qingyan. Apart from knowing how to fight a little bit, oh no, she's especially good at fighting. Anyone who wants to deceive her needs to think twice.

The long spear in Song Ke's hand spun into a beautiful floral pattern, "Whoever deceives me, I'll, I'll beat them!"

Truly straightforward and brutal... way of thinking.

Zhuang Qingyan choked.

"...As you wish."

Song Ke zipped up her backpack, turned to him and asked, "Are you going?"

Zhuang Qingyan was reading her old light screen, not even looking up as he coldly refused, "Not going."

Song Ke stared at his profile for a few seconds, feeling that he seemed somewhat unhappy. It wasn't like the time at the safe zone when he insisted on escorting her to the entrance and said those mushy words. Song Ke felt a bit melancholic for no reason. But then again, she hadn't done anything wrong, so why feel guilty? In the end, it's all Zhuang Qingyan's fault!

After several days of effort by Wu Juemin and the others, the roads around Hua City had mostly been cleared, and even the number of zombies had sharply decreased. Song Ke had gone out twice in the past few days, disappearing for a while without drawing too much attention. If she walked a bit faster, she could go and return before nightfall.

Amid the ruins of steel and concrete, Song Ke moved swiftly, occasionally stopping to ask, "Are you tired?"

Xu Xing was chasing her, his little face flushed, panting heavily, yet he managed to keep up, "Sister, I'm not tired."

Almost forgot, he's also an awakener, and an ice-type with strong offensive abilities.

Song Ke always saw him as a harmless kid, but in reality, Xu Xing's physical qualities had already surpassed those of an average adult man.

[Hua City Suburban Area, Food Factory.]

The guard post two kilometers away had collapsed and been abandoned. The 500-square-meter warehouse stood silently.

Song Ke had a bad feeling. She whispered to Xu Xing, "Wait here, I'll go over and take a look first."

Xu Xing gripped the straps of his backpack and nodded obediently.

Like a nimble deer, Song Ke lightly stepped along the wall, smoothly climbed onto the roof, and looked inside through a skylight. The interior of the warehouse resembled a garbage disposal site, with rotten food covering the floor. A sea of people could be seen, all zombies!

Song Ke searched for Xu Weiguo's figure but distinguishing individuals in the crowd of zombies, pressed shoulder to shoulder, was quite challenging.

A slight movement came from behind. Song Ke turned around, only to find that Xu Xing had also climbed up without her noticing.

She raised a finger to signal him to be silent. Xu Xing immediately understood and covered his mouth with his small hand. His gaze shifted around, and when he saw the huge number of zombies inside, his eyes widened in shock.

Fortunately, Xu Xing was just scared; he didn't scream. He wiped the foggy skylight glass with his sleeve and joined Song Ke in searching for Xu Weiguo. After a while, Xu Xing pointed to a figure in the distance and excitedly whispered, "Daddy!"

"It's Daddy! That's my dad!"

Following his direction, Song Ke saw a man with a shiny golden belt around his waist. No wonder Xu Xing could recognize him at a glance. However, the man's body had swelled up several times, not resembling a normal person.

Sure enough, when Xu Weiguo turned around, his irises were grayish-white, his face twisted, showing clear signs of being a zombie.

Xu Xing's "Daddy—" was abruptly cut off in his throat.

Perhaps because he was overwhelmed with fear, he sobbed while hiccuping uncontrollably.

The temperature around them seemed to drop; Song Ke felt the chill on her head. She touched it and realized that raindrops had turned into snowflakes, falling gently. She instantly remembered the tragedy at the dock that day. No, big brother, please don't unleash your supernatural powers again, okay?

"I'm sorry, sister, I, I can't control it."

Xu Xing also realized that his supernatural powers were leaking out. Nervous and disordered, his efforts to suppress it proved futile. Snow and ice spun through the air, the temperature plummeted, and Song Ke shivered.

“Hey, you...” She was about to remind Xu Xing to calm down and not attract the zombies.

Too late.

The rapid drop in temperature caused the fragile skylight to crack open, and a piece of shattered glass fell with a crisp sound. All the zombies in the warehouse looked up at the ceiling, their thousands of white eyes fixated on the falling shard. It was hair-raising.

Song Ke sighed inwardly.

“Hide here, protect yourself.” She didn’t forget to remind Xu Xing.

“Thud—”

With a loud noise, Song Ke jumped into the warehouse from the skylight, one hand supporting her weight while the other held a spear. Her landing was clean and stylish.

She slowly lifted her head. Although it was a bit troublesome, for her, dealing with these zombies was just a matter of time.

The freezing tip of the spear aimed at the enemy, and the zombies charged at her frantically. The situation was about to erupt—

Suddenly! Countless ice blades descended from the sky, like a gust of wind sweeping fallen leaves, raging and dancing wildly. There was no rhyme or reason; they pierced through the zombies upon contact.

This kind of wide-ranging group-damaging ability, combined with the advantage of being in a confined space, left the zombies with no escape route. They were completely caught in a trap, and in no time, their bodies were pierced with ice blades. They died thoroughly, leaving only a few wandering aimlessly.

Song Ke maintained her spear posture, staring in amazement.

She turned back and looked through the bowl-sized hole. She saw Xu Xing near the skylight, sobbing and breathless, "I'm sorry! I also... I also don't know what's happening!"

Song Ke: "..."

...

On the way back, Xu Xing's mood was unusually low.

In the end, Xu Weiguo stayed in the food factory. After Song Ke dealt with the other zombies, she asked Xu Xing what to do next.

His eyes were red, and he said, "Sister, can you not kill my dad? Just let him, let him stay here."

Let him stay? But Xu Weiguo had already turned into a zombie and couldn't revert to being human.

Xu Xing looked very sad, but Song Ke had no parents, and her emotions in this regard were always dull. She couldn't empathize with him. Well, perhaps if Zhuang Qingyan were here, he could explain it to her.

In the end, she agreed to Xu Xing's request and locked up the food factory with an iron chain.

The two hurried back to the base ahead of Wu Juemin and the others. Xu Xing wiped his tears and thanked Song Ke, "Sister, thank you for taking me to find my dad. I'm sorry, I know I'm useless..."

"It's okay," Song Ke asked him, "Is your ability, okay?"

Xu Xing lowered his head in frustration, "When I'm emotionally excited, I can't control my ability properly. Uncle An said it's because my focus is too scattered, but I will definitely correct it in the future! I won't cause trouble for you guys!"

Song Ke awkwardly replied, "Okay, okay."

From a certain perspective, Xu Xing releasing his powerful ability without regard for the situation was indeed troublesome. For example, just now, due to being too shocked, she accidentally sat down too hard, and now her tailbone was still slightly painful.

...

After leaving the room, Xu Xing stopped crying. He walked around the corner, his hands in the pockets of his hoodie, bouncing as he walked.

At the end of the corridor stood a silver-white wheelchair, with a tall man leaning against it, lazily posed. His superior side profile had a pleasing charm in the misty drizzle.

Xu Xing pursed his lips, his face showing a shy and bashful smile. "Uncle Zhuang."

Zhuang Qingyan turned his head. "It's you."

"Uncle Zhuang, what are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you."

"Waiting for me? Do you have something to tell me?"

Xu Xing tilted his head, looking adorably curious.

Zhuang Qingyan adjusted the wheelchair's direction and faced Xu Xing.

Though the child's face still feigned innocence and curiosity, the corners of his eyes darted around, clearly indicating that his mind was elsewhere.

"Kid, you knew all along, right?"

"Knew what?"

"Your dad's dead."

Although these words sounded like an insult, Zhuang Qingyan calmly stated the facts.

"Didn't hear clearly? Let me say it again: your dad is dead."

Xu Xing froze, his small face immediately fell, his reddened eyes locked onto Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan chuckled. "With the chaos in Hua City, Wu Juemin couldn't have been unaware. He must have sent people to the food factory long ago to check it out and told you there's no need to go find your dad again, right?"

"Why? Are you that unwilling to give up? Insisting on finding someone to confirm it with you?"

Xu Xing's hand emerged from his pocket and hung at his sides. He murmured softly, as if complaining like a dissatisfied child, "Uncle Zhuang, you really love meddling in other people's business."

A sharp ice blade appeared, accompanied by a bone-chilling cold, flying straight towards Zhuang Qingyan's right leg through the gap in the wheelchair.

Zhuang Qingyan smirked.

Children, they can't control their tempers.

A second before the ice blade hit Zhuang Qingyan, an invisible force lifted Xu Xing off the ground!

His hoodie was caught on a beam, and his entire body plummeted uncontrollably, but his head got stuck in the collar. He resembled a little chick with its wings tied, only supported by that bit of force.

"Let me go! Put me down! You jerk!"

Xu Xing finally panicked. He flailed his limbs desperately, gnashing his teeth and brandishing his claws like an angry little lion.

The innocence and purity on his face disappeared, replaced by gnashing of teeth and irritability.

This person, this person who's wheelchair-bound, turned out to be an awakener!

How infuriating! How infuriating!!! He's so mad!!!

Zhuang Qingyan admired his predicament, earnestly advising, "Kids need to learn to be self-reliant and not always rely on others."

"Especially on other people's thigh."