

Doomsday 31

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 31: Bloody Ferrara (3)

Excellent nourishment

The person Zhuang Qingyan referred to as the “make up the numbers” guy was Xu Xing.

Before Xu Xing separated from them, he secretly slipped a small piece of paper to Song Ke. On the paper, he wrote down the place he was temporarily staying, allowing Song Ke to come and visit him when she had time.

Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan followed that address to find Xu Xing, and what they discovered was... it was actually a seven-star hotel?!

Well, look at this white luxurious dome, the evergreen front garden, and the excellent view of the night sky from a high altitude. It looked expensive at first glance.

Alright, strict access control, even external visitors weren't allowed in.

The two of them had to inform the robot butler and waited for a full twenty minutes in the chilly wind before Xu Xing finally came downstairs. He was wearing a colorful coat, floating over like a butterfly, “Sister!”

Xu Xing obediently jumped into Song Ke's arms, his eyes sparkling, his smile sweet. Just as he was about to speak, he suddenly noticed Zhuang Qingyan standing aside.

Xu Xing: OvO!!!

His clever words got stuck in his throat, his smile froze on his lips, and a surge of irritability rushed to his forehead, “Why did he come too!”

Song Ke: ?

After Song Ke explained, mentioning that she had been together with Zhuang Qingyan during this time, Xu Xing reluctantly nodded, leading the two upstairs.

As soon as they stepped into the room, Song Ke was stunned.

Xu Xing was actually staying in a suite, fully equipped with amenities. There was 24-hour warm water if one got thirsty, they could order food anytime they were hungry, and they could watch the latest projection programs when bored. Additionally, there were entertainment rooms, swimming pools, fitness rooms...

Turns out they were sleeping rough outside, perhaps even staying in free capsule hotels by the roadside, while Xu Xing, the invisible rich kid, was living luxuriously in a big house. His life was undoubtedly extremely enjoyable.

Dizzily, Song Ke sat down on the sofa and felt as if she had sunk into a soft cloud.

Xu Xing offered her a bunch of snacks and drinks as if presenting a treasure.

“Why are you living here, here?” Song Ke asked, her confusion easing after a moment.

“My dad had a lot of money saved at Yaban Bank.” Xu Xing innocently blinked.

Yaban Bank was a well-known commercial bank within the Alliance, with branches scattered across various cities and regions.

When Xu Weiguo passed away, Xu Xing became the legitimate heir to his inheritance. Everyone understood the reasoning, but it was hard to avoid jealousy when a ten-year-old kid possessed such astonishing wealth. During his time in the logistics team, Xu Xing hadn't revealed anything to others. He acted like a timid little rabbit, happily munching on sesame cakes as if he didn't have a care in the world.

Everyone thought he was just like Song Ke, coming from the backward District F, an ignorant and impoverished child.

“...How did you know, know about this hotel?” Song Ke still couldn’t believe it. Both were from the District F, but as soon as Xu Xing arrived at Ferrara, he stayed in a luxury hotel. He seemed to be swimming in comfort, while she couldn’t even distinguish the four cardinal directions and suffered the embarrassment of not having enough money to register as an awakener.

“My dad took me to a concert here before, and we stayed here!” Xu Xing answered matter-of-factly.

...So, the real poor person was just her.

Eating the delicious snacks, Song Ke’s mood grew even more melancholic.

“Sister, why did you come looking for me?”

Xu Xing curled up into a small ball on the carpet, pressed against Song Ke’s thigh, and asked softly.

He didn’t know why, but he felt particularly close to Song Ke. Perhaps a child’s intuition was naturally accurate, or maybe both of them being from the District F made them connect. Song Ke was strong and gentle, and Xu Xing firmly believed that she wouldn’t hurt him.

Song Ke stumbled through explaining that she wanted his help to form a team and meet the required number of members.

Considering Xu Xing was timid, she hastily added, “You don’t need to, to do the task. I can, can manage it on my own.”

After listening, Xu Xing, without much thought, readily agreed, “Sure, sister. I’ll join your team. This way, the two of us, with two awakeners... two awakeners?”

He suddenly “popped up” and pointed at Zhuang Qingyan, “Two awakeners?! Isn’t he—”

Zhuang Qingyan leaned by the window, elegantly sipping tea, maintaining a calm demeanor.

Song Ke glanced over, puzzled, "Him, what's wrong?"

Xu Xing glanced at Zhuang Qingyan, then back at Song Ke. His words trailed off, and his eyes moved around, then suddenly he exclaimed, "Oh!" with an expression that said, 'I understand now.'

"Sister, are you hungry? I'm really hungry. Can you order some food for me? The service machine is in the living room."

Song Ke found herself inexplicably assigned to place an order.

With only the two of them in the room, Xu Xing paced back and forth, hands behind his back, looking smug and childish, as if he had just discovered something profound about Zhuang Qingyan, "You didn't tell Sister that you're an awakener."

Zhuang Qingyan responded calmly, "Yeah, she didn't ask, so I didn't have the chance to say."

Of course, Xu Xing didn't believe him. He stuck his tongue out in disdain and scrunched his face.

"You're lying to a kid!"

"Clearly, you're an awakener and yet you pretend to be pitiful, and can only sit in a wheelchair."

"Are you afraid that if you tell the truth, Sister won't want you anymore? You want me to be self-reliant? You have no shame!"

Amid Xu Xing's relentless "no shame, no shame, no shame," Zhuang Qingyan's expression remained unchanged. He gently placed the tea cup in his hand on the table, making a crisp "clink" sound.

“Saying you have no brains, I really haven’t wronged you.”

He interlocked his ten fingers over his abdomen, smiling menacingly at Xu Xing. “I bet that even if I tell Song Ke I’m an awakener, given the life-and-death bond between us, she would still bring me along. And you? After pretending to be so innocent and naive before, now that she knows how cunning you are at such a young age, well, let me think... she probably won’t even have time to run away, will she?”

Xu Xing was taken aback, “You!”

“You! You, you, you!” He kept stammering, failing to continue his argument, and finally exploded with frustration, stomping his feet and cursing, “You villain!”

When Song Ke returned, she found Xu Xing glowering at Zhuang Qingyan, panting heavily.

“It’s ordered, done.”

Xu Xing quickly turned his head, switching his expression faster than flipping a page in a book, putting on a fatally sweet smile.

“Sister, why don’t you stay here? There are still plenty of empty rooms, and I feel scared alone.”

A luxury hotel was certainly more comfortable than a capsule warehouse, so Song Ke didn’t hesitate to say thank you to Xu Xing.

Ecstatic, Xu Xing jumped up and enthusiastically wanted to show Song Ke around the room. As he turned, Zhuang Qingyan also followed.

He immediately spread his arms like a protective chick, guarding the door, “What are you still doing here?”

“You go stay outside; you’re not welcome here.”

Song Ke felt a bit awkward. She had promised to look after Zhuang Qingyan's leg. She also couldn't just leave him alone to sleep in a comfortable room. If Xu Xing really didn't want to accommodate Zhuang Qingyan, then she... maybe she should sleep in the capsule warehouse with him.

Just as she was about to say something, Zhuang Qingyan calmly adjusted the blanket on his knee, "Little... lo-tus..."

"Ah! Ah!" Xu Xing irritably started making weird noises, completely controlled by him.

In the end, both of them managed to stay.

However, Song Ke couldn't shake the feeling that something was a bit off. Had Xu Xing's personality changed a bit in the few days they hadn't seen each other?

And also, when did he become so familiar with Zhuang Qingyan?

...

The next day, the three of them set off once again for the commission center.

Xu Xing skipped and hopped as if he were out shopping, walking backwards with enthusiasm. "Sister, after we're done forming the team, let's go eat something delicious! My dad took me to a place..."

Someone rushed towards them, colliding with Xu Xing. He stumbled a bit, and Song Ke quickly reached out to steady him.

The person muttered a vague "Sorry" and hurriedly ran past them, heading in another direction.

"What's happening?" A curious individual poked their head out from a nearby shop.

"There are zombies up ahead!" The person shouting looked excited.

Song Ke was momentarily stunned, suspecting she had misheard “There’s something delicious up ahead” as “There are zombies up ahead.”

To be so enthusiastic about encountering zombies, were the citizens of Ferrara all this daring?

“Should we go, go and take a look?” Song Ke asked her companions for their opinions.

Both Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing nodded in agreement.

The three of them followed the crowd and soon arrived at the scene.

In the center of the crowd, a tall zombie was bound by several ropes, its face twisted in a fierce grimace as it struggled and roared like a trapped beast.

There were obvious knife marks, scars, and bruises from the ropes on its body. The ends of the ropes were held by different individuals, each of their faces filled with the excitement of slaughter, the cruelty of bloodlust, and an indescribable eagerness to try. A burly man stepped forward, planted his foot on the zombie’s head, spat in its face, and then raised his arms in triumph. The others responded excitedly, as if he were some kind of world-conquering hero.

Song Ke couldn’t help but furrow her brows.

Holding her hand, Xu Xing lowered his chattering voice, fearfully hiding behind her.

Before long, a mechanized forklift with a special number on its body came roaring in. A massive iron cage descended from the sky, capturing the zombie alive, and then it was lifted away.

“Why didn’t they kill it?” Song Ke whispered.

A person nearby who had been watching the commotion gave her a sidelong glance, “New here?”

“Kill it? That’s crude, far too crude. No artistic sense.”

“But this is the Throne Race Competition; it’s excellent nourishment!”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 32.1: Bloody Ferrara (4)

Formation of V587!

Throne Race Competition?

On the day they entered the city, Ilya mentioned this term, but at that time, everyone was more astonished by the identity of the artificial intelligence, so they didn’t pay much attention to it.

And what was the deal with “nourishment”?

The attitude of the citizens of Ferrara towards zombies was drastically different from the people Song Ke encountered in District F and District D. There was a hint of fanatical hunting in their approach.

Zhuang Qingyan leaned forward from his wheelchair, his slender fingers lifting up a poster covered in numerous footprints. He gazed at the words on it and slowly recited, “Smooth roads only make people mediocre. Only flames and thorns can temper the true crown of a king. Hm.”

“Throne Race Competition, hot registration ongoing, address on the back!” Xu Xing also leaned in with his little head.

“If you’re curious, you can go take a look,” Zhuang Qingyan said.

“Yeah,” Song Ke nodded. Once the awakener registration was sorted out, she would go check out this Throne Race Competition. But for now, the priority was to form their team at the commission center.

The group of them arrived at the Ferrara Special Affairs Commission Center again. In just a day, the damaged fountain pool at the entrance had already been repaired. Its surface was as good as new, and the efficiency was astonishing. It seemed that the substantial amount of money paid by Baldy and Crazy Chihori for compensation was not in vain.

As soon as Song Ke stepped into the hall, she saw a crowd gathered around the screen. A chorus of amazed voices kept coming, "It's 'Three Grandsons and One Grandpa' again. How many B-rank commissions is this for them? They're progressing so quickly; their points must be over a thousand soon, right?"

Song Ke paused her steps. That peculiar team name sounded somewhat familiar, didn't it? Her gaze involuntarily turned towards the suspended screen in front of her, and as expected, as if replaying yesterday, a holographic projection once again flickered with a new announcement — "Congratulations to Team 'Three Grandsons and One Grandpa' for completing B-rank commission xxxx!"

On the overall points leaderboard, this team was also in the lead, sitting comfortably at first place with a score of 966.

The level of commission tasks not only came with corresponding Alliance currency rewards but also carried different point values. For instance, the simplest E-level task was worth 2 points, and the scale increased gradually: D-level was 10 points, C-level was 50 points, B-level was 200 points, and an A-level mission could earn as much as 1000 points. As for the rumored S-level missions, none had appeared so far, and it was said that there was no upper limit to their point rewards. The rapid ascent of the "Three Grandsons and One Grandpa" team, reaching 966 points so quickly, indicated that they had completed at least three or more B-level missions, showcasing their considerable strength and unparalleled popularity.

Their goal was also clear—to gain access to District B.

Cities ranked C and above within the Alliance had strict access regulations. Regular people who wanted to enter a non-residential District C had to apply for short-term entry permits. The reasons could be sightseeing, visiting relatives, official business trips, and more. Once a permit expired or if someone were still in the city without proper authorization, they would become "wanderers," subject to pursuit by the Alliance's Citizenship Enforcement Division.

Among the 50 District C areas, only District C72 was an exception. Ferrara, known for its emphasis on art and freedom, welcomed all travelers from afar.

Even for local residents of District C, changing their place of residence wasn't an easy feat. The naturalization process between different cities was extremely stringent. District C inhabitants aiming for District B faced even greater challenges. Before the apocalypse, joining the Azure Phoenix might have been a shortcut, but with the collapse of order and the increasing awakening of abilities, new rules had been established. The Alliance had recently issued an official announcement that individuals with abilities could gain District B citizenship by accumulating points.

Of course, the required number of points was quite daunting. Transitioning from District C to District B required a whopping 500,000 points.

Song Ke harbored an unspoken desire. She wanted to go outside and explore. Throughout her life, she had hardly left F177 District, venturing only as far as Yue Mountain (E166 District) and Hua City (D99 District). After forming a team this time, she wanted to take on a B-level mission and test her skills. Even if she wasn't as capable as the "Three Grandsons and One Grandpa" team, she could slowly accumulate points. Who knows, someday she might have the chance to visit District B.

With her dreams in mind, Song Ke approached the service window and said, "Hello, I want to, to form a team."

A middle-aged woman in uniform inside pushed up her glasses, glanced at Song Ke briefly, and then shifted her gaze away. She paused for a second over Xu Xing's fuzzy head, another second on Zhuang Qingyan's legs, two seconds on his face, and finally returned to Song Ke.

A teenager around seventeen or eighteen, a well-behaved child, and... a disabled person in a wheelchair?

She had worked here for five or six years and considered herself to have sharp eyes, but this was the first time she couldn't tell which two of these three were awakeners.

"Which of you is the captain?"

“Huh?”

“Regardless of who’s the captain, show me your awakener ID.”

“Huh??”

Song Ke was taken aback. Wasn’t it said that regular people could also form teams and take on missions? Why were they asking her for an awakener ID?

The staff member looked skeptical. “Team members can be regular people, but the team captain has to be an awakener. Without an awakener ID, how do you intend to take and complete missions? All terminals require identification.”

Song Ke exclaimed, “Huh?”

The staff member thought she was a rebellious teenager who had gone astray and tried to counsel her with a pained expression. “Young lady, I don’t think you’re an awakener, are you? Look at the three of you... sigh, taking on contracts is very dangerous. Don’t come to cause trouble, okay? Go on, take your brothers back home. Watch a concert of your favorite star, buy some pretty dresses, and live peacefully.”

“If my daughter acted like you, oh my, I’d be so frustrated.”

Song Ke remained silent.

What can I do? What else can I do? I just want to form a team, why is it so difficult? !

Song Ke was left speechless.

Her thoughts were in turmoil.

The entire world for Song Ke had turned dark.

...

By the fountain pool, Song Ke sat down dispiritedly. Her fair chin rested on the back of Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair, and her face wore an expression of utter disillusionment.

Zhuang Qingyan, rarely seeing her so listless, patted her head comfortingly. "Don't be disheartened. There might be other ways. Maybe a 'kind-hearted person' will help us?"

Xu Xing squatted beside them, playing with the water. He stuck his finger in, and the water surface immediately froze. He pulled out a finger-shaped ice stick, looking like he had discovered a new land, and he enjoyed it immensely. Soon, all ten of his fingers were solidly frozen.

"Sister, why don't you just directly register as an awakener?"

"Because I don't have the money," Song Ke answered wearily.

"Does it require a lot of money?" Xu Xing asked, puzzled.

"Yeah!" Song Ke nodded vigorously. "10,000 Alliance coins."

Xu Xing shook his hand, and the ice stick fell with a tinkling sound, revealing his ten white and tender fingers. "Sister, I'll transfer it to you directly."

"It's your, your money," Song Ke refused. She couldn't just spend someone else's money, especially since Xu Xing was just a child.

"It's okay, sister. Look, I have so much money."

Xu Xing handed over his new terminal, and Song Ke caught sight of a long string of zeroes that seemed endless.

Alright, let's correct that. Xu Xing was a "very wealthy" child.

Song Ke still shook her head.

But Xu Xing thought his idea was brilliant and pleaded softly, "Sister, just consider it a loan from me. You can give it back to me after you complete that commission, okay?"

"I want to register as an awakener too, sister~ Will you take me?" Not getting his way, he began to act cute.

Song Ke was worn down by his persistence. "Alright, I'll ask you, you to lend me first."

She lifted her chin from the back of the wheelchair, rummaged in her backpack, took out a piece of paper, and wrote a IOU carefully.

"Okay," Xu Xing brightened up, "let's go then."

After saying this, he sneakily glanced at Zhuang Qingyan's corner of the eye, like a proud little peacock, chin held high. "Hmph!"

Zhuang Qingyan smiled but remained silent.

A little foolish fish, easily caught on a hook, yet blissfully unaware. He's kind-hearted at least; he shouldn't spoil his good intentions.

With the support of the little local tyrant Xu Xing, things suddenly became simpler. Soon, Song Ke once again completed the process and obtained her awakener identification – a small needle-type terminal that could circulate in District C, with its jurisdiction located in the area of Ferrara.

Compared to Wu Yarou's silver-white District B terminal, this one lagged behind in both appearance and functionality. It was like the difference between a basic model and a luxury limited edition. However, Song Ke couldn't put it down; it was her official ID, marking an end to her days as a black householder.

The girl who was slacking off also told her that once the results of the awakener level were out, they would be synchronized and updated on the terminal. She wouldn't need to make another trip.

Xu Xing took this opportunity to register as an awakener as well. According to his own account, he "accidentally" lost control of his ice power during the awakener review and nearly stabbed the auditors with ice shards, startling them quite a bit.

"He asked me to conjure a cup of water for him, so I did," Xu Xing blinked innocently, his expression quite convincing.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 32.2: Bloody Ferrara (4)

Formation of V587!

The three of them returned to the commission center once again. The staff member who had considered Song Ke a "rebellious teenager" repeatedly checked her awakener ID and finally pursed her lips, submitting a team formation application in the system: "Enter the team name."

Song Ke looked back to ask her teammates for their opinions.

"You're the captain, you decide," Zhuang Qingyan said, adopting an attitude of completely deferring to her.

"Sister, I can't think of anything," Xu Xing scratched his head.

Song Ke: I can't think of anything either!

Suddenly, she kind of understood the difficulty of “Three Grandsons and One Grandfather”, naming really was tough.

Seeing her troubled expression, the staff member casually suggested, “If you can’t come up with anything, just use a number. Let me see... you’re the 587th awakener team registered in Ferrara.”

The number on the screen jumped by one digit, stopping exactly at “00587,” next to which was the full name of the Ferrara (Vulala) Special Affairs Agency.

“Then, let’s go with this, V587.”

New Calendar, Year 46, October 2nd.

On an ordinary day, the number one awakener team that would later shake the entire Alliance, V587, was established in such an ordinary manner.

The initial team consisted of only three members: Song Ke (Gold-type Awakener, level unknown), Xu Xing (Ice-type Awakener, level unknown), and “ordinary person” Zhuang Qingyan.

The first thing V587 did after its establishment was to go and complete the B-level mission that Song Ke had set her eyes on.

Using the self-service terminal, Song Ke swiped her awakener ID and searched for that mission from the long list. Luckily, it hadn’t been taken by anyone else yet.

This mission was issued by the Municipal Hall of Luli Port (D150 District), with a reward of 2000 Alliance coins and 200 team points.

The earliest release date was September 25th.

“Help us clear the zombies on the first floor. We’re trapped in the office and can’t get out.”

On September 27th, the mission was updated.

“Is there anyone to save us? We’re running out of food!”

On September 30th, the mission was updated again.

“Urgent!!! The zombies are already outside the door. We can’t hold on any longer. Anyone will do, help, help!!!”

Today was already October 2nd, and the mission hadn’t been updated since then. It’s unknown whether the issuer was still alive.

Song Ke casually checked the system and found that there were quite a few commission tasks from Luli Port, and most of them were related to zombies. It seemed like the disaster situation was quite severe.

She turned to Zhuang Qingyan and asked, “D150 District, do you, do you know about it?”

In her mind, Zhuang Qingyan knew everything.

Sure enough, Zhuang Qingyan just slightly frowned and said, “Luli Port? Hmm... it’s a pretty well-developed tourist city in District D, mostly because of its location by the sea. The other three sides are District C. It became a large-scale resort a few years ago. I remember the artificial beaches and hot springs there are quite popular.”

A vacation paradise? During the apocalypse, it was the peak of tourism in Luli Port. The local attractions and folk streets were bustling with people. Having a large number of zombies stuck there wasn’t surprising.

Song Ke switched back to the mission interface. “So, should I take this?”

Zhuang Qingyan confirmed with her, "The mission location is the Municipal Hall?"

"Yes, why, is there a problem?"

"The Municipal Hall of Luli Port is known for its maze-like architectural style. It's intricate and complex inside, easy to get lost. Similar to Hua City, it has won the gold award in city planning competitions."

"A maze?"

Song Ke's expression became blank. She couldn't even tell north from south! No wonder this mission was so urgent and yet no one had taken it for so long.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled and said, "If it's just a simulated maze, even if it's a real maze, it would still be a bit difficult to trap me."

With him saying that, things seemed easier.

Full of confidence, Song Ke clicked "Accept Commission" and then "Confirm." Suddenly, the terminal screen projected a text: "Detecting that you are currently in District C72. The format of this mission has changed. Please refresh and complete it according to local requirements; otherwise, the mission will be considered a failure. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation."

What did that mean?

Song Ke refreshed the screen.

New text appeared on the screen: "In support of the Throne Race Tournament, please try to capture the zombies and bring them back to Ferrara~ You can apply for a free transport vehicle for this commission :)"

Capture... zombies??

And what's with this ":"? What is that supposed to be?

Both Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing saw this prompt. Xu Xing had little reaction, but Zhuang Qingyan sneered, "Interesting."

What was once a straightforward task suddenly turned magical.

Song Ke couldn't help but recall the scene she witnessed on the street in the morning, along with the phrase "excellent nourishment" that the passerby mentioned. The direction of events was becoming increasingly enigmatic. It seemed necessary to figure out what the Throne Race Competition was all about after completing the mission.

After exiting the hall, Song Ke was still pondering where to collect the "free transport vehicle." The rumbling sound of an engine reached her ears. From the track that stretched across the Ferrara sky, a numbered transport vehicle came rolling along and stopped right in front of Song Ke and her companions.

The transport vehicle was entirely silver-gray in color. The cockpit was narrow, but it had a total of eight carriages at the back. What was even more chilling was that each carriage was filled with iron cages adorned with barbs. Bloodstains crisscrossed inside, the colors dull and gloomy, having captured countless zombies.

The terminal made a "ding" sound, displaying the vehicle information. This vehicle was equipped with automated driving and preset round-trip routes. In theory, Song Ke only needed to capture the zombies and toss them onto the vehicle. It would return on its own.

Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan boarded the cockpit, and as the door was about to close, Xu Xing caught the hem of Song Ke's clothes.

"Sister, I... I want to go too."

“Aren’t you, afraid?” Xu Xing was terrified of zombies to the core. Both instances of his supernatural ability going out of control were due to zombies.

Xu Xing’s hand trembled for a moment, gradually releasing Song Ke’s clothes, but the next second, he grabbed them tightly again!

He saw Zhuang Qingyan inside the cockpit, looking at him with a smile that wasn’t quite a smile.

Although Zhuang Qingyan hadn’t said a word, Xu Xing sensed the disdain in his gaze, as if he were saying, “Oh? That’s it?”

Initially hesitating, Xu Xing’s inner sense of pride was completely aroused. With his neck held high, his voice full of enthusiasm, he exclaimed, “I’m not afraid! I want to help you. I won’t cause any trouble!”

After a moment of thought, Song Ke agreed. Although Xu Xing was an unstable element, it wasn’t a big deal. She just needed to keep a closer eye on him.

“Come on board.”

...

The transport vehicle distributed by Ferrara had a steam-driven engine and didn’t use the energy of “Yiyu,” so its speed was considerably slower compared to a starship. Nevertheless, it could utilize the aerial track. After approximately ten hours of travel, Song Ke and her companions arrived at Luli Port.

It was approaching midnight, and the Municipal Hall of Luli Port was less than three kilometers away. Hordes of zombies were roaming the outskirts.

Without clearing a path, they couldn’t get in.

Song Ke opened the window, hooked her finger, and agilely flipped out, landing on top of the vehicle.

In her hand was a repeating crossbow similar to the one Zhuang Qingyan had. “I’ll distract the zombies on the left. Xu Xing, freeze them on the right.”

Xu Xing clenched his fists and nodded nervously, “Okay!”

Shouldering the crossbow with one hand, Song Ke squinted her eyes, aimed, and lightly pulled the trigger. Ten arrows shot out simultaneously, accurately piercing a small group of isolated zombies ahead. Those zombies noticed the movement and rushed towards them.

Xu Xing also stood up, his ability followed suit. A sudden blizzard engulfed the area, and the zombies that were lured out were instantly frozen.

The vehicle’s surveillance detected the zombie movements. A long mechanical arm extended from the rear compartment, sweeping these zombies into iron cages like garbage. Once a compartment was filled, the door silently closed, automatically shifting to the front, and the second-to-last compartment was then pushed out.

“Keep going,” Song Ke changed direction and continued shooting arrows to attract the zombies’ attention.

“Alright!” Xu Xing was full of enthusiasm.

The first carriage transporting zombies slowly passed the cockpit. Dripping water droplets fell, and one of the frozen zombies had unknowingly melted. Suddenly, it began to roar restlessly. “Swipe!” Sharp claws protruded from the iron cage, almost touching Xu Xing’s nose through the window glass.

Xu Xing’s attention was focused forward. He was startled by the attack that came out of nowhere. His pupils trembled, and the blizzard that had been swirling all around him turned into ice spikes.

“Crunch, crunch, crunch—”

Several skulls of the supposedly frozen zombies were pierced by ice shards, but the remaining ones kept pushing forward.

Xu Xing's rhythm became chaotic, affecting Song Ke's concentration. Her arrows couldn't attract so many zombies, and a small group was already rushing towards their position.

Song Ke put down the crossbow, reached back, and pulled out two dual-bladed knives from her backpack. "Swoosh!" She leaped off the top of the vehicle, charging towards the approaching tide of zombies. The moment her feet hit the ground, she swung her blades horizontally, killing the zombies that came rushing.

Zhuang Qingyan frowned and yelled in a low voice, "Song Ke, capture the live ones."

Song Ke's silhouette stiffened for a moment, her actions momentarily delayed, as if she were contemplating how to capture the zombies alive.

Then, the catastrophe began.

Everything descended into chaos. Xu Xing started yelling frantically, his ability alternately turning into blizzards and ice shards. Song Ke was dashing up and down within the swarm of zombies, incapacitating one by kicking, chasing another to the left, knocking one down, only to have another on the right run away.

After much difficulty capturing a group, just as she was about to throw them into the transport vehicle, ice shards from Xu Xing flew over, killing them all.

Song Ke: "..."

In the midst of endless chaos, Zhuang Qingyan covered his face.

V587's first mission, a massive failure!

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 33: Bloody Ferrara (5)

A-Level Task: Mutant Zombie!

At the critical moment, Zhuang Qingyan remained calm. He surveyed the chaotic situation on the field and quickly made a judgment: “Xu Xing, stop and create ice in the direction I indicated.”

Xu Xing, with a defiant tone despite being in a difficult situation, retorted, “Why should I listen to you?”

Zhuang Qingyan’s icy gaze lingered on his collar for a second, his expression as fierce as a demon: “If you don’t obey, I’ll throw you out right now!”

Xu Xing: (T__T)

He recalled the agony of being dominated.

Zhuang Qingyan no longer paid attention to him. His slender fingers continuously manipulated the complex control panel in the cockpit. His gaze fell on Song Ke in the distance. He paused, and certain unpleasant memories suddenly struck him.

As a precaution, he turned his head again and confirmed with Xu Xing, “Do you know the directions—north, south, east, west?”

Xu Xing angrily shouted, “Of course! Who do you think you’re looking down on?!”

“Very well.” Zhuang Qingyan’s lips curled slightly, better than your sister.

With a slight movement of his fingertip, he retrieved a collapsible cane from the space, unfolded it in a couple of swift motions, supported the wheelchair’s handguard, and then exerted force. After injuring his right leg, he stood up for the first time.

Once he stood firm, Zhuang Qingyan extended his right hand, finally reaching the control lever of the mechanical arm, positioned slightly higher.

Xu Xing was amazed to find that Zhuang Qingyan was actually quite tall. It wasn't the frail and thin figure he had imagined from prolonged wheelchair use. On the contrary, Zhuang Qingyan stood tall and elegant, with superior proportions. His waist and abdomen had smooth and straight lines, and even his exposed forearms were unusually sturdy.

While he was lost in thought, Zhuang Qingyan had already opened the car window and shouted from a distance, "Song Ke! Head to 11 o'clock direction!"

Song Ke blocked with her left knife and executed a semi-circular slash with her right knife. With a swift "whoosh," she leaped to the front of the zombie horde, acting as bait to lure them towards the northwest.

"Xu Xing, freeze the entire group of zombies to the southwest!"

Xu Xing felt a bit dissatisfied. His sister was clearly running towards the northwest, so why did he have to freeze the zombies to the southwest? But Zhuang Qingyan was indeed quite tall. He seemed to only reach his waist. Xu Xing cast an envious glance and obediently followed the command.

Northwest direction, 11 o'clock.

The zombies brought over by Song Ke were increasing in number, and they finally collided with a nearby carriage with a resounding "thud." There was no way forward from here!

"Six o'clock!"

Almost simultaneously, Zhuang Qingyan shouted the next command.

Song Ke hit the brakes sharply and made a quick turn. The zombies followed her like rabbits chasing carrots, rushing towards them in a synchronized manner.

Xu Xing became anxious, "They're all coming this way!"

Zhuang Qingyan said coldly, "Take care of your ice. If I see another ice shard, you'll be the first one to feed the zombies."

The horde of monsters was getting closer and closer to them. Just as the first batch of zombies that Xu Xing froze was melting, and they regained their freedom in a daze, continuing forward due to inertia, Song Ke was caught between them like a carrot being chased by two sides. She was about to be overwhelmed by the zombies. Xu Xing's heart raced.

Right at that moment, Song Ke suddenly switched her grip, reversed her knives, and inserted them perfectly into the gaps of the iron cage covered with inverted hooks. Following that, she propelled herself with a leap, her feet landing on the crossbar of the carriage. In the blink of an eye, she executed two graceful backflips, taking both herself and her weapons onto the roof of the car.

The two waves of zombies couldn't react in time and collided with a loud "thud," falling to the ground. Just then, the mechanical arm on the side of the carriage emerged mysteriously, sweeping through like a whirlwind, and all these zombies were swept inside. The iron cage swiftly followed, clanging shut the exit.

In an instant, the clearing was complete!

Inside the cockpit, Zhuang Qingyan gave orders to Song Ke while manually controlling the transport vehicle and the mechanical arm, both in synchronized motion.

Xu Xing was completely stunned. This person was multitasking—no, make that triple-tasking. He even found time to scold him. Was this really something a human brain could accomplish?

With Zhuang Qingyan's guidance, the almost-tipping-over situation was finally brought under control. Waves of zombies managed to run right into Song Ke's attack range or step into Xu Xing's blizzard, and with the synchronized sweeping of the mechanical arms from the six carriages, about half an hour later, the three of them managed to clear a path, narrowly escaping the crisis.

With the crisis averted, the remaining few zombies were swiftly dealt with by Song Ke.

She wiped her twin swords with cloth, crossed them behind her back, and briskly walked back to the front of the vehicle.

Leaning on his crutch, Zhuang Qingyan pushed open the cockpit. Leaning against the door, he appeared relaxed and composed, with the night breeze rustling his clothes, making his handsome features even more profound.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at Song Ke with a helpless expression. "What did you say before we set off?"

Both Song Ke and Xu Xing were highly offensive supernatural beings. If their cooperation went awry, it could potentially lead to a big mess, wreaking havoc on a catastrophic scale.

Having them use their abilities to attract monsters in coordination was a decision they had agreed upon earlier. Zhuang Qingyan had taught them the method personally. On the way, Song Ke had promised with great confidence that she would follow the plan meticulously, being extra cautious.

Yet here she was, a skilled long-range archer, engaging in melee combat due to her inability to control the monsters.

Xu Xing was even more extreme, losing control of his powers at the slightest scare from the zombies, acting like a runaway wild horse.

Song Ke lowered her head in embarrassment, her expression sheepish. "I-I didn't mean to, I-I forgot..."

She had gotten so used to cutting off zombie heads that she forgot everything else once she swung into action.

Glancing at Zhuang Qingyan's cold gaze and expression, she suddenly had an epiphany. She jumped onto the cockpit and very doggedly reached out to support his arm. "I-I-I'll help you walk."

Zhuang Qingyan hesitated for a moment but didn't pull away.

Song Ke desperately signaled to Xu Xing, who was standing foolishly nearby. "Xiao Xing!"

Having just been lectured by Zhuang Qingyan on how to be a proper person and awed by his immense calculating abilities, Xu Xing didn't dare to pout this time. He obediently moved the wheelchair out of the cockpit.

Forget it. Men still had to rely on their strengths to speak. Next time, he definitely had to win back his dignity!

After a quick check, the three of them estimated that the transport vehicle was now filled with about four carriages' worth of materials. The interior was soundproof, and they couldn't hear a thing even when pressed against the carriage walls.

The City Hall of Luli Port was very close now. The vague outline of the building could be seen in the distance. Zhuang Qingyan put away his crutch and returned to his wheelchair. "We're almost there. Let's walk."

Song Ke hesitated, "What about this vehicle..."

She was about to ask if they were just leaving it here, not fully loaded and without automatic return capability.

Before she finished speaking, the two empty carriages actually detached from the main body of the vehicle. Four small wheels emerged from the bottom with a clatter, and in an instant, they transformed into the kind of small shopping carts used to stock goods in supermarkets. They trotted along behind them in a curious manner.

Zhuang Qingyan wasn't surprised at all. He had discovered this when manipulating the control panel earlier. "The vehicle is equipped with a small-scale artificial intelligence that possesses some autonomous decision-making ability. Don't worry about it, let's go."

As Song Ke took a couple of steps forward and turned around to look, the two carriages were right behind them. With their mechanical arms swinging and swaying, the scene was inexplicably eerie, resembling a supervisor more and more!

...

Luli Port City Hall.

Unlike the local area's natural and charming characteristics, this was a building with a forest steel style, and its industrial facade was covered with lush vegetation. Suspended in the air were dazzling corridors in various shapes, and platforms of different sizes extended freely. One could easily anticipate the complexity and diversity of the interior space.

The height of the entrance gate wasn't enough; the two compartments couldn't squeeze in. The mechanical arm automatically retracted, entering an energy-saving mode. Two small square boxes stopped temporarily at the entrance, finally no longer following them.

Song Ke paid no more attention to it and, along with Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing, entered the entire building.

As described in the assigned task, as early as September 25th, the first floor here should have been filled with zombies. However, the reality was different. After entering through the main gate, there were only a few zombies wandering in the spacious lobby.

When things deviate from the norm, there must be something amiss. Song Ke became vigilant involuntarily.

She raised her head, following the spiral staircase's ascent. The entire 6 floors of the building were demolished, and the opposite sides were beveled and cut. The top space was distorted, and the environment was extremely quiet.

"The situation isn't right, be cautious," Zhuang Qingyan warned in a deep voice.

“Got it,” Song Ke sharpened her focus, “Xiao Xing, stay close, both of us.”

Zhuang Qingyan led the way, taking the lead with the two following him upstairs. In the nearly identical corridors, they kept turning and advancing. Before long, his wheelchair stopped, “There’s someone, someone with abilities.”

Song Ke was slightly taken aback. The number of rooms here was extensive, and the layout was intricate, often obstructing spiritual exploration. She hadn’t heard any sound nor sensed any abilities. How did Zhuang Qingyan determine the presence of an awakener?

“Go this way.”

Zhuang Qingyan changed direction, leading them up to the top floor through the staircase and guiding them to a concealed small platform to look down.

Sure enough, there were people!

Only in the central open space of the fourth floor, several groups of people were confronting each other from a distance.

Compared to the mysteriously vanished zombies inside the building, the number of zombies here seemed to be more normal, but they were gathered together like trapped beasts. Song Ke’s keen eyesight noticed that one of the zombies had distinctly different symptoms. Its skin had a unique shade of blue, and its level of decay was lower than that of ordinary zombies. Its metallic-like claws were particularly sharp, and most peculiarly, its pupils weren’t gray-white but intensely dark, pure black.

Zhuang Qingyan’s expression turned serious. “A mutant zombie...”

Song Ke was startled. Mutant zombie? Weren’t those zombies created from fallen awakeners? Zhuang Qingyan had mentioned that the Alliance’s approach to dealing with such zombies was only one: execution.

In a tense atmosphere of stalemate, a man whose half body was composed of machinery took a confident step forward. His natural eye and mechanical eye turned simultaneously, presenting a rather peculiar appearance. "I say, Brother Duanmu, your family's business is vast. You might not value these low-level mutant zombies. Why not let us have them?"

Leaning by the staircase, a refined man dressed in vintage robes smiled. His voice was gentle, but his words showed no sign of backing down. "Bartel, spare us the insincere words. They sound nauseating. Our team is climbing the points leaderboard. I thought everyone knew that."

"Duanmu Qi, don't be too greedy!"

"Exactly! You've already completed most of the B-level tasks. What's left are just dirty and tiring tasks. Don't be too excessive!"

"Aren't you already in first place? Isn't 966 points enough?"

On the 6th platform, Song Ke, who had just taken on a "B-level dirty and tiring task", said: "..."

Wait a minute, she suddenly realized with a gasp, belatedly understanding: points for promotion, completion, 966... Could this be the team "Three Grandsons and One Grandpa" that's currently ranked first on the leaderboard?!

Song Ke focused her gaze and indeed, behind the man named Duanmu Qi stood three individuals, all concealed in the shadows, their faces revealing a cold and stern expression, each looking quite formidable.

"Duanmu Qi, you weren't the first to discover this unique zombie, and an A-level mission isn't something you can just take on as you wish."

An elderly man with a head full of white hair, hands behind his back, descended the staircase with a dignified tone: "Awakeners disregard human emotions. In all endeavors, the victor is king. If you want to claim these 1000 points, you should ask whether we agree."

Duanmu Qi chuckled, "I never expected even Mr. Xiang to join in on this lively event."

"Very well then. Let it be as you wish. The victor is king, and the loser is a bandit. All of you can fight for it. I'm curious to see who can take these 1000 points from me, Duanmu Qi!"

"So arrogant! Brothers, I can't stand this!"

"Let's all go together. I refuse to believe we can't defeat him!"

...

"A-level mission?" Song Ke understood the content of the dispute between the people below, and her eyes lit up suddenly.

"Sister, look," Xu Xing leaned over holding the terminal, "There is a sudden red commission in the system."

Five hours ago, on their way to Luli Port, the Ferrara Commission Center issued an emergency mission with a level of A.

"Zhang Lei, the former D-level awakener of Luli Port (D150 District), with the ability of 'Stone Gaze', has now mutated and escaped. This individual is extremely dangerous. Starting today, a nationwide hunt is underway. Once found, terminate on sight!"

This was the first A-level mission that appeared in Ferrara!

With a whole 1000 points, it was no wonder that it attracted so many awakener teams.

The atmosphere on the 4th floor was becoming more and more solidified, and a crisis was imminent.

"Since that's the case... let everyone compete based on their abilities."

Bartel, the half-mechanized one-eyed man, suddenly smirked. Taking advantage of everyone's unpreparedness, his mechanical left arm extended rapidly, stabbing straight at the mutant zombie Zhang Lei.

“Bartel! Don't you dare to play tricks!”

All the awakeners took action, and dark shadows rushed towards Zhang Lei one after another.

Just as they closed in, Duanmu Qi's robes fluttered, and countless thorns burst from the ground, tightly binding the legs of the leading awakeners. Thump thump. Like dumplings dropping into boiling water, they all fell back to the ground.

Such formidable control ability – Duanmu Qi was undoubtedly a powerful wood-type awakener!

After Duanmu Qi suppressed the situation, three individuals behind him rushed out from different angles, heading straight for Zhang Lei. They were just about to reach him when suddenly, Zhang Lei vanished on the spot, a displacement occurring in a corner opposite the group.

There was a space-type awakener on the scene!

This space-type awakener concealed their whereabouts, constantly shifting Zhang Lei's position. A change every five seconds made it difficult for anyone to predict their exact movements. Soon enough, Zhang Lei ended up right beneath Song Ke and the others.

The space-type awakener seemed to believe that this spot provided good cover for their line of sight. For a while, they refrained from further displacement.

A perfect opportunity!

‘The mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind’. Song Ke and her group, who had been observing the battle from the shadows, now became the oriole.

“Should, should we try to seize, seize it?” Song Ke asked her companions for their opinions.

Zhuang Qingyan gazed at the chaotic battle below, chuckling softly, “Of course, why not? A-level task—after completing this, you’ll be rich, won’t you?”

Yeah, I wonder how much this A-level task is worth?

All the awakeners present couldn’t help but focus on the high 1000-point score. Only Song Ke had her mind fixed on the Alliance coin reward. If she managed to seize it, would it be enough to pay back the debt she owed Xu Xing?

“Go, pay attention to the direction of 3 o’clock,” Zhuang Qingyan pointed to a certain corner, “That space-type awakener is hiding there.”

“Okay,” Song Ke nodded.

“Sister, you can do it!” Xu Xing clenched his small fist to cheer her up.

“Xiao Xing, protect him well,” Song Ke earnestly instructed.

Xu Xing: “...Oh.”

Was there a possibility that the one who needed protection was actually me?

After confirming the direction with a glance, Song Ke drew out her dual knives and leaped down from the 6th-floor platform!

Almost simultaneously, a nimble black shadow jumped down from the rooftop diagonally opposite!

There was never just one oriole lurking in the shadows.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 34.1: Bloody Ferrara (6)

This sister is so fierce

Song Ke jumped from the 6th-floor platform, and almost at the same time, a black figure flew out from the opposite direction.

Both of them met unexpectedly in mid-air and were momentarily stunned when they saw each other's faces.

Soon, they realized each other's intentions: they were both here to snatch an A-level task!

Song Ke executed a mid-air somersault and swung her long knife down towards her opponent's head. The fierce blade wind swirled aggressively, forcing the opponent to yield their position. Unexpectedly, this person was just as ruthless and intended to meet her head-on!

“Clang!” Her spiritual weapon's blade struck the opponent's arm, colliding with something similar to steel armor. The shadow absorbed the blow, inwardly rotated their forearm, and used the momentum to continue forward, maintaining their speed and even overtaking Song Ke by a step.

Song Ke wouldn't let them have their way. She immediately followed up with her short knife in her right hand, swiftly and viciously slashing upwards.

“Clang!” The piercing sound of metal scraping against metal echoed once again as the opponent narrowly dodged by tilting their body to the side. Their movements momentarily slowed, allowing Song Ke to block their escape route.

Being repeatedly stopped, the shadow seemed to grow irritated. They grabbed Song Ke's throat with their right hand and kicked her knee with their left leg, attempting to end her with a lethal blow!

Song Ke raised both knives to defend herself and agilely dodged.

However, her opponent was clearly skilled in close-quarters combat, with elusive and deadly strikes. They only attacked when they were certain to strike a lethal blow.

In terms of combat skills alone, this was the most formidable opponent Song Ke had encountered so far.

Unfortunately, they were still not a match for her.

Song Ke lowered her waist, performed a 360-degree backward flip, and kicked the shadow in the chest, pushing them back. Taking advantage of the recoil, she grabbed the collar of the zombie Zhang Lei before the space manipulator could teleport again.

Fighting was one thing, but she hadn't forgotten her true objective.

Just then, a beautiful song inexplicably echoed in Song Ke's ears.

“Let me~ accompany you to sleep~ gently withdraw my hand~”

Even more strangely, with each line of the song, her spirit grew more tired, and her desire to attack was gradually disarmed.

So tired... She wanted to rest...

Her eyelids grew heavier and her fingers loosened. In the midst of such an intense battle, she was almost falling asleep?

“Hot tears~ in my heart~ gather into a river~”

Song Ke uncontrollably shed two clear tears.

“!!!”

Why am I crying?

The black shadow who had been grappling with Song Ke suddenly flashed, and a cold light flickered at their fingertips. They wielded a gleaming dagger with a green tint, aiming for her throat. Not good! This person was just as cunning as Yang Bo; the dagger was clearly poisoned!

Song Ke raised her knife again to block, but her arm's movement was slightly slower. She felt sluggish all over and had a strong desire to lie down and take a nap. This inexplicable thought distracted her, and she was momentarily caught off guard as the black shadow severed a few strands of her hair.

In just half a minute, they exchanged dozens of moves. Meanwhile, the awakeners on the 4th-floor platform finally realized that there were intruders causing trouble.

“Damn, there are thieves!”

“They're so damn sneaky, they hid until now!”

“Stop! Don't fight each other! Take them down first!”

Seeing the imminent threat of their victory being stolen, the group grew furious, launching a barrage of powerful attacks at them.

The spatial manipulator hidden in the shadows made another move, causing Zhang Lei the zombie to teleport a few times like a bouncing ball, disappearing and reappearing in different spots.

Song Ke and the black shadow were left isolated, instantly surrounded on all sides.

“Sister!” Xu Xing clung to the railing, tiptoeing to peer down, his palms sweaty with nervousness.

Across from them, deep within the empty corridor, a soft and coquettish voice suddenly sounded.

“Friends on the opposite side, how about considering cooperation?”

Zhuang Qingyan’s wheelchair slid forward, exposing half of his handsome face to the bright overhead light.

He chuckled, “How do you propose we cooperate?”

“Hehe~” the female voice giggled sweetly, “Of course... if you all stop right now, I’ll let you go.”

In the chaotic battle below, with Song Ke surrounded and experiencing the mental disturbance caused by the mysterious singing, their situation was far from favorable.

Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped his wheelchair’s armrest, producing a rhythmic “clatter, clatter” that seemed to convey a certain special melody. He remained calm and didn’t speak for quite some time, making the waiting individuals increasingly anxious.

The woman couldn’t help but urge, “Aren’t you going to decide? Your companion doesn’t look like she’s doing well.”

Zhuang Qingyan raised an eyebrow casually and replied, “Is that so? Perhaps you should take another look.”

...

The eerie singing surrounded her from all directions, and its lingering notes, like hooks, penetrated Song Ke’s ears relentlessly. Countless supernatural ability attacks came at her, and she found herself unable to move her feet, as if she were a helpless target.

No, she couldn't continue like this.

Song Ke closed her eyes, rapidly guiding her mental power through her body, and then...

She decisively blocked off her own sense of hearing, shutting out all external sounds.

The world fell silent.

She suddenly opened her eyes, her twin knives emitting a blue brilliance, and she released them forward. It was as if she were cutting through rows of harvested wheat stubble, ruthlessly severing the thorns that emerged from the ground. When those incredibly resilient thorns touched the azure blade wind, they instantly decayed and dissipated into fragments.

At a distant staircase, Duanmu Qi took a large step back in disbelief, covering his mouth as blood trickled from the corner.

“Aqi!” His teammates abandoned their opponents and rushed back, their faces filled with worry. “How are you?”

Duanmu Qi swallowed a mouthful of blood foam, his veins throbbing with pain, his spiritual energy running rampant, and his blood surging uncontrollably.

He looked up in astonishment. “What’s that weapon she has in her hand?!”

What in the world was that thing that could so effectively suppress his ability?!

The twin blades, after clearing the area, returned to Song Ke's hands. She clanged the hilts together, merging them into a jagged and elegant saw. With one hand, she raised the large blade and executed a “Mowing the Grass” technique, swinging it roundly. The black shadow was forced back step by step, unable to get close at all, and their previous slight advantage was completely gone.

Instead, Song Ke pressed her advantage, and the broad attack range of the elegant saw was particularly effective. She swung the blade at her opponent's back, and with each strike, "crack, crack," the protective armor shattered, sending metal fragments scattering all over.

How could an ordinary "shield" withstand the power of a "blade" that could pierce through anything?

The power of metal manipulation was indeed this domineering!

...

The situation downstairs suddenly reversed, and there was a subtle shift in the negotiations on the 6th floor.

The soft female voice hadn't spoken for a while, and her shadow companion, now without the steel armor protection, probably couldn't withstand a single blow from Song Ke.

Zhuang Qingyan casually leaned against his wheelchair. "It seems like we need to reconsider the terms of our cooperation."

The soft female voice, sounding somewhat resigned, asked, "What do you want?"

"Cooperation is based on mutual benefit. I just need to make sure that what we want doesn't conflict with each other, right?"

Zhuang Qingyan remained composed and deliberate in his speech, showing no signs of urgency.

However, under Song Ke's relentless onslaught, the black shadow sustained more and more injuries, clearly unable to hold out much longer.

The soft female voice eventually couldn't hold on any longer and played her trump card first. "You can have the zombie... we just want the crystal."

Zhuang Qingyan's eyes flickered, and he smiled faintly. "Deal."

In the silent world, Song Ke was completely focused on her opponent, and her attacks grew even more fierce.

In the midst of the heated battle, she noticed a familiar ice shard in her field of vision. It circled around her twice before hovering in front of her. Song Ke instinctively looked up toward the platform where Zhuang Qingyan was.

Perhaps knowing that she couldn't hear at the moment, Zhuang Qingyan made two hand gestures they had previously communicated, indicating "prioritize capturing the target" and "withdraw quickly."

Song Ke understood and ceased her attacks on the black shadow. Her gaze swept around and quickly located the position of the zombie Zhang Lei.

The black shadow also stopped moving, his ears twitching as if he had heard something. He turned the direction of his dagger and followed Song Ke as they charged toward the crowd.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 34.2: Bloody Ferrara (6)

This sister is so fierce

Bartel managed to capture the zombie Zhang Lei amid the chaos.

He was ecstatic, and his cold mechanical arm spiraled forward, puncturing Zhang Lei's left side. Then, he stood there, one hand on his hip, and laughed heartily, "Hahaha, the A-level task is mine!"

The previously puppet-like Zhang Lei, who had been moving around unnoticed by everyone, suddenly sprang into action. His expression twisted grotesquely as he raised his head. Dark patterns on his neck bulged, and he let out a harsh roar. From the center of his pitch-black pupils, invisible ripples spread out

in all directions. Within arm's reach, all awakeners who couldn't escape in time were turned into stone statues, frozen stiff in their tracks.

This was Zhang Lei's power, the "Stone Gaze." Originally, it had the effect of immobilizing enemies who met his gaze briefly. However, after turning into a zombie, his power mutated into the even more terrifying "Petrification," with an expanded range of effect.

Two awakeners who were entangled with each other were both hit. Their bodies turned as hard as stone, and one of them happened to be standing on the edge of the railing, losing his footing and tumbling down the spiral staircase. With a loud "crash," he instantly shattered into pieces!

Bartel maintained his posture with his mechanical arm extended, and half of his original eye nervously rolled around.

It was too late; he was the closest person to Zhang Lei and couldn't escape.

"Clang!"

The fearsome zombie swung a powerful slap, knocking Bartel's head off.

"Swish, swish."

A nimble figure was swiftly approaching the scene, and the alert Zhang Lei turned his neck nervously, his nerves twitching.

Then, its entirely black pupils met Song Ke's round, unreactive eyes.

The two stared at each other for a full two seconds, during which Song Ke remained completely unfazed. She calmly swung her long-handled machete, striking Zhang Lei squarely in the face. His facial features were flattened, eye sockets caved in, and he was almost knocked out. Song Ke flicked the tip of her blade, hooking his collar, and then ran away.

The shadowy figure followed closely behind her, and just as pursuers were closing in, he released something onto the ground, causing a roaring fire to erupt, blocking the pursuing superhumans.

The two of them soared up and down, swiftly returning to the sixth floor, where they joined their waiting teammates and disappeared from view.

As the petrification effect wore off, Elder Xiang hastily ordered, "Where are they? Retrieve Zhang Lei!"

A space distortion appeared behind him, gradually revealing a blurry awakener. In a hoarse voice, he said, "The target has disappeared. I can't detect them with my mental power."

"Hmph," Elder Xiang snorted, "Then seal off all entrances; they can't escape."

A lean awakener hurried over to report, "Elder Xiang, Duanmu Qi and the others have withdrawn."

"Withdrawn? At a time like this?" Elder Xiang was slightly puzzled. Duanmu Qi had just been loudly declaring that he wouldn't give up on the A-level task, and now he had gone silent? Something was definitely not right.

Elder Xiang's sharp eagle-like gaze showed his discernment. He toyed with his jade thumb ring, then gave a stern command.

"You, go find out what happened."

"Yes, Elder."

As Elder Xiang took a few steps forward, Bartel's head was rolling towards him, and he kicked it away with a snarl, "Useless!"

...

With Zhuang Qingyan as their living navigator, Song Ke and her companions swiftly navigated the complex maze of corridors. Sometimes, what appeared to be a dead-end wall would miraculously transform into a passageway under Zhuang Qingyan's guidance.

The pursuers from behind couldn't keep up with them and quickly lost their way in the labyrinthine structure, disoriented and directionless.

After shaking off the annoying pursuers, the group reached the third floor and found a locked office. They forcefully entered the room, dumping the half-beaten zombie, Zhang Lei, onto the floor. Song Ke finally had the chance to take a closer look at the two individuals who had come with them.

First was the shadowy figure she had been battling. He was a young man, perhaps even taller than Zhuang Qingyan, with dark skin, a robust physique, and dressed entirely in black combat gear. His eyes were wild and untamed, resembling a lone wolf.

Noticing Song Ke's gaze, he responded with a cold, ruthless stare, and the greenish gleam on the blade in his hand flickered ominously. His ability likely had something to do with venom or assassination.

The other person, the mastermind behind the interference with Song Ke's combat using her singing, revealed her true appearance. Surprisingly, she was a woman with a soft appearance, likely in her mid-twenties. She had chestnut-colored voluminous wavy hair loosely tied into a ponytail, fair and smooth skin, and full, rosy lips. Even without makeup, her beauty was astonishing, and up close, she seemed to emit a radiant aura.

Song Ke was taken aback by her extraordinary beauty and couldn't help but be mesmerized.

With a slight smile, the beautiful woman gently parted her vermilion lips and smiled at Song Ke, saying, "Let's quickly divide the spoils."

Song Ke was bewildered. "Di-Divide the spoils?"

"Hey, we agreed that the zombie belongs to you, and the crystal belongs to us. Don't think about renegeing on the deal!" the beautiful woman reminded her.

“Hey, sister,” Xu Xing leaned closer and whispered to her, openly informing Song Ke of the deal Zhuang Qingyan had made behind her back. He spilled all the details about Zhuang Qingyan’s negotiation while watching him in the corner of the office. Zhuang Qingyan’s expression didn’t change, and he casually smiled when he noticed Song Ke’s gaze, showing no signs of guilt about using her as bait for their deal.

Song Ke didn’t mind. After all, she had no idea what the “crystal” they were talking about was, and she trusted that someone like Zhuang Qingyan wouldn’t let her down. In any case, it was done, so she had no objections.

Song Ke turned her attention back to the two individuals in front of her. “We won’t renege on the deal.”

“Then go ahead and deal with it, kill it,” the beautiful woman nodded towards Zhang Lei on the floor.

Upon hearing this, Xu Xing quickly hid behind Song Ke, clearly not eager to engage in such a dirty job.

Zhuang Qingyan couldn’t be counted on either. Although he didn’t hesitate to kill Wu Yarou and Yang Bo earlier, he had no intention of getting involved this time.

Song Ke seemed to be the only one left to handle the task. She gripped her cold, serrated saw, hesitated for a moment, and suddenly remembered something. “We need to, to complete the mission.”

Almost forgetting, they hadn’t completed the mission yet! How were they supposed to complete it? Did they have to bring the zombie Zhang Lei back to Ferrara, and submit it in front of everyone in the commission center? Just the thought of it was quite...

The beautiful woman chuckled and pointed to her own terminal. “It’s not that complicated. You can complete it at the terminal.”

Song Ke looked down and realized that she was right. Special assignments could be submitted remotely, but the verification process seemed quite strict. It required recording a video and scanning the biological data of the target. She wasn’t very proficient with the terminal, and in her haste, she ended up fumbling around and couldn’t figure it out. Feeling increasingly flustered, she handed it over to Zhuang Qingyan to operate.

“Stop dawdling,” the beautiful woman impatiently urged, pouting charmingly. “Su Cha.”

The young man named Su Cha walked forward, raised his hand, and swiftly slashed Zhang Lei’s neck. Zhang Lei didn’t even make a sound; his head was severed.

“Alright, hand in the task.”

Song Ke finally managed to understand the process and aimed the terminal at Zhang Lei. It automatically scanned the biological data, and after a few seconds of calculation by the artificial intelligence in the background, a prompt appeared on the screen: “Confirmed, the target is deceased, mission accomplished.”

Before Song Ke could even see how much the mission was worth in Alliance coins, the beautiful woman pressed, “Now, it belongs to us, right?”

She put down the terminal and nodded eagerly, saying, “Yes, yes!”

The beautiful woman crouched down, took Su Cha’s dagger, and swiftly thrust it into Zhang Lei’s head. With a quick motion, she pulled something out—a pure white crystal.

She wiped the crystal clean with a tissue and held it in her hand. She was about to speak when suddenly, a mournful cry echoed from the corner of the office.

“No, no... Leizi, Leizi wuwuwu!”

A woman wearing municipal hall uniform with disheveled hair rushed out. Her two colleagues couldn’t hold her back and were dragged out from behind the filing cabinet. Their faces were pallid, and they seemed mentally drained, having been trapped here for several days.

The woman stumbled and knelt on the ground, cradling Zhang Lei’s broken head. She cried out in agony, “Why did you kill him? Why did you do it!”

“He was a good person, such a good person! He worked so hard and never took a day off. He was saving up just to marry me. We were supposed to get married next month! Why, why did this happen...”

“Ahui...” one of her colleagues tried to pull her away, but she forcefully shrugged him off.

In the depths of her sorrow, Ahui continued to mutter, “Finally, Leizi became an awakener after all the hard work. We thought things would get better, but you killed him. You killed him!”

Both Liu Xiaohui and Zhang Lei worked at the municipal hall. Before Luli Port fell into the zombie apocalypse, they had been working tirelessly in the office, unable to leave when the chaos began. When they finally realized the situation, the first floor had already been overrun by zombies.

With no other choice, they hid inside the filing cabinets in the office and waited for rescue. They endured this for a whole week without any sign of help. Eventually, their water and supplies ran out. Zhang Lei, the only awakener among them and Liu Xiaohui’s fiancé, made the courageous decision to go out and divert the zombies’ attention, hoping to secure a path for the others.

On October 1st, he left the office with two male colleagues and never returned.

Liu Xiaohui remained curled up inside the filing cabinet, praying fervently to the heavens, hoping that her fiancé would return soon. However, as time passed, her consciousness began to blur, and she could no longer hold on.

Just moments ago, Liu Xiaohui had heard voices from outside the room. She thought her fiancé had returned, so she summoned the last of her strength and peeked through the door’s crack, only to witness a woman thrusting a knife into Zhang Lei’s head.

Liu Xiaohui was overwhelmed by despair. “You have to pay for this! You have to pay for Leizi!”

She seemed to descend into madness, stood up with difficulty, and stumbled toward the beautiful woman’s face. Unfortunately, she couldn’t reach her and was forcefully kicked away by the silent Su Cha, crashing heavily to the ground.

“What are you doing!” Two male colleagues rushed over, filled with grief, anger, and despair. They helped Liu Xiaohui to her feet, glaring at Su Cha and the woman.

Su Cha’s kick had been gentle, but Liu Xiaohui was already at her limit. She couldn’t stand anymore, and her emotions had completely unraveled. Tears streamed down her face as she hurled the most vicious curses at the woman who had killed Zhang Lei.

The beautiful woman listened to her curses without any change in expression. Suddenly, she exploded, “Open your eyes and see clearly. He was already a zombie!”

“I’m not a saint! What’s wrong with killing a zombie?”

“Even if it wasn’t me, there were at least thirty other people downstairs waiting to kill it. Sooner or later, it was going to die! You don’t need to stand on your moral high ground to condemn me. Since you let him out of this room, he was destined to die!”

Liu Xiaohui was drenched in a shower of verbal abuse, and she stared blankly at Zhang Lei, whose face was twisted in a grotesque manner. His inky-black pupils were nothing like a human’s.

“No... it’s not true. I don’t believe it. Leizi... Leizi...” Liu Xiaohui held Zhang Lei’s hand, crying inconsolably.

Was it true? Liu Xiaohui asked herself. Was it because they had unanimously agreed to send Zhang Lei, the only awakener, out when they needed someone to divert the zombies? Even she, his fiancée, didn’t oppose it. Hadn’t they indirectly caused Zhang Lei’s death?

The beautiful woman sighed. “I’m not the one who makes the rules. Don’t blame me. If you want to blame someone, blame this absurd world.”

Song Ke, who had been watching quietly, was impressed by the woman’s logical and cutting insults. She stared at her in awe.

The beautiful woman suddenly turned her head and glared at Song Ke. "What are you looking at? Did I say something wrong?"

Wow, this sister is so fierce.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 35.1: Bloody Ferrara (7)

You've corrupted Xiaoxing

Song Ke was scolded.

"What are you looking at? Did I say something wrong?"

The beautiful sister not only scolded her but also demanded an answer to her question.

Song Ke nodded at first but quickly realized her mistake and shook her head vigorously under the other's angry gaze.

Seeing her bewildered expression, the beautiful sister snorted coldly and turned her gaze away without causing further trouble. For a while, no one spoke in the room.

The atmosphere gradually fell silent, with occasional sobs from Liu Xiaohui and feeble attempts at comforting from her colleagues.

"Blocked at the exit," Su Cha observed as he leaned against the window, speaking with an unusual pronunciation, enunciating words strangely, and pausing as if not very familiar with the common language of the Alliance.

"Can we break through?" asked the beautiful sister.

“We can, but it will expose us,” Su Cha replied.

The beautiful sister frowned. In the chaos earlier, they had acted quickly and retreated even faster. The awakeners on the other side couldn't determine their identities without direct contact. But now, it was clear that the other side was on guard. Trying to force their way out aggressively might not be a good idea. She didn't want to expose their identities here and needed to think of another plan.

...

Song Ke pushed Zhuang Qingyan to the other side of the room, keeping a distance from the two groups of people.

“You noticed some, someone here a long time ago?” she asked quietly.

“Yeah,” Zhuang Qingyan didn't deny it. Liu Xiaohui and the others were ordinary people with no awakened abilities. It was normal for Song Ke's attention to be focused on Zhang Lei at the time. But since the office door was locked from the inside, he figured that there must be someone in the room.

After hearing his explanation, Song Ke responded belatedly, not paying too much attention. She held the cold and heavy jagged blade in her hand, considering whether to find a place to hide it.

“Song Ke,” Zhuang Qingyan called her name softly.

“Yeah?” Song Ke raised her gaze, and she had just found a good place to put the blade down. Thinking that Zhuang Qingyan wanted to have a quiet conversation, she bent over and placed the saw on the floor against the wall.

Her uneven black short hair brushed over his shoulder, causing a slight tingling sensation.

Zhuang Qingyan moved his fingertip but didn't avoid it.

“That person has the Rainforest mark on him.”

Zhuang Qingyan was referring to a young man named Su Cha.

The Rainforest, the E170 District, was the Alliance's most mysterious ecological area.

Due to its humid and hot climate, as well as its rich and diverse species, the rainforest was considered the best breeding ground for special operations personnel such as mercenaries and assassins. It was said that the methods of training combat machines in the rainforest were brutal, harsh, and even sadistic. Many standards far exceeded the limits the human body could endure. Those who could survive and carve a bloody path out of such grueling training not only possessed exceptional individual combat abilities but had also become accustomed to dancing with death. Their empathy was almost nonexistent, and their mental fortitude was far from ordinary.

The Rainforest mark mentioned by Zhuang Qingyan was located on Su Cha's nape, where there was a black serpent-like tattoo.

Recalling the details of her encounter with Su Cha, Song Ke slowly spoke, "His combat, combat skills were very strong, strong but he didn't possess any, any awakened abilities."

"You're right," Zhuang Qingyan agreed, "Su Cha's awakened ability should be related to 'poison,' possibly at B-level or higher."

Awakened abilities at B-level or higher, weren't they as formidable as individuals like An Qiwen and Wu Juemin from the Azure Phoenix army? Such people could be a real headache if they turned into enemies.

"And there's another one!" Song Ke informed Zhuang Qingyan of the recent interference by the beautiful sister's singing, which had left her feeling exhausted.

Zhuang Qingyan pondered for a moment. "It's either soundwave control or some kind of auditory awakened ability related to mysticism. Based on the current information, we can't make an accurate assessment. This person only imposed side effects on you. If her singing has an effect on her companions as well, this person... will be a real problem."

A powerful support who could debuff enemies and buff allies simultaneously?

Imagine a battle that was evenly matched at first, but as you fought, you grew weaker while your opponent became stronger. Anyone with even a slightly fragile will would easily have their fighting spirit crushed.

The beautiful sister's strength was indeed not to be underestimated.

No wonder they dared to take on missions and act as the hidden oriole among so many awakeners. However, when it came to Su Cha and his companion, there was still one thing they hadn't figured out.

Song Ke locked eyes with Zhuang Qingyan and asked another pressing question, "What are, are 'crystals'?"

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his voice, "Do you remember when I explained the cause of the apocalypse to you?"

"I do."

"Excessive solar radiation enters the human body, causing disruptions in the magnetic field and genetic mutations. Ordinary people would turn into zombies. However, if an overwhelming amount of external energy is absorbed at once and cannot be digested by the human body, it will crystallize."

Song Ke fell silent for a few seconds, then reached into a hidden pouch in her backpack and pulled out several crystals.

This was something she had dug out from Song En and other senior brothers' heads, and the one inside Zhang Lei's body should be the same thing.

Zhuang Qingyan picked up the nearly transparent crystal and examined it closely.

“Crystals are not commonly found in ordinary zombie bodies because they are subjected to overwhelming radiation. However, in the bodies of awakeners, due to previous gene fusion, there is a certain degree of resistance, and the probability of crystallization is basically above 95%.”

“It can be said that whenever an awakened zombie is encountered, there will be crystals.”

Song Ke lowered her gaze, clenched her fist silently, and felt extremely downcast.

So Song En had already awakened his abilities back then? She had encountered awakened zombies so early.

While the two were talking, Xu Xing remained quiet in the middle, his eyes moving. Although he had awakened early, his theoretical knowledge was not much different from Song Ke's. Hearing Zhuang Qingyan's explanation in a gentle tone, he didn't feel like arguing for the first time.

He hadn't expected this person, who usually pretended, to know so much. Hmph.

“What are crystals used for?” Song Ke calmed her emotions and asked.

Just thinking about where these things came from, dug out from zombie heads, sent shivers down her spine. What could they be used for that would make those two prefer them over an A-level task, no matter the cost?

“The official explanation is that crystals have a chance to trigger the awakening of abilities in ordinary people, and even allow awakeners to undergo a second evolution.”

Xu Xing's eyes widened suddenly.

Song Ke was also surprised. Awakening and evolution? How did this thing cause evolution? Did they have to eat it?

Wait a minute, Song Ke suddenly realized a blind spot in Zhuang Qingyan's words.

“What do you mean, mean by ‘official explanation’?” Did that imply the existence of unofficial and secretive methods? This was becoming more and more mysterious. Also, since awakening and evolution were both described as having a “chance,” did that mean there was a possibility of failure?

Song Ke grew more perplexed as she asked, “Do crystals really work?”

A subtle smile appeared on Zhuang Qingyan’s face. “No, this is a meticulously planned deception by the Alliance.”

“What?!” Xu Xing couldn’t help but exclaim in surprise, immediately attracting the attention of Su Cha and the beautiful woman.

Zhuang Qingyan knocked on his head, warning in a cold tone, “Shut your mouth.”

Xu Xing realized he had overreacted and covered his mouth with a small, pitiful hand.

Zhuang Qingyan placed the crystal that belonged to Song En back into Song Ke’s hand. “While there is still some residual energy within the crystal that can be activated through technological means, its structural form has solidified, and it won’t undergo a third mutation. You can think of it as a power bank that can only be charged once.”

A power bank, what a strange analogy. Song Ke stared at his smiling face, feeling extremely speechless. It turned out that the crystals were completely useless. She had said so! How could Zhuang Qingyan possibly suffer a loss? This was like using a knowledge gap to one’s advantage! How cunning.

However, she still had some uncertainty. “How do you know it’s useless?”

“Because this was originally Qingyan Institute’s research achievement, oh, it’s the one that Wu Yarou and Yang Bo wanted to steal. This achievement had ‘accidentally’ leaked before, but unfortunately, it was the incorrect part.”

“If it was incorrect, why did it circulate?”

“Because some people don’t care about right or wrong; they only pursue their interests. Most people nowadays have no idea about the true purpose of the crystals. The Alliance only needs to release a bit of information suggesting that they have materials that can promote awakening and evolution, and they can firmly control the awakeners, after all, this is a valuable strategic resource.”

“Oh,” Song Ke replied quietly for a couple of seconds but quickly asked again, “How do you know it’s incorrect?”

“Why do you have so many questions?” Zhuang Qingyan chuckled. “I’m out of explanations for today.”

He was about to tap Song Ke’s head as he did earlier, but as his arm reached halfway, he suddenly met her expressionless face. Awkwardly, he withdrew his arm, swerved, and tapped Xu Xing’s head once again.

Xu Xing exclaimed, “Hey!!”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 35.2: Bloody Ferrara (7)

You’ve corrupted Xiaoxing

Song Ke sat on the ground and took a break, suddenly remembering that she hadn’t checked the rewards for the A-level mission.

“Let’s check together!” She called out to Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing with a sense of ceremony. This was their team’s first completed mission.

Two shiny heads crowded together, along with Zhuang Qingyan lazily leaning on his wheelchair, not wanting to move. All six eyes focused on the projection screen in front of Song Ke.

On V587's mission list, there lay a shining red commission:

A-level mission (Code VA00001, status: completed): Eliminate the awakened zombie Zhang Lei,
Biological ID: LYG1301756

Points earned: 1000

Alliance credits earned: 0

Friendly reminder: Your team has entered the total ranking list for C72 District points. Would you like to make it public? (Yes/No)

Ignoring the other irrelevant information, Song Ke stared at the middle line, finding it hard to believe as she confirmed it once again.

“Alliance credits earned: 0”

Song Ke: “...”

Could someone please tell her why even B-level missions had 2000 Alliance currency, and yet a proper A-level mission had a reward of 0! She had fought so hard to reclaim the awakened zombie, and the result was 0! Who could endure this!!!

Song Ke's eyes went dull, appearing deeply affected, and the other two couldn't bear to watch.

“Sister...” Xu Xing was still trying to figure out how to console her. “It's okay, you don't have to pay me back...”

Zhuang Qingyan interrupted him, “It's not that bad. Didn't you accept a B-level mission as well?”

Song Ke's eyes regained a glimmer of hope. “Oh, right.”

At least there were still 2000 Alliance credits!

“When clearing the zombies on the first floor of the city hall, did you notice that these people resemble the publishers?” Zhuang Qingyan pointed at Liu Xiaohui and the others in the center of the room.

“I’ll go, go ask,” Song Ke stood up.

“Wait,” Zhuang Qingyan tugged at her hood. “It’s not appropriate for you to go. They are very hostile towards us right now.”

Although Song Ke didn’t personally kill Zhang Lei, they all entered the room together. Not to mention that she had casually tossed Zhang Lei’s body with a knife earlier. The way these people looked at them was filled with hatred.

“What should we do then?” Song Ke looked troubled.

“There’s someone best suited for this task,” Zhuang Qingyan replied cryptically.

“Who, who is it?” Song Ke asked.

“Who?” Xu Xing also inquired.

Then, he found that the two of them looked at him at the same time.

Xu Xing: QAQ

...

Liu Xiaohui had finally managed to regain some composure but sat in place in a dazed and absent-minded state, unable to snap out of it.

The two remaining male colleagues, physically and mentally exhausted, finally succumbed to fatigue, clutching their heads and slumping to the ground.

Just then, a boy with curly hair and big blinking eyes approached slowly.

The boy glanced at the lifeless Liu Xiaohui for a moment, then shifted his gaze to the two tired men and softly asked, "Big brothers, can I ask you a question?"

Their willingness to communicate was not strong, but considering that the person asking was an adorable child, one of the slightly plump men nodded in a somewhat more friendly manner. "Go ahead."

"Thank you, big brother!" Xu Xing blinked his innocent large eyes, looking grateful.

He lowered his head and fiddled with his terminal, displaying his task interface. "My sister and I came to Luli Port because we received this task, 'Clear the first-floor zombies at the City Hall.' Big brother, was this task issued by you? Have you been trapped here for a long time?"

Xu Xing's words were quite skillful. Firstly, he explained their reason for coming, emphasizing that they were here for a "rescue mission." Unlike the beautiful woman who often resorted to violence, they were definitely not associated with her. Secondly, after inquiring if the man was the task issuer, he added a caring message, gradually breaking down the man's psychological defenses.

Sure enough, the man's attitude softened a bit when he heard Xu Xing's words. "Yes, I posted it on the Survival Platform."

He took out his phone. Like Hua City (D99 District), the star network in Luli Port (D50 District) was also paralyzed, but there was an app called "Doomsday Self-help Platform" on his phone. It didn't require an internet connection, was universally used throughout the Alliance, updated in real time, and allowed users to exchange information and post-rescue missions.

Xu Xing compared it with his terminal and confirmed that this man was the issuer of the B-level task. However, the man's interface was noticeably different from his. It didn't display any ABCDE levels or any information about awakener teams. It was likely that the Alliance's central hub or artificial intelligence collected help requests from various regions, evaluated them, and then forwarded them to the corresponding local awakeners.

The man gazed at Xu Xing's brightly shining cartoon terminal, his eyes devoid of envy but filled with numbness. Citizens in different regions had different statuses, rights, and access to information. People in District D would never use a terminal that surpassed the local technological level unless they became awakeners.

Xu Xing turned off the projection and innocently tilted his head. "Big brother, the zombies outside have been cleared. You're safe now, and you can leave through the main entrance."

Indeed, all the zombies in the city hall had been thoroughly cleared. They could leave without much danger. As for the awakeners, as Zhuang Qingyan put it, they didn't have the time to bother with these small fries.

"Good, thank you," the man said, his spirits somewhat lifted upon hearing this news.

"Then, big brother, could you please help us confirm the completion of the mission?" Xu Xing folded his hands together, his eyes moist, wearing a pitiful expression that seemed to say, "Please."

"...Alright."

Not far away, Song Ke was momentarily speechless. She turned her head and looked at Zhuang Qingyan with an expressionless face.

"Why did you teach, teach him all this? You've corrupted Xiaoxing."

"Me? Corrupted him?" Zhuang Qingyan looked puzzled.

...

“Ahui, let’s go,” the man said, taking heavy steps towards his companions.

“No... we should take Leizi with us!” Liu Xiaohui clutched Zhang Lei’s head tightly, unwilling to let go.

“Didn’t you just hear? There are many people downstairs looking for Leizi. If we bring him along, we won’t be able to escape,” the man explained in a pained tone.

Liu Xiaohui shook her head in anguish.

Another man shouted with deep sorrow, “Ahui, you need to snap out of it! The people who died can’t come back. Don’t let Leizi sacrifice for us in vain. We need to survive!”

In the end, Liu Xiaohui was led away by the two men. They were employees here and were familiar with the labyrinthine corridors of City Hall. Soon, they disappeared into the depths of the corridor.

After these people left, two minutes later, Su Cha, who had been leaning against the wall, suddenly whispered, “Pursuers are coming.”

Song Ke released a trace of her mental power and indeed sensed numerous scattered and diverse energy signatures nearby. These awakeners were systematically searching each room, and the sounds of their approach were faintly audible from the office. In a little while, they would be close to this room.

Beautiful Sister’s expression first tightened, but then she seemed to think of something and raised her gaze towards Song Ke’s group.

“Hey, you guys across the hall! Aren’t you going to come up with a plan? How are we going to get out of here?”

The three members of V587 displayed an unexpected level of telepathy at this moment. One looked up at the sky, another looked down at the ground, and the third smiled and stared at the others, but none of them spoke.

Beautiful Sister exclaimed, "What's going on? You had all sorts of tactics when dealing with us earlier, and now you're just giving up?"

"You!" She pointed her brightly painted finger at Song Ke and then turned to Zhuang Qingyan. "And you, weren't you pretty capable just now? Don't tell me that's all you've got?"

"Sorry, provocation doesn't work on me," Zhuang Qingyan replied calmly.

Beautiful Sister: ...

Okay, you guys aren't in a hurry. It's just us who are in a hurry, right?

Feeling a bit embarrassed by her words, Song Ke took two steps forward, approached the window, and peered down. The office was about three stories high above the ground, taller than a typical building. She could manage a jump, but it was clear that Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing wouldn't be able to.

Song Ke picked up the cold jagged blade in the corner and used her eyes to ask Zhuang Qingyan if they should break the window to escape.

After pondering for a moment, Zhuang Qingyan extended his hand to her. "Give me your terminal."

Song Ke removed her needle-shaped terminal and handed it to him. After a few moments of manipulation, they waited for two or three minutes until they suddenly heard a knocking sound from outside the window.

The group immediately turned their attention toward the noise and were surprised to discover a mechanical arm!

As the electronic eye hanging from the tip of the arm noticed Song Ke's group looking at it, it excitedly shook and gestured with its metallic joints, making a beckoning motion.

It was the two transport carriages left at the entrance!

The carriages were parked right under the window in the shadow of the building, an extremely concealed location, far from all exits and unlikely to be discovered easily. A long mechanical arm extended all the way up to the third floor, gripping the window sill, then flattening out and unfolding, forming an escape slide.

Song Ke: "...” Can this even work?

Others looked at Zhuang Qingyan in shock.

“I tried sending the coordinates to it, and it calculated and built the nearest escape route automatically,” Zhuang Qingyan explained calmly, without taking undue credit.

A simple artificial intelligence possessed this level of intelligence. How terrifying must Ilya, the Lord of Ferrara City, be?

For the first time, Song Ke started to wonder about the extent of artificial intelligence development in Ferrara.

With the slide in place, the group of awakeners slid down smoothly, escaping from under the noses of the heavily guarded pursuers.

After leaving City Hall, they ran several kilometers before slowing down, making sure no one was pursuing them.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the other two. “Let’s part ways here. It’s better for both of our sides.”

Beautiful Sister raised her chin. “Of course, I have no objections.”

Their temporary cooperation was fragile, even more fragile than paper, easily broken with just a bit of moisture. Moreover, both sides were still wary of each other.

Song Ke pulled the two carriages and took a step in the direction where the transport vehicle was parked.

Coincidentally, Beautiful Sister and Su Cha also took a step in that direction.

Song Ke hesitated for a moment, then lifted her foot and took another step.

Oh! They bumped into each other again!

She immediately stared cautiously at the people in front of her. What were they up to? Why were they following her?

“Oh, are you also returning to Ferrara?” Beautiful Sister teased. She noticed Song Ke’s expression and raised an eyebrow. “Why are you looking at me like that? You don’t know me?”

She seemed somewhat surprised, her gaze shifting between Song Ke, Xu Xing, and Zhuang Qingyan. “You really don’t know me... are you visitors?”

“Who are you, must we know you?” Xu Xing couldn’t help muttering.

The beautiful sister burst out laughing, her face absolutely radiant. “No need, it’s even better if you don’t know me.”

“I’m Lin Youyou. Maybe we’ll meet again someday. Farewell.”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 36: Bloody Ferrara (8)

What’s the cheapest price?

“I thank you for your honeyed words~ your sweet words...”

Song Ke wore a deeply resentful expression, and once again, she pressed the replay button.

“I thank you for your honeyed words~”

“That’s enough,” Zhuang Qingyan couldn’t bear it any longer and reached out to press the terminal’s off button. “You’ve listened to it over a dozen times.”

Song Ke sighed.

Listening to it a dozen times still didn’t help. Why couldn’t she figure it out?

Blame herself, blame her complete lack of musical appreciation cells; she couldn’t recognize the voice that had been singing in her ear before.

How could she not be familiar with it? This song, “Thank You for Loving Me,” had been playing on a loop throughout the journey to Ferrara. The entire train compartment had calloused ears from hearing it so many times, and she almost had the lyrics memorized!

But... but Lin Youyou, wasn’t she Ferrara’s top sweet songstress?

When she shouted “I’m not a saint!” with both hands around her chest, she was incredibly fierce, with absolutely no sweetness involved!

Song Ke sighed once again.

No wonder Lin Youyou would hide in the shadows and refuse to reveal her identity, causing her idol image to crumble. This was a major taboo for idols; how disappointed her fans must be! She wondered

how the conservative Maeda Jiu would react if he saw Lin Youyou's domineering side, what expression would he make? Suddenly, she was a bit curious... Wait, no, no!

Song Ke shook her head to clear away these jumbled thoughts. The current issue was why, if Lin Youyou didn't want to reveal her identity, did she specifically tell Song Ke her name before leaving?

The heart of the beautiful sister was like a needle in the sea, completely inscrutable.

Song Ke sighed for the third time.

"Stop thinking about it. Since she dared to tell you, she must be confident that you won't reveal it. Let's go back to Ferrara and complete the mission first," Zhuang Qingyan admired her troubled expression and casually commented.

"Okay!" Song Ke patted her face, agreeing. She decided not to dwell on things she couldn't understand for now. If the other party said there would be a chance to meet again, she would ask her when they met.

They reattached the two detached carriages back to the main body and harvested some zombies nearby to fill the entire transport vehicle. Song Ke and her companions returned to the cockpit, and the artificial intelligence automatically initiated the return program. The vehicle changed its direction and sped towards Ferrara.

After another 10 hours of a long journey, they safely returned to the commission center.

The transport vehicle stopped at the entrance to the high-altitude track, and the horn on the control panel sounded "honk honk," reminding them to disembark.

Song Ke glanced back, observing the pure black metal body of the vehicle, which looked like a well-fed beast, quietly lurking in the darkness. Roughly estimating based on a capacity of 200 per carriage, this vehicle had at least 1200 zombies on board. What could be the purpose of transporting so many monsters into Ferrara City?

“Where is it going?” Song Ke turned to Zhuang Qingyan, who knew everything, and asked with confusion.

“For now, it’s unclear. The final route has been encrypted, and we don’t have permission to view it.”

Zombies, supplies, and the Throne Race Competition... Song Ke attempted to connect these clues, but her mind remained hazy.

She furrowed her brow and proposed a bold idea, “Can we follow it?”

Before Zhuang Qingyan could respond, the horn sounded twice again, and a message appeared on the screen, “Warning! You have exceeded the time limit. Please leave the cockpit immediately, or the emergency plan will be activated.”

“Warning! You have exceeded the time limit...”

Zhuang Qingyan turned off the incessantly beeping alarm system, but the cockpit continued to flicker with lights, making it hard for them to keep their eyes open.

“It seems not possible.”

The transport vehicle could travel on the high-altitude track within Ferrara City, and its speed was significantly faster than when they were wandering around in Luli Port. If they got off now, Song Ke was certain that it would disappear in the blink of an eye, and they wouldn’t be able to catch up.

Zhuang Qingyan narrowed his eyes for a moment and suddenly thought of something. “Your artifact, can you track it if it’s not nearby?”

“Within five kilometers, I can,” Song Ke nodded.

As long as she injected a bit of her spiritual energy during the transformation, she could sense the presence of the artifact within a certain range.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled, “Then it’s easy. Let’s install a tracker on it.”

“You mean...”

Leaving the artifact intentionally inside the cockpit? This way, even if the transport vehicle disappeared from their sight, Song Ke could still roughly sense its location with her spiritual power if they chased after it with all their might.

The artificial intelligence in the vehicle had no independent consciousness, so they openly discussed their plan without worrying about it eavesdropping.

After their discussion, Song Ke even placed a swallowtail dart under her seat in front of the artificial intelligence.

The artifact was composed of supernatural elements, not electronic devices, so the poor artificial intelligence remained completely unaware, continuing to beep insistently, urging them to leave.

After the three of them got off, the transport vehicle switched to high-orbit mode and accelerated with a “whoosh,” instantly disappearing into the colorful night sky.

“No rush for now. Let’s go complete the mission first,” Zhuang Qingyan suggested.

...

Song Ke entered the commission hall and found an empty self-service terminal. She scanned her captain’s awakener ID, and the backend confirmed that Team V587 had successfully completed the B-level mission, earning them 2000 Alliance coins!

B-level mission (Code VB00046): Clearing zombies on the first floor of the municipal hall in Luli Port (Completion Confirmed)

Points earned: 200

Alliance coins earned: 2000

Friendly reminder: Your team has entered the overall ranking list for C72 District. Do you want to make it public? (Yes/No)

Song Ke dismissively closed the friendly reminder and looked at Xu Xing happily. "Xiaoxing, here's your money back!"

She had money now! A total of 2000 Alliance coins!

Xu Xing shook his head. "Sister, you can keep it for now. What if we need it later? We can settle it all at once in the future."

"Oh, alright," Song Ke thought it was a good idea to keep some money on hand. "You go back and rest. We're going after the vehicle."

Xu Xing didn't respond immediately. He scuffed his foot on the floor, showing reluctance to leave. A few days ago, he was just eating, drinking, and sleeping in the hotel, which wasn't too bad. However, during this time with Song Ke, even though the process was a bit heart-pounding, it was much happier than being alone. Xu Weiguo was dead and he had no close relatives left. He and Song Ke didn't know each other in District F, their relationship was almost like that of strangers, but he couldn't explain why, he felt like sticking with her.

"Sister, can you take me with you? I won't be a nuisance," Xu Xing suddenly hugged Song Ke's arm, pleading in a childish tone.

Xu Xing was indeed quite sensible, and his courage had grown significantly since the last time they went to the food factory. Except for a brief loss of control when using his ice ability at the beginning, he had become accustomed to the influence of Zhuang Qingyan, if not intimidated by it, and he obediently did what he was asked.

Xu Xing gently shook Song Ke's arm, his dewy eyes resembling grapes soaked in water.

“Sister, pretty please, I'll be very well-behaved.”

Behind them, Zhuang Qingyan made a quiet clicking sound with his tongue, his brows furrowing in disdain.

This little white lotus was blooming again.

As expected, Song Ke completely surrendered to his soft and persuasive tactics. “Alright, alright.”

“Take a left here.”

Song Ke used her spiritual power to track the swallowtail dart, and the three of them changed direction once again. They had initially thought that the transport vehicle would take a more remote route and eventually stop in the wilderness. However, the reality was quite the opposite.

It drove all the way to the central city area, dragging six carriages filled with zombies, passing through the neon-lit Ferris wheel and the mist-shrouded skyscrapers. Finally, it stopped at the back of a magnificent theater. The marble floor tiles slowly sank, and a massive hole appeared, just enough for it to pass through. The transport vehicle slid down slowly, entering the depths below.

They entered... a theater?

Song Ke took two steps back and looked up at the building in front of her. The gray brick walls were both vintage and retro, while the exquisite reliefs were gorgeous and extravagant. The strong contrast made it hard to look away. This was Ferrara's most famous art sanctuary—the Sycara Theater.

Countless drones hovered in the sky, dancing around the venue. Thousands of cameras flashed in the dark night. The broadcasts of every concert held here could fetch a sky-high price.

Just standing at the entrance, they could hear the deafening cheers and shouts from inside.

Song Ke stepped forward to enter, but a mechanical gate stopped her. An electronic eye scanned her face and displayed a "Recognition Failed" prompt.

A staff member in a tailcoat approached, took off his hat, and elegantly greeted them. "Good evening, my dear ladies and gentlemen. Are you here to watch tonight's preliminary round?"

"What round?" Song Ke asked.

"The Throne Race Competition, Round 162 Preliminaries. Do you have any preferred contestants or teams that you support? I can distribute support gifts for you."

"No, we don't."

Throne Race Competition? Song Ke looked at the man behind her, and whether it was the popular favorite contestants projected on the walls or the posters scattered on the ground, they all indicated that a fierce competition was taking place inside.

"No favorite contestants? Are you here to experience the atmosphere in person then? That's indeed a wise choice!"

"Even though the terminal is quite realistic, it can't compare to the experience of being here in person. Although the ticket prices are higher, you can see that we have more than ten thousand tracking projection devices. Every detail is crystal clear."

"I guarantee that tonight, you won't regret it."

The man's tone fluctuated, and his smile remained at the same angle, making it quite eerie.

"Song Ke, it's an artificial intelligence," Zhuang Qingyan suddenly said.

Song Ke looked back at the staff member, who seemed immune to the words “artificial intelligence” and maintained an impeccable smile.

Since they were already here, it didn’t seem right not to go inside.

“How much are the tickets?” Song Ke asked nervously.

The staff member replied, “We have the most luxurious and immersive Hoverball tickets, allowing you to get up close to the center of the arena. Today’s special price is only 2888 coins. We also have VIP box seats for 1888 coins, offering excellent views of the entire arena. Which one would you like?”

“What’s the... cheapest price,” Song Ke pursed her lips and tightly held her terminal.

The staff member’s smile disappeared, and his exaggerated tone turned into a lifeless straight line. “Standing platform tickets, 800 coins per person.”

Song Ke was about to speak when he added, “Sorry, no discounts.”

“...”

800 coins per person, which meant 2400 for the three of them.

Song Ke, who had just received 2000 coins, said, “...”

She was so broke, really.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 37: Bloody Ferrara (9)

Luo Qinghe!!! I’m your dog!!

2000 Alliance coins, of course, were not enough for three people to enter. Xu Xing, understanding the situation well, stepped forward and made it clear that he was the one who insisted on coming along, so he could be “self-reliant” and cover his own ticket money. Song Ke, a dignified team captain, avoided the embarrassing situation of not having enough money, and the three of them were able to enter smoothly.

Walking along a dim and narrow corridor, about five or six minutes later, their view suddenly became bright and spacious. Stepping onto the stands, they were hit by a wave of heat and a deafening roar of the crowd, like a surging tide, almost knocking them over.

Surprisingly, the interior of the Sycara Theater did not follow a typical stage design but resembled an ancient arena from the old civilization. It was wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, with a sunken area at the bottom several tens of meters deep, surrounded by five-story-high horseshoe-shaped tiers. Regardless of where they stood, they had an unobstructed view of the events below.

It seemed to be halftime now, as the arena floor was empty, but the stands were packed to capacity, filled with people.

The three of them squeezed their way into the crowd, Xu Xing’s face contorted from the effort, and Zhuang Qingyan’s wheelchair had almost no space to maneuver. While the surrounding audience was lively and animated, Song Ke’s nose seemed to detect a lingering, inescapable smell of blood.

After a while, a spotlight descended from above the theater, and tiny points of light converged to reveal a handsome man in a cyan robe, holding a jade flute.

His sleeves moved without the wind, and his raven-like long eyelashes slowly opened, a faintly aloof smile gracing his lips. “Hello, everyone. The second round of tonight’s preliminary competition is about to begin. I am the special guest for this match, Luo Qinghe.”

The audience erupted in enthusiastic cheers, especially from the female spectators.

“Luo Qinghe!!! I’m your dog!!!”

Not far from Song Ke, a piercing scream echoed.

Song Ke almost lost her balance and her jaw dropped as she turned to see Crazy Chihori, whom she had crossed paths with once before, squeezed into Luo Qinghe's fan group. She was flushed with excitement, shouting with all her might and gazing at the figure under the spotlight with an infatuated expression.

Luo Qinghe smiled gracefully, pulling out an ancient scroll from his long sleeves and unfolding it with elegant movements.

“Next up is ‘Atu and Ashui,’ a team of two. They are not only teammates but also lovers who depend on each other through life and death. Let's look forward to their debut. You, the audience, can vote for them through the terminals to support your favorite team. As long as they successfully complete the challenge and have a popular vote rate of 60%, they can advance to the next round of the main competition.”

He spoke calmly and unhurriedly, with a voice as clear as a mountain spring, exuding a refined and cultured aura, resembling a noble young man.

The female fan group, led by Crazy Chihori, once again erupted in cheers.

“Woohoo!! My Qinghe is so handsome!”

“Such a high-class Qinghe should be matched with a low-class me!”

Song Ke: “???”

In the center of the arena, a pure white platform slowly rose from the ground, and a young man and woman dressed in bright red and blue combat suits stood on it, full of confidence. They waved to the audience with cheerful smiles.

The two of them took their positions on the arena, and Atu playfully made a “peace” sign towards a nearby drone, and his smiling face appeared on the floating projection. It looked like they were on vacation, and laughter resounded from all directions, mixed with slight jeers.

“Alright then, let the game begin,” Luo Qinghe said calmly as he closed the scroll.

As his voice fell, the iron barriers on both sides of the arena slowly opened. Following that, there came a rumbling of footsteps and a deep growling from underground, getting closer and closer. In the next moment—almost a hundred zombies surged out!

The enthusiasm of the audience was instantly ignited, and they stood up, raising their arms and cheering loudly.

Song Ke’s eyes widened slightly, looking over in disbelief. This so-called preliminary competition was actually a battle against zombies?

She exchanged a glance with Zhuang Qingyan, realizing that the zombies... were the “excellent nutrition” for this event.

The abilities of the two participants on the field were quite unique. Atu possessed the power of mirror teleportation, allowing him to suck zombies into a separate space, while Ashui had the ability of self-replication. For every zombie Atu sucked, she released a duplicate to fight inside the mirror.

The two of them coordinated seamlessly, continually circling the edge of the arena and adopting a strategy of taking out the zombies one by one. In no time, the arena was filled with their mirrors and clones, maneuvering the zombies in circles.

The battle raged on, and Luo Qinghe’s melodious voice resonated once again.

“The performance of the two contestants is outstanding. Let’s see the audience support rate...”

The drone cut to a close-up, and Atu and Ashui’s support rate had already skyrocketed to 43%.

Song Ke also noticed the “0 Distance” hoverballs, which cost 2888 Alliance coins to ride. They were floating alongside numerous drones and balloons, sometimes kicked by running zombies, and sometimes colliding with the mirrors and changing direction. Inside, people tumbled around excitedly, faces flushed with exhilaration, vigorously waving their arms.

···So, this was the “immersive” experience? The hobbies of the wealthy were indeed unique.

The good times didn’t last long. When only one-third of the zombies remained, Atu and Ashui’s coordination showed a flaw. Perhaps they had released too many clones, or maybe the remaining zombies had become more difficult to deal with. In one of the mirrors, Ashui’s attack exposed a vulnerability and was instantly seized by a fierce zombie, brutally torn in half!

Atu’s mirror shattered in an instant, and the zombies from the independent space rushed out, frantically chasing the remaining clones.

“What are they doing? Get rid of it quickly!”

“Don’t just stand there in a daze! Move!”

“Do they have any on-the-spot reactions?!”

The audience shouted in dissatisfaction, cursing and some even took off their shoes to throw them into the center of the arena, but they were mercilessly stopped by patrolling security robots.

However, the situation continued to worsen. After the first zombie ran out, Atu and Ashui’s rhythm was completely disrupted. The two were in a state of chaos, and Ashui’s duplicates were diminishing rapidly. Finally, another zombie leaped out of the mirror and bit down on the real Ashui’s neck.

Blood splattered everywhere!

Atu’s eyes were filled with despair as he rushed forward for a few steps and then abruptly stopped.

Losing Ashui's means of attack, he was merely a pure support, and what use could he be? Soon, he would also become a victim of these monsters.

"Forfeit, I forfeit!" Atu shouted desperately, then fled in a terrified scramble.

As he saw the zombies closing in on him, he unexpectedly dove into his own mirror, leaving Ashui, who was still struggling, behind. With a few quick shifts, he escaped to the other corner of the arena. Faced with imminent danger, Atu's instinct for self-preservation was laid bare for all to see.

The audience immediately erupted in thunderous boos from the stands.

"Atu, what kind of man are you?"

"You're garbage! I even voted for you!"

"Give me a refund! I want a refund!"

Unfortunately, Atu was still saved. The mechanical arms responsible for maintaining order acted promptly and drove the remaining zombies back underground.

"Challenge failed."

The large gray letters appeared on the floating screen, and the team's light for "Atu and Ashui" dimmed. The posters of the participants around the arena were ruthlessly taken down.

"Sigh..."

Sighs filled the venue.

“It’s a pity, they couldn’t make it through the preliminary round in the end,” Luo Qinghe said with a faint smile. “The next match will begin in ten minutes, and before that, we have prepared a fantastic halftime performance for everyone.”

A dazzling AI band descended from the sky, igniting the atmosphere with energetic drumbeats, deep bass, and explosive electric guitar sounds.

“It’s the Rainbow Band!”

“I love their nostalgic heavy metal style.”

The audience, who had just been sighing and lamenting, immediately got excited again, swaying and headbanging to the intense rhythm.

Xu Xing had long hidden behind Song Ke when Ashui was being bitten, covering his eyes and refusing to watch.

Meanwhile, Song Ke, despite being in the midst of the noisy arena, felt a coldness in her heart.

Fighting against zombies should have been a means of self-preservation in a post-apocalyptic world, but in Ferrara, in the Sycara Theater that claimed to be a temple of art and freedom, hunting had turned into a frenzied catharsis.

Song Ke didn’t really sympathize with the zombies. If it were her in the arena, she would have acted without hesitation. However, being watched by so many people was a surreal experience. Could killing really stimulate people’s desires? Why were some so passionate about blood and violence?

Why did Ferrara organize events like this?

“Do you still want to watch?” Zhuang Qingyan frowned and asked loudly.

He wasn't unable to watch; it was just that the platform was too crowded, and even the air wasn't flowing properly. Zhuang Qingyan had endured it for a long time, enduring until the match was over. When the people next to him were about to take off their shoes, he couldn't bear it any longer.

"Let's go."

Since none of their companions had the desire to continue watching, Song Ke also found out where the zombies were heading and prepared to leave first.

She gripped the wheelchair handles and struggled to make her way through the crowd.

Approaching the exit, she happened to overhear two men talking in the corridor.

"Old Zhang, why do you have that expression again? Did you lose another bet?"

"Don't mention it. I was pretty confident in Atu initially and bet a few tickets. Now they're all down the drain!"

"How much did you lose this time?"

Old Zhang shook his head without revealing the amount, saying stubbornly, "Fortunately, the odds weren't high; otherwise, I would have lost everything."

His friend chuckled, "I told you your information wasn't up to par, didn't I? Atu and Ashui can barely handle a C-level mission. They came to participate in the Throne Race, isn't it just to feed the zombies? You still went and bet; you deserve to be a losing bettor."

"I know, but I thought maybe he could have a breakthrough. After all, as long as they pass the preliminary round, they can earn 50,000 alliance coins and 100 points. Who among those awakeners doesn't want points?"

"True, but two D-level are still a bit of a stretch."

“Thankfully, the competition requires participants to be D-level or higher; otherwise, there would be too many dull matches!”

Song Ke’s footsteps halted between the two men, and she asked incredulously, “Ho-how much money?”

Old Zhang and his friend’s conversation was interrupted, and they both turned to look at her.

“50,000 Alliance coins and 100 points? It’s all in the registration rules.”

Song Ke, who had just lost a large sum of money, instantly had sparkles in her eyes.

50,000 Alliance coins! That’s a lot of money! Not only could it clear her debt to Xiaoxing in one go, but there would still be 40,000 left over! If she were to take on missions, it might take her a long time to save up that amount, but now, by just passing the preliminary round, she could get it for free! Who wouldn’t be tempted by that?

Song Ke’s wide sparkling eyes was easy to understand.

Old Zhang stopped his conversation and scrutinized her, “Little girl, do you also want to participate?”

Song Ke hesitated. She didn’t particularly enjoy the atmosphere of slaughter in the Throne Race, but earning money was currently her top priority. During her time in Ferrara, she had realized that being broke was a major obstacle to her every move.

“Are you an awakener? Are you atleast a D-level?”

Song Ke shook her head. She still didn’t know!

Old Zhang interpreted her headshake as a negative response and, perhaps still irritable from losing money, sneered, "I've watched over a hundred preliminary matches, and someone like you wouldn't last a hundred seconds up there."

"When the zombie chops you, it's just like chopping vegetables."

"Are you planning to perform a one-second surrender for the audience?"

Beside them, Xu Xing couldn't help but burst into laughter.

Who was chopping whom? This guy was so confident.

His friend patted Old Zhang on the shoulder and, with an apologetic smile to Song Ke, said, "Sorry, sorry, please don't mind him. He's just irritated from losing money."

Then, he turned to Old Zhang, "Why don't you pipe down? You've watched over a hundred matches, how many times have you actually hit the mark? Not even once!"

Old Zhang, exposed in public, raised his voice, "How have I never hit it? Don't talk nonsense, I... I..."

"I don't believe it. If even someone like her can make it to the main event, then in the next round, no, in every future round, I'll bet my entire fortune on her. I promise to follow through!"

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 38: Bloody Ferrara (10)

Song Ke's Level

After leaving the Sycara Theater, the three of them found a long bench and sat down to discuss the rules of the Throne Race Competition.

Zhuang Qingyan stared at the huge projection screen at the entrance of the theater and calmly recited the registration details displayed on it:

“Applicants must meet the following conditions simultaneously: first, possess a D-level or higher ability officially certified by the Alliance; second, abide by Ferrara’s laws with no criminal record; third, be in good physical health with stable vital signs...”

“The total prize pool for this competition exceeds 10 million, and the champion team will receive 5 million Alliance coins and 1000 commission points. In addition, all teams that pass the preliminary rounds will receive 50,000 Alliance coins and 100 commission points.”

1000 commission points were almost equivalent to an A-level commission! Just thinking about how Song Ke and the others had to go through so much trouble to kill the zombie Zhang Lei from the hands of so many awakeners in Luli Port, they knew how difficult A-level missions were.

And then there were 5 million Alliance coins, which was an enormous amount of money, almost too much to count! Of course, winning the championship was still too far off for them, but as long as they passed the preliminaries, they could earn 50,000 for free! Was the official in Ferrara’s District C really that wealthy?

“Are you planning to register?” Zhuang Qingyan always seemed to grasp her thoughts immediately. “Why? Do you really want to bet against that guy just now?”

Of course not! Song Ke explained earnestly, “I want to, to make money.”

She and Zhuang Qingyan would be staying in Ferrara for a while, and they would have to spend money on food and drink. They couldn’t keep relying on Xu Xing. In the past, their life in District F was poor, and their material desires were low. Song Ke’s understanding of money had always been vague since childhood. Now that she was out in society, she realized how important money was!

“Sister, I support you!” Xu Xing clenched his little fists and cheered her on with sparkling eyes. He knew how formidable Song Ke was. When Song Ke used those artifacts from the old civilization, it was a pure visual delight. One move, one zombie; it was beyond cool!

Hmm, let that old man see how amazing his sister is.

He could also place a few bets and make some pocket money... after all, choosing his sister would definitely not result in a loss.

As Xu Xing's thoughts wandered, he truly lived up to being Xu Weiguo's son, with a sense of venture at such a young age.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the two eager individuals in front of him and a light smile crept onto his lips.

“Have you forgotten something? Song Ke's ability level hasn't been revealed yet.”

Oh right! Song Ke suddenly remembered. It was supposed to take three working days, and Xu Xing was one day behind her. It was normal that he hadn't received the results yet. But she was about to enter the fourth day; had it taken too long?

She was about to open the system to check again when her terminal suddenly beeped.

Huh, this terminal was brand new, and apart from Xu Xing, there was no one else in her contacts.

Who would be contacting her at this time?

Song Ke answered the call, puzzled, and a loud voice came through immediately, “Hello! We are the marketing department of Century Consortium. Would you be interested in sponsorship? In the early stages, we are primarily focusing on the logo for the team uniforms...”

“Sponsorship?” Song Ke thought it might be some new type of scam and cleverly hung up.

“Beep beep.” Just as she ended the call, the terminal beeped again with a notification.

Song Ke picked it up once more.

“This is the Soaring Dragon Awakeners Club. May I ask if you are interested in joining us? Currently, we have three teams that have made it to the main competition...”

Awakeners club? Is there such a thing? But why are they looking for her?

“Beep beep—beep beep—” The terminal rang for the third time.

What’s going on? It suddenly got so lively.

“Wait a moment,” Song Ke cut off this call and answered the third one.

A pleasant electronic voice greeted her first, “Ferrara Arts and G*mbing reminds you to g*mble for happiness and bet sensibly.”

As soon as the call connected, the person on the other side cleared their throat and then lowered their voice, asking in a hushed tone, “Do you play in rigged matches?”

Song Ke: “???”

She pressed the disconnect button without a word, and the terminal continued to ring incessantly.

Song Ke directly disabled the calling function.

The world became quiet.

The next moment, Xu Xing’s terminal also rang, with an equally unfamiliar caller.

“No, don’t answer!” Song Ke, like a startled bird, stared wide-eyed, “It’s a scam!”

“Okay!” Xu Xing followed her example and turned off the communication.

Zhuang Qingyan chuckled softly, “It probably isn’t a scam.”

Both of them looked at him curiously.

“I guess... it’s about your ability levels coming out.”

And it wasn’t low, which was why all these people were rushing over like bees smelling honey.

Song Ke was puzzled, “My level, I, I still don’t know it.”

Zhuang Qingyan pointed to her stylish terminal, “Since Ferrara’s Awakener Base has external commercial interests involved, some probably knows your ability level earlier than you do. It’s not that surprising.”

While they were talking, a notification popped up on the terminal.

This time, it wasn’t some inexplicable nuisance call. Song Ke clicked on it and indeed found her abilities registration information.

Name: Song Ke (Bio Id: VUL7700523)

Ability Level: A-level

Ability Type: Psychic – Metal – High Offensive – Object Transformation

Ability Potential: 30%

Team: V587 (Registration Location: C72 District)

Song Ke looked at the result and couldn't help but smile, a small dimple appearing on her cheek.

So, she was an A-level awakener, just like Wu Juemin! That's great; she was even more eager to spar with him now.

"Sister, my level has also come out."

Xu Xing raised his cartoonish terminal high and proudly showed it to her.

Name: Xu Xing (Bio Id: F177104910)

Ability Level: B-level

Ability Type: Psychic – Ice – High Offensive – Hexagonal Ice Blades

Ability Potential: 90%

Team: V587 (Registration Location: C72 District)

The two of them were like children exchanging gifts, their heads close together as they showered each other with praise.

"Sister, you're amazing, you're A-level!"

"Xiaoxing, your potential is high, you'll reach A-level in the future too."

"Hehe," Xu Xing chuckled goofily.

“Song Ke, let me see your terminal,” Zhuang Qingyan said from the side.

“Okay,” Song Ke handed him the stylish terminal.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his gaze and started scrolling through the registration information displayed on the screen for Song Ke.

Before the apocalypse, the military controlled the affiliation of awakeners who joined the Azure Phoenix, while the remaining ones were under the unified jurisdiction of the Alliance’s Special Abilities Division. Therefore, the Alliance established awakeners bases in major cities, and the machines used to determine an awakener’s level were independently developed by Qinglan, with the core computing hub stored in District A. All information about awakeners would be archived there and then directly sent back to various regions, without any possibility of tampering.

At first glance, Song Ke’s level result seemed very normal—an A-level awakener, an extremely formidable presence wherever she went. However, Zhuang Qingyan had seen many A-level awakeners before. If he were to pick any of them to go one-on-one against Song Ke, he was confident that Song Ke wouldn’t lose to any of them, and he could even say that she would dominate them all.

Moreover, her ability potential was only 30%. If Xu Xing’s high potential of 90% could be attributed to his young age, it became even stranger. Song Ke wasn’t that old either, and her 30% potential value seemed more like a deliberate means of balance, as if they wanted to keep her pinned at the A-level, never allowing her to advance.

At least in Ferrara, they didn’t want her to be so dazzling.

Interesting, Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes narrowed slightly. Whether Song Ke was truly an A-level wasn’t easy to determine, but his interest had been piqued.

Don’t forget, this city is ruled by top-tier artificial intelligence.

...

Since they had decided to participate in the Throne Race Competition, Song Ke found the registration point according to the address on the poster. They were received by a cute-looking robot that was clearly a member of the staff.

Ferrara truly lived up to being a city ruled by artificial intelligence, as AI figures were frequently seen in various work positions.

“Are you registering as an individual or a team?”

“What’s the difference?”

“This competition recommends registering as a team. Only individual challenges are accepted in the preliminary rounds, and for the main competition, you must participate as a team. Teams that register during the preliminary round and make it to the main competition can retain their original team configuration.”

Song Ke raised a question, “What if an, an indivi, individual makes it to the main, main competition?”

“After the preliminary rounds, all individual participants will be randomly matched to form teams.”

Ah? If she gets matched with strong teammates, that’s fine, but what if she ends up with incompetent teammates? Wouldn’t that drag her down and lead to elimination? Moreover, with no prior teamwork, there would likely be flaws in their coordination, just like when she and Xu Xing first started.

Song Ke couldn’t make up her mind for a moment.

Currently, V587 had three members. Zhuang Qingyan had a leg injury, Xu Xing was timid, and his ability control was poor. It was simply unrealistic for them to participate in the preliminary rounds. Besides, Song Ke considered herself the team captain, and such physically demanding work should fall to her.

After some thought, Song Ke asked again, “If, if a team makes it to the main, main competition, can they add, add more members?”

“Yes, but each team has a maximum limit of five members.”

Most awakeners wouldn't do this, 'I worked so hard to make it into the main competition. Are you trying to take advantage of my hard-earned victory?' However, Song Ke used this time to search for teammates. Perhaps by watching a few matches, she could find some good individual players and invite them to join her team.

Song Ke shared her decision with the robot. The robot seemed to hesitate for a moment.

“You want to register as a team, but only one person for the qualifiers?”

“Yes,” Song Ke confirmed.

The artificial intelligence stared at her for two seconds as if she were foolish.

“In team mode, with a minimum of two people, you'll be facing a hundred zombies.”

“Okay.”

“...Please present your awakener certificate.”

Song Ke transmitted her freshly acquired awakener information to it.

The robot performed a series of actions in its system. “Please complete the pre-match physical examination first.”

Song Ke followed its instructions and underwent a simple physical examination.

The robot made another series of actions.

“Congratulations, you are registered.”

Song Ke’s terminal prompted her: “Congratulations, you have become a participant in the 178th round of the Throne Race Qualifiers. Your match will begin in two days at 21:00. Please report 30 minutes in advance, or it will be considered a waiver of qualification.”

The qualifiers had been running for half a month, and even if she registered on the same day, she might have to wait for several days to compete. Waiting for two days wasn’t bad at all for Song Ke.

...

Back at the hotel, Xu Xing was still a child and had been tired for several days. One moment he had vowed to accompany his sister, and the next, he was fast asleep as soon as he touched the pillow. Only Zhuang Qingyan and Song Ke remained to discuss the qualifiers.

“A hundred zombies, siege mode. You not only have to clear the field but also gain support from the audience to get their votes.”

“Clearing the field won’t be a problem for you, but controlling the audience’s support rate is tricky. Some players can easily kill zombies, but if their popularity isn’t high enough, they can’t advance.”

Song Ke considered herself average and couldn’t charm the audience like Atu did today. What if she worked hard to kill zombies but got eliminated because of insufficient support? She would lose those 50,000 Alliance coins!

Zhuang Qingyan gestured for her not to worry. “I’ve watched past match recordings, and there are three situations where the audience’s support rate is generally high.”

“The first is when awakeners have a high level and great fame, with a strong fan base before the match. For example, ‘Three Grandsons and One Grandfather’ had a support rate of over 90% because they were ranked first in the Ferrara region’s total points leaderboard.”

“The second is when contestants have a strong topic or controversy. For instance, in the 82nd round, a female contestant wore revealing clothing, and her support rate reached 71%. In the 105th round, a male contestant wore only shorts, while the rest were masked, and his support rate was 68%. Well... you could say they courted attention, and although there were criticisms, the results were surprisingly good.”

“No!” Song Ke shivered and vehemently shook her head.

Zhuang Qingyan’s tone slowed down. “As for the third type, the bloodier and more violent the scene of slaughtering zombies, the more intense the atmosphere on-site, and the higher the support rate.”

Song Ke furrowed her brow; she didn’t want to slaughter zombies for the sake of performance. She preferred to deal with them swiftly and decisively.

Zhuang Qingyan paused for a moment and then continued, “But according to my speculation, there should be a fourth situation.”

“What?” Song Ke asked quickly.

“People have a desire to peek, and if an awakener can, under everyone’s watchful eyes, use methods unknown to them to swiftly dispatch all the zombies, their curiosity remains unsatisfied, and it gnaws at them. Such a player, even if their vote count isn’t high, the audience will undoubtedly send them to the main competition to satisfy their curiosity.”

Zhuang Qingyan emphasized, “So, what you need to achieve is a sense of mystery.”

To bypass the eyes of countless spectators, drones, and cameras on-site and maintain an air of mystery?

Song Ke contemplated.

“How about it? Have you figured out which spiritual weapon to use?” Zhuang Qingyan asked.

Song Ke nodded, her palm subtly moving, conjuring a familiar spiritual weapon.

“This one.”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 39 – Bloody Ferrara (11)

Who cast that stupid vote?

Two days later, the Throne Race 178th round of qualifiers proceeded as scheduled.

This round of matches was scheduled for 9:00 PM, and before that, three participants had consecutively faced defeat. The patience of the live audience had worn thin. They cursed and complained, and the stands resounded with boos. The atmosphere was not particularly pleasant.

Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing chose to watch the live broadcast from their hotel rather than attend the event. The reasons Zhuang Qingyan didn't attend were simple: firstly, Song Ke had run out of money, and they couldn't even afford the cheapest tickets, priced at 400 Alliance coins; secondly, he had a severe case of germophobia and couldn't tolerate the noisy and crowded environment of the stands.

Since Zhuang Qingyan didn't go, Xu Xing certainly wouldn't go alone. Both of them lay comfortably on the luxurious sofa in the viewing room, with plenty of food and drinks at hand, enjoying the match.

It had to be said that Xu Xing knew how to indulge himself. The seven-star hotel they had booked provided a holographic display with a stunning 24k resolution, and it even offered multi-angle broadcasts, making the experience nearly as good as being there in person.

At the Sycara Theater.

After a brief intermission, a lively young girl with twin ponytails and orange glitter eyeshadow appeared in the center of the arena.

“Hello, everyone! It’s been a while, did you miss me?”

“Yulica!!” The previously gloomy atmosphere in the audience instantly lifted, replaced by enthusiastic cheers.

Yulica, one of Ferrara’s top ten super rookies, was a virtual idol on the same level as Luo Qinghe. However, their styles were markedly different. Yulica was lively and cheerful, attracting mainly young fans.

“I heard your voices! It seems like everyone is still full of enthusiasm~ Now, let me take a look at the next participating team. Huh? They’re called V587. It’s a team but there’s only one contestant coming on stage!”

“Quite bold, isn’t she? Let’s welcome her to the stage!”

The audience fell momentarily silent, and then discussions and doubts erupted one after another.

“What? Did I hear that right? 1 vs. 100? Am I going crazy, or is she?”

“Another one here to make a joke; there won’t be a single decent match tonight!”

“Alright! Saves me the trouble of voting.”

Outside the screen, Xu Xing bit onto the juice straw and vigorously waved his small fist.

“Sister, go for it!” He had cast a whopping 1000 votes!

Zhuang Qingyan didn’t say anything but had a faint smile at the corner of his mouth. Those who mistook a lion for a kitten were soon going to pay the price.

The stage gradually rose, and a slender figure appeared before the crowd.

Song Ke stood quietly, with a peculiarly shaped, enormous silver umbrella by her side.

In a five-story VIP box, a man with ice-blue eyes exclaimed, "Huh, what is she holding?"

"A weapon-type ability?" the man mumbled to himself, stroking his chin.

Behind him, another young man with a tear mole at the corner of his eye and striking looks was slumped in his seat, tiredly yawning, "What's so interesting about these regional matches? It's only because of you that we're here. When are we heading back to Erjia?"

...

In an apartment located a dozen kilometers away from the Sycara Theater, a slim man who was watching the match through a terminal looked slightly bewildered but quickly stood up. "Aqi, come and see this!"

Duanmu Qi emerged from his room, still displaying an imperceptible pallor on his face. His gaze focused on the delicate girl on the screen, and his eyes narrowed. "...It's her."

After Song Ke took the stage, the murmurs in the audience grew louder, and suspicions arose. Yulica quickly appeared, gesturing for everyone to quiet down. She then energetically raised the microphone and announced, "Let the challenge begin!"

The barriers on both sides opened, and a total of 100 zombies poured into the arena from all directions, converging on the sole human figure.

Zhuang Qingyan and Xu Xing, watching the clear projection, saw Song Ke standing calmly in place, slowly raising the weaponized umbrella in her hand.

The iron umbrella, which could cover the sky, opened with a "whoosh," completely shielding her.

A silver flash streaked by.

The audience members who had tried to widen their eyes to see clearly were blinded by the intense light, temporarily losing their vision for a few seconds.

A nearby drone immediately changed its direction and flew towards her, attempting to capture a close-up angle.

Song Ke twisted the handle, and the eight umbrella ribs extended by a section, blocking the view once again.

What happened under the umbrella was unclear to the onlookers, who could only hear the sound of blades cutting through flesh through the amplification devices.

“Clang, clang, clang!” Like chopping vegetables, one after another, the zombies pounced, only to be sent spiraling and flying away, motionless on the ground, lifeless.

What a swift clearing speed!

In the audience seats, numerous people anxiously stood up, craning their necks to get a better look.

“Damn, can’t see anything!”

“Director, what are you doing? Can’t you change the angle?”

“Hurry up, the zombies are about to be wiped out!”

The drones and cameras skimmed the ground, attempting to break through from every direction, but it seemed the silver umbrella had eyes on its back. It defended flawlessly from every angle, and no matter how they circled, they couldn’t capture what was happening under the umbrella.

The wealthy individuals who had spent a fortune on hoverball tickets became the most frustrated people in the entire arena. Their view was even worse than that of the regular spectators. They were either blocked by the dense crowd of zombies or could only see a ring of silver umbrella edges.

This 2888 credits spent were utterly unsatisfying; it was a complete waste!

The silver iron umbrella resembled a rolling mushroom as it swept through the encircling horde, continuously shooting and knocking down the approaching zombies. However, whether it was the live audience or the viewers in front of the terminals, not a single person could figure out how Song Ke was doing it.

How was she killing the zombies? What was happening under the umbrella?

No way, nothing is visible at all!

God, this is so frustrating!

“Dammit, I’m not watching this anymore!”

“Is this person doing it on purpose? Who does this?”

“Give me a refund!”

Some people grumbled and demanded refunds with their mouths, but their bodies were honest, taking another step forward and squeezing to get a better look. They were unwilling to give up, refusing to believe that they couldn’t see anything at all.

On the high-altitude floating screen, V587’s support rate was slowly rising: 53%... 56%... 59%... It finally settled at 59% and remained unchanged for several seconds. Then, just like numerous disgruntled spectators, suddenly, the number jumped up to 61%!

She crossed the threshold!

After Song Ke dispatched the last zombie, she cleaned her short sword, sheathed it back into the umbrella handle, and snapped the umbrella shut. The umbrella tip pointed downward, and dark, tainted blood continuously dripped.

The arena was now littered with corpses, and she stood alone, like a silent reaper.

The venue fell silent for a moment, only to erupt when the “Challenge Successful” notification sounded. Everyone finally realized what had happened – they hadn’t seen anything, but this person had advanced? The audience was furious.

“Is this a joke? Who cast that stupid vote?”

“Refund! Give us our money back!”

“I paid to watch nothing!”

Yulica shouted loudly, “Quiet! Quiet!” several times but still couldn’t calm the restless audience.

Just when the situation was about to spiral out of control, three deep bell tolls rang out, and a spotlight shone down from above the Sycara Theater. Then, a figure with radiant golden hair appeared once again.

“I... Ilya.”

The irritable audience witnessed the arrival of a deity, behaving like pets calmed by their master, instantly retracting their claws and falling silent.

Yulica and the other AI on site lowered their heads, displaying a respectful posture.

Ilya was dressed casually today, still in pure white. Although his attire seemed relaxed, his nobility remained evident. His gaze swept across the arena, not lingering on Song Ke or paying any attention to the recent troublemakers. It was as if this were just an ordinary match.

“I seem to have lost track. How many rounds is this today?”

“Round 178! It’s the 178th round! I’ve watched every single match, Ilya!!” A fervent fan shouted, her voice trembling.

“Round 178... Another contestant has advanced tonight.”

No one dared to voice objections. Ilya had declared that Song Ke had advanced. Who would dare to step forward and demand refunds now?

Ilya took two steps forward, and his crystalline, translucent eyes suddenly radiated dazzling ripples.

“The weather is quite pleasant today, so I’ve decided to add some chips to this grand event.”

All eyes turned expectantly toward the phantom figure.

“The total champion of the Throne Race, in addition to the existing rewards, also gets a chance to make a wish to me,” Ilya said, his perfect face revealing a casual smile. “Whether you want a lot of money, immense power, a stronger ability, or even the qualification for District B, whatever your wish may be, Ilya can fulfill it.”

The audience at the venue hadn’t reacted much, but countless awakeners who followed the Throne Race were standing in shock.

–This was a promise made by the highest ruler of C72 District.

Ilya spread his hands, and dazzling starlight radiated from his fingertips. “Ferrara, welcome all the brave.”

“Only through fire and thorns can a true crown of kings be forged.”

This statement pushed the excitement surrounding the Throne Race to an unparalleled height!

The entire Ferrara trembled.

...

After the competition ended, Song Ke left through the dim player’s tunnel. As she approached the exit, she saw a slender figure leaning against the tunnel wall.

The person turned slowly upon hearing footsteps, with their dazzling golden hair, unmatched glassy eyes, and ethereal phantom.

It was Ilya. Hadn’t he left? Why was he here?

Ilya gazed at Song Ke as she approached slowly.

Song Ke’s mood suddenly became a bit nervous. She had never interacted with an AI of Ilya’s caliber before. Should she say hello, or would it be better to just walk away?

In the end, Song Ke stopped and stuttered, “D-Do you... have something?”

Ilya didn’t speak but observed her without blinking, as if she were an interesting toy.

Song Ke felt a bit uncomfortable under his gaze and shifted her toes forward slightly.

Unexpectedly, Ilya spoke, “You chose Ferrara.”

Song Ke: "Huh?"

He nodded, "I understand."

Song Ke: "What?"

Ilya smiled, "It's just as I imagined."

Song Ke: "Where? What do you mean?"

After saying this, Ilya's figure gradually faded, eventually disappearing into the tunnel.

Only his faint, lingering words remained in the air.

"—You and I, aren't we the same?"

Song Ke was utterly perplexed.

I'm not an artificial intelligence. How could we be the same?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 40.1: Bloody Ferrara (12)

Xiaoxing's determination

"The heat of the Throne Race has escalated."

Zhuang Qingyan flipped through Song Ke's terminal, quickly browsing various news that were continuously fermenting. If, in the past, it was just a relatively popular medium-sized event within the

Ferrara area, then starting from round 178 when Ilya appeared, the Throne Race Competition became a nationwide carnival.

The awakeners from the two adjacent C areas (C70, C71) and more than a dozen surrounding D areas were gearing up and coming here upon hearing the news.

Now, if you were to randomly throw a small stone onto the streets of Ferrara, it would probably hit two awakeners.

No one responded to his words.

Zhuang Qingyan raised his gaze, and Song Ke sat at the bedside, looking absent-minded with her short shoulder-length hair in disarray.

“What are you daydreaming about? Still thinking about what Ilya said to you?”

—” You and I, aren’t we the same?”

That night, in the dim player corridor, after leaving behind these profound words, Ilya disappeared on the spot.

Leaving Song Ke with a head full of question marks, her thoughts lost in the wind.

Zhuang Qingyan put down the terminal, his wheelchair slowly slid to the bedside, and then he leaned forward. The vibrant sunlight outside happened to shine through his back, casting him in backlight, highlighting his prominent brow bone and sensual thin lips. The two of them were only inches apart, and Zhuang Qingyan stared at Song Ke for several seconds.

Song Ke snapped out of it and stared back, puzzled. “What are you doing?”

Zhuang Qingyan’s lips curled slightly, and he shook his head slowly. “I dare not say anything else, but at the very least, you’re definitely not artificial intelligence.”

He retracted his upper body and lazily leaned back in his wheelchair. "From a general rational perspective, there shouldn't be an AI like you."

Before his words could settle, a shiny, flexible whip whizzed past his temple, landing heavily on the desk behind him, causing the pages of the books to rustle.

Song Ke puffed up her cheeks in frustration.

Just because she didn't hear those middle words clearly, did he think she couldn't hear them at all? Did he want to call her stupid?!

Zhuang Qingyan casually brushed away the severed hair strands, and he even had the mood to shake the blanket on his legs.

Alright, she's not being absent-minded anymore, she's full of life and energy now.

"Go freshen up and come back. We'll talk about the competition."

...

When Song Ke was washing up, Xu Xing entered with his hands behind his back, looking like a little lord.

Once inside Song Ke's room, he lifted his chin, occasionally touched the bizarre short weapons at the foot of the bed, then helped tidy up the messy books on the table. Finally, he glanced at the annoying presence in the room, snorted arrogantly.

Zhuang Qingyan's gaze landed on Song Ke's terminal, ignoring him.

Xu Xing stared at him for two seconds, then suddenly asked, "Where's your terminal?"

Zhuang Qingyan pointed with his fingertip.

“Aren’t you a researcher from some... some Lan’s group. Why didn’t you use your own terminal?”

Xu Xing was young, but he was quite intelligent. As he thought more about Zhuang Qingyan, he began to notice more and more things that didn’t add up.

Zhuang Qingyan was not an unknown person, nor was he from the technologically backward District F. Given his behavior, there was a high likelihood that he came from a big city. However, Xu Xing had never seen him use any communication device.

“Not only do you not use a terminal, but you also haven’t registered as an awakener. You definitely have a secret!”

If an ordinary person awakened their powers, they would be ecstatic and would rush to register, especially now, during the apocalypse, when awakeners enjoyed special privileges like changing districts. To officially register, one had to go to an awakener base belonging to the Alliance, take photos, and provide biological information. This would expose all personal privacy. Was Zhuang Qingyan intentionally avoiding registration for this reason?

“Oh? What secrets do I have? Tell me.”

Zhuang Qingyan said with a sly smile, clearly not feeling uneasy about his lies being exposed.

Xu Xing thought he had uncovered Zhuang Qingyan’s true identity and excitedly jumped up. “You’re a wanted criminal, that’s why you don’t want to leave any traces, and you don’t use communication devices to avoid revealing your whereabouts. Someone is after you!”

He taunted, with a mischievous grin. “I’m going to tell sister that you’re a bad person and ask her to get rid of you!”

Zhuang Qingyan raised an eyebrow, smiling ominously. “You’re right; I am indeed a wanted criminal.”

“Now that you know, I’ll have to eliminate you.”

At first, Xu Xing thought he was joking, but the air around him grew thinner, and an invisible force seemed to tighten around his neck. Xu Xing tried to summon his ice blades to resist, but his brain exploded with pain, and his powers couldn’t coalesce.

His face turned red, and his hair was soaked with sweat when Song Ke, with a wet towel on her face, returned.

“What’s going on here?” she asked.

The oppressive feeling instantly disappeared, and Xu Xing took a deep breath of fresh air, collapsing onto the bed.

Damn it, damn it! I can’t beat him!!

He became angrier the more he thought about it, feeling both frustrated and upset, and he started crying.

Song Ke turned to Zhuang Qingyan with a helpless look. “Don’t bully Xiaoxing.”

Zhuang Qingyan looked innocent. “How can you call it bullying? I’m just teaching Xiaoxing a lesson. Some things... can’t be said recklessly.”

Xu Xing: =皿=!!

“Have you finished washing up? Come and look at the profiles I’ve prepared for the contestants.”

Perhaps satisfied with the result of his “teaching” of Xu Xing, Zhuang Qingyan stopped teasing him, put on a serious expression, and said.

Song Ke sat down at the edge of the bed, and Xu Xing quickly moved closer, snuggling up against her thigh and keeping his distance from the smiling devil.

“The format for the main competition has been announced. Unlike the qualifiers where we had to advance, the first round is a battle royale. All participating teams will engage in a chaotic battle, with the top 64 teams advancing.”

“The qualifiers, which has already ended, consisted of a total of 192 rounds, with 130 teams successfully advancing. The following individual players or teams are interesting, you can pay attention to them.”

Zhuang Qingyan was a person with clear thinking and strong initiative. Since Song Ke decided to make the Throne Race a stable source of income for them during this period, they had to manage it well, plan ahead, and obtain maximum benefits at minimal cost.

“First, let’s talk about the most highly anticipated championship contenders.”

He gestured twice in the air, and the luxurious 24K projection immediately displayed the team’s information.

“Duanmu Qi, the captain of ‘Three Grandsons and One Grandpa.’ We’ve crossed paths with him before in Luli Port. Public records show that he is the only B-level awakener in the team, specializing in plant-type thorny vines, and he controls the group.”

Song Ke knew that Zhuang Qingyan wouldn’t randomly single out a B-level awakener without reason.

“Is the information... fake?”

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head. “Duanmu Qi is indeed a B-level awakener, but ‘Three Grandsons and One Grandpa’ has more than just him.”

“This is their qualifiers match video. As you can see, only Fan Peng and Qiong Mingcheng actually engaged in combat. Duanmu Qi and Xiao Chen seemed busy but only did some clean-up work.”

In the high-definition footage, the focal figures mentioned by Zhuang Qingyan indeed stood their ground. When Duanmu Qi's thorns were deployed, they blocked most of the rush routes, and a total of 200 fierce zombies were eliminated by the other two team members alone.

As for Xiao Chen, he stood by with his arms crossed and never lifted a finger.

“Do you suspect that Xiao Chen is also a B-level?” Song Ke guessed.

“No,” Zhuang Qingyan's eyes gleamed with a hidden light. “I suspect that all four of them are B-level.”

Song Ke and Xu Xing were both stunned, their mouths agape in sync.

Four B-level awakeners! This was no longer “Three Grandsons and One Grandpa”; it was clearly “Four Grandpas”!

“Their rate of points accumulation is rapid, and their competition goal is clear—aiming for qualification in District B.”

Less than a week after the chaotic battle for the mutated zombie in Luli Port, “Three Grandsons and One Grandpa” had climbed to a terrifying 2176 points on the Ferrara leaderboard, leaving the second-place team far behind, making them the envy of all awakener teams.

“For Duanmu Qi, winning the Throne Race is a sure thing.”

“By choosing such a team name, they're focusing all the attention on Duanmu Qi and, in turn, ignoring the other three. In fact, Fan Peng, Qiong Mingcheng, and Xiao Chen are no pushovers, and their cooperation in Luli Port was seamless. If opponents underestimate these individuals because of this, they might take a big fall in the main event.”

Truly worthy of championship contenders, they were already playing mind games before the competition. Song Ke watched the projection screen, silently thinking that if they ever faced them in the future, she would have to be extremely vigilant.

“Next, ‘Shunxing Teahouse,’ the team with the oldest members in the competition.”

Song Ke glanced at the screen and suddenly exclaimed, “Hey, that old man looks familiar.”

“Mr. Xiang, real name unknown, abilities unknown. It is said that he keeps a group of talented individuals under his wing, including a spatial-type awakener.”

“The advantage of Shunxing Teahouse lies in its flexibility. You never know which abilities Mr. Xiang will deploy in this situation without any prior intelligence. You can only rely on improvisation.”

Song Ke nodded. She couldn’t underestimate her opponents either. After the apocalypse, age was no longer the standard for judging strength; it was all about abilities. She wasn’t clear about Mr. Xiang’s hidden cards, so she had to be careful when dealing with him.

“Next is the ‘Anna Knights,’ all members are mechanical modifications.”

The style of this team was somewhat similar to Bartel, whose head had been smashed by a mutated zombie named Zhang Lei. It combined the cold mechanical bodies with human muscle tissue, creating a cruel and violent aesthetic.

“Next...”

Zhuang Qingyan went on to explain in detail about more than a dozen teams, and she wondered how he managed to do it. He had watched all 192 rounds of the competition in just two nights and had recorded all the participants’ information. With a quick glance at the intelligence, he could speak fluently. This person’s memory was at a terrifying level.

“Lastly, this is the recording from last night’s qualifying match, and I think... you might be interested.”

Zhuang Qingyan's two fingers swiped, and the projection displayed a pair of familiar figures.

Although the young woman wore a mask, and her appearance was hard to distinguish, her vivid red lips and big wavy ponytail made her unmistakable. Along with another elusive figure in the arena, Song Ke recognized them almost instantly.

Beautiful Sister!

It was Lin Youyou and Su Cha. How had they ended up participating in the Throne Race?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 40.2: Bloody Ferrara (12)

Xiaoxing's determination

Lin Youyou showed considerable restraint, as if she were just there to have fun, hardly moving. Fortunately, Su Cha was fast and ruthless, killing zombies with ease, making it quite thrilling to watch. In the end, their approval ratings settled at 71%, and they advanced smoothly.

"Sister, look!" Xu Xing lowered her head and fumbled through the terminal, surprised. "Lin Youyou is one of the top ten supernovas, right? Why is she participating in this competition?"

Huh? Song Ke also leaned over.

The terminal's screen froze on this year's Supernova Gala, with Lin Youyou holding a trophy. She wore a cherry blossom pink spaghetti strap dress and had a pure and gentle makeup look, smiling sweetly at the camera.

"Of course, she can participate," Zhuang Qingyan chuckled softly, with a meaningful tone.

Song Ke and Xu Xing both tilted their heads in curiosity, like two curious little animals.

“Don’t you understand? Think carefully. Haven’t you noticed a characteristic of the Throne Race Competition?” Zhuang Qingyan gently prompted.

Characteristic? Song Ke tried to recall: the grand entrance of the Sycara Theater, the design of the arena, the registration area, the special guests...

She suddenly realized, but Xu Xing raised his hand even faster, answering, “It’s artificial intelligence!”

That’s right, from the moment they got involved with the Throne Race Competition, all job positions were filled by artificial intelligence, with no traces of human involvement. AI greeters, AI registration, AI security patrols, even the superstars responsible for entertaining the audience were all virtual idols. Humans had only two roles: participants and spectators.

Lin Youyou wasn’t a virtual idol. She didn’t need to appear as a special guest like Luo Qinghe or Yulica. If she registered as an awakener, from a program standpoint, it was completely legitimate.

“But why would she want to participate?”

A famous superstar who could make countless people swoon with a song on stage, Lin Youyou had fame, money, and adoration. Why would she risk her life to enter the Throne Race?

Zhuang Qingyan pondered for a moment. “For crystals, or perhaps for an irrevocable wish.”

During their time in Luli Port, Lin Youyou had taken a risk to seize crystals, even revealing her identity. Additionally, after Ilya promised that “any wish could be fulfilled,” she appeared in the qualifying round. She must have a deep-seated determination.

Song Ke still didn’t understand. “Why? It’s just a sentence.”

It was just a sentence from artificial intelligence. Why were so many people rushing in?

Ilya had deceived her just a couple of days ago!

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head slowly. “Precisely because it’s artificial intelligence.”

Song Ke was bewildered.

“Artificial intelligence is more trustworthy than humans.”

“Look here,” Zhuang Qingyan snapped his fingers, and the projection immediately displayed a screen full of data. “According to incomplete statistics, any policy or statement Ilya has made since taking the stage has never been broken.”

“It’s not just artificial intelligence; it’s also the highest executive of Ferrara, capable of wielding all power to ensure the transmission of its will.”

What Zhuang Qingyan didn’t say was that Ilya’s promise made that day was also meaningful: money, power, status, abilities, and even access to District B, these lures were thrown out one by one, and no awakener could resist.

Gathering so many awakeners, secretly collecting so many zombies, what did Ilya really want to achieve?

Nobody knew.

But Song Ke thought of something else.

Wishes? Did everyone participate in the competition because they had wishes they wanted to fulfill?

What about V587? Did her companions also have unfulfilled wishes?

Song Ke patted Xu Xing's furry head. "Xiaoxing, do you have any wishes?"

Tears welled up in Xu Xing's eyes. "I hope Dad can come back to life."

"Well, it's not impossible," Zhuang Qingyan said casually from the side. "Perhaps Ilya can create a bio-mimetic AI of Xu Weiguo. As long as you input his original behavioral patterns, you'll have a new Dad. Will that make you happy?"

Xu Xing thought about that image, a bio-mimetic robot speaking in Xu Weiguo's voice, and he shuddered. "No, thank you!"

"What about you, Sister? Do you have a wish?"

"Me?"

Does it count to go to District B to have a look? Song Ke thought for a moment, but this idea wasn't very urgent, and it didn't qualify as a heartfelt wish. Moreover, rather than saying she had a wish, it was more accurate to say she had something she had to do.

"What's your wish?" Song Ke turned to Zhuang Qingyan.

Xu Xing rolled his eyes discreetly where Zhuang Qingyan couldn't see and then straightened his face, also looking over.

Zhuang Qingyan's hands, with distinct joints, rested on the touch panel, and the images in the projection changed intermittently and chaotically.

He lifted the corner of his mouth, but there was no trace of amusement in his eyes.

"I have no wishes."

No wishes? He truly was a strange person.

Song Ke remained silent for two seconds, then asked, “Then you have seen so many teams, are there any people with healing abilities?”

Zhuang Qingyan suddenly raised his gaze.

“My wish is to heal you,” Song Ke said, looking into his eyes, each word spoken deliberately.

There was no hint of doubt in her eyes, only pure sincerity.

They locked eyes for a few seconds, neither of them looking away.

Then Zhuang Qingyan smiled, a genuine smile this time, with little stars in the corners of his eyes.

“Healing-type awakeners are not suitable for the qualifier round. I haven’t found any temporarily. Perhaps during the main event, I can look for them again.”

“Okay.” Song Ke nodded.

*

The Throne Race Competition’s qualifiers were still in full swing, and a few days later, the highly anticipated first official race location was announced.

Mirror Lake.

It was a forbidden forest located at the border of C70 and C72. Due to its higher elevation, the mountaintop was covered in snow year-round, making the area unusually cold. In the center of the forest was an oval-shaped lake, its surface frozen with a thin layer of ice, crystal clear and mirror-like, hence the name.

It was rumored that there had been sightings of a water monster beneath Mirror Lake. After discussions between the former leaders of both districts, they reached an agreement to permanently seal the area, prohibiting any entry or exit. The mysterious Mirror Lake had been closed for seven years, and soon it would reopen.

After Zhuang Qingyan learned of this news, he suggested to Song Ke, "I propose that we let that little brat participate in this race."

"Someone with ice abilities like his would have a unique advantage in a place like Mirror Lake."

"And by bringing him along, you'll have the minimum required number of team members, without the need to search for teammates."

Song Ke pursed her lips and felt it was best to consult Xu Xing's opinion first. "I'll go and ask Xiaoxing."

Zhuang Qingyan stopped her. "I'll go with you."

...

"Why?!" Xu Xing jumped up from the artificial beach chair, spilling the fruit tart in his arms all over the floor.

The hotel maintained a year-round pleasant climate with comfortable temperatures. You could request any food or drink you desired with a press of a button, and robot butlers would deliver it to your room. Such a luxurious lifestyle could easily erode one's fighting spirit, turning them into a person who just wanted to relax. Xu Xing was only ten years old, and after the apocalypse, he didn't have to go to school or do homework. With plenty of free time on his hands, he had already embraced a retired elderly lifestyle ahead of time.

"Sister, I'm scared," Xu Xing pleaded pitifully as he tugged at the corner of Song Ke's sleeve, shaking it gently.

Song Ke didn't want to force him and said, "Then forget it..."

"If you want to become a useless person, or if you just want to make up the numbers, you can continue to live like this," Zhuang Qingyan sneered coldly from the side.

"But as an awakener, if you cower in fear when you encounter zombies, misuse your abilities, and don't find a way to protect yourself, always begging for someone else's protection, I suggest you consider ending your own life sooner rather than later."

"No one can protect you for a lifetime in this post-apocalyptic world."

Under this barrage of harsh words, Xu Xing was left stunned.

He had originally wanted to retort with something like, "Aren't you also seeking protection from powerful figures?" But then he remembered Zhuang Qingyan's formidable psychic abilities and gritted his teeth in frustration.

Xu Xing wasn't stupid, and after calming down, he carefully considered the current situation.

In the V587 team, if Song Ke represented the strongest combat force, then Zhuang Qingyan was the sharpest mind. Both of them had irreplaceable importance, but what about him? Besides being wealthy, extremely wealthy, and cute-looking, it seemed like he didn't have many special talents.

Now that his sister was willing to take him along, what if, in the future, a cuter and more obedient child came along, and he continued to let them down from time to time, unable to control his abilities properly, not even able to handle a zombie? They might not want him anymore.

If he couldn't go with Song Ke...

Xu Xing thought about his father Xu Weiguo turning into a zombie, about Zhang Lei being attacked by the crowd, and about traveling with Wu Juemin and seeing the helpless faces of countless people. It sent a chill down his spine.

He suddenly realized that he couldn't let himself sink into such a state. He needed to become stronger. He had to officially become a member of V587 and fulfill his role. In the future, his position should be even more important than that scoundrel Zhuang Qingyan!

With determination blazing in his eyes, Xu Xing said, "Sister, I'm going with you. I want to participate in the official race!"

Song Ke couldn't help but be impressed. Just how did Zhuang Qingyan manage to inspire him with just a few words? Or rather, manipulate him?

Looking at Xu Xing's appearance, he seemed eager to roll up his sleeves and head to Mirror Lake to fight right now.

Song Ke was about to nod, but Zhuang Qingyan stopped her. "No."

"Why not?!" Xu Xing's curly hair seemed almost ready to explode with frustration.

You were the one who suggested that I join the competition, and now you're telling me not to? What do you want from me?

Zhuang Qingyan scrutinized him from top to bottom, a smirk playing at the corners of his mouth. "Of course, you can't go. With your current level, you want to participate in the Battle Royale? What, planning to be a sitting duck for someone to chop up?"

Xu Xing: "..."

His small self-esteem had suffered a huge blow. After all, he was a B-rank awakener with a potential of 90%!

Zhuang Qingyan continued, "Let's take the recorded matches we've watched as an example. Tell me, who can you beat?"

Xu Xing tugged at his hair, racking his brain to think. It seemed like... there was really no one.

His confidence instantly waned. "Then... what should I do?"

Zhuang Qingyan said solemnly, "Special training."

"I suggest that during this period, you take on more individual and group missions and train seriously."

"What do you think? Xiao... Xing?"