

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 5: F177 District (5)

Chapter 5 – F177 District (5)

©Tonight at eight o'clock, Fools Wharf©

Song Ke was lurking in a corner of the garbage dump, observing without moving, holding her breath. After coming out from her neighbor's house, the heavy fog disoriented her, and she unknowingly ended up in this vicinity. Her destination was the villa area halfway up the hill, but to reach there, she had to pass through the garbage dump in front of her.

From deep within the mist, there faintly emanated a grating sound of bones crunching, making one's teeth ache. About five or six meters away, a few figures swayed and walked past, their footsteps heavy, their postures strange. One by one, they walked mindlessly, clanging and clattering, stumbling into piles of tin cans.

Through the faint mist, Song Ke could discern their faces, causing her heart to sink. They were those "monsters."

She couldn't stay here any longer! Seizing the opportunity as a few of the monsters crossed paths, Song Ke timed it right, lowered her center of gravity, and sprinted forward.

The wind from her dash lifted a few scraps of paper, and the lingering monsters all turned their heads simultaneously. However, within the expanse of whiteness, they didn't catch anything, so they continued to wander aimlessly.

Song Ke cleared a path with her sword, sprinting several hundred meters in one breath, breaking out in a hot sweat. The damp ends of her hair stuck to her neck, and even her eyelashes were damp with moisture. Running too fast, she couldn't rein in her speed, and she collided head-on with someone. The immense force made her head buzz. Out of reflex, Song Ke bowed and apologized, "So-sorry!"

The person turned stiffly, and their gray-white pupils slowly fixed on her. Drool dripped from their wide-open mouth...

Song Ke: “!!!”

Her heart raced, and she swung her sword forward with all her might, “Bang!” sending the monster flying. Then she turned and ran, using the nearest pillar to propel herself onto the eaves of a nearby house.

The slow monsters couldn’t catch up, only angrily scratching the walls below. Song Ke clung to the pillar, holding her breath, refusing to make a sound. After a while, the agitated monsters lost their target in the dense fog, circled in place for a few rounds fruitlessly, and then left in confusion.

Song Ke let out a sigh of relief, and nimbly flipped onto the roof. This area was at the edge of District 177, serene and peaceful, with several detached villas scattered around. It could barely be considered the local “wealthy area.” Song Ke had come to inquire about the situation from Old Cheng, but the problem was that her last visit was two years ago, and she couldn’t remember the exact location of Old Cheng’s house.

Squatting on the rooftop, Song Ke widened her eyes and diligently made out the door numbers, “Number 27... 28... 29, 29!”

After confirming the direction, Song Ke leaped down from the rooftop and made her way to Old Cheng’s house. When she reached the door, she took a few steps up the stairs, paused before knocking, and looked down at the giant sword in her arms. She felt that showing up like this might be impolite. With a thought, she stowed it away.

“Knock knock knock—” After knocking for several minutes, the iron door slowly creaked open a crack, revealing a shiny bolt in the middle and Old Cheng’s wary and guarded face.

Anxious, Song Ke blurted out, “Cheng... Grandpa Cheng, Grandpa Liu, and Grandma Liu... they’re bitten, bitten by monsters... just encountered them, they chased me...”

She became more flustered, her stuttering worsened, and her sentence structure turned chaotic, making it even harder to understand.

Old Cheng looked surprised, “Girl Ke, you child, how did you...”

The bolt was removed, and Old Cheng observed the surroundings, then whispered for her to come inside, "Come in first, we'll talk inside."

Bending down, Song Ke entered the door, her toe hitting something hard, nearly causing her to fall flat on her face.

The living room was in a state of chaos, with several large suitcases scattered on the floor. Inside them, various men's and women's clothing and essential items were only halfway packed.

Old Cheng locked the door again and double-checked it multiple times before turning to look at Song Ke. He asked, "Given how dangerous it is outside now, with monsters that eat people everywhere, how did you manage to get here?"

Song Ke was still racking her brain, trying to figure out how to explain, and she was left dumbfounded after hearing his question. What did he mean by "monsters that eat people everywhere"? Were the circumstances worse than she had thought, extending beyond just the neighbors and the garbage dump?

Mr. Cheng carefully studied her bewildered expression, then shook his head slowly after a moment, sighing, "Take your time to explain. What happened just now? And where have you been these past few days?"

"I, I've been at home the whole time. I was, I was sick, and that day..." Song Ke organized her thoughts and began to describe her inexplicable high fever, as well as waking up to the strange changes in the neighbor couple.

She hesitated about mentioning her awakened peculiar ability, but Mr. Cheng waved his hand and interrupted her with a serious expression, "I understand, child. You've been hiding at home all this time, so you're unaware of everything. Two days ago, the Alliance issued an urgent announcement due to an unprecedented solar storm disturbing the Earth's magnetic field with unknown energy, causing some organisms to undergo mutations..."

He paused at this point and his tone grew heavy and mournful, "As for those monsters that eat people... though the announcement didn't explicitly say, rumors of the 'end times' are spreading. Now, nowhere outside is safe. District 177 has already fallen, and those capable have already fled."

Song Ke's gaze swept over the suitcases on the floor; Old Cheng was in District 177, so he indeed counted as one of the capable ones.

Unaware of her subtle movements, Old Cheng continued to speak worriedly, “We’re getting ready to take a starship to evacuate. While we still can, we need to leave quickly. District 177 is no longer viable, and the situation in District D is probably similar. The schedules to District C are sparse, and if we miss this afternoon’s trip, we might not have a chance to leave later...”

Song Ke listened quietly as he rambled on, blinking her eyes belatedly in realization.

Old Cheng also seemed to notice something as he spoke and suddenly stopped, his expression turning somewhat awkward. “Girl Ke, um... we couldn’t reach you these past few days. Since you’ve come here, either you could join us...”

“Dad!” Old Cheng’s daughter-in-law emerged from the inner room, holding a baby in her arms. Her tone was confrontational as she cut him off, “Come with me for a moment.”

They walked into the study one after the other, not bothering to hide the sound of the door slamming shut, their argument clearly audible through the door.

“At a time like this, you’re still thinking about being a good person! Where do we have spare starship tickets to take her to District C?”

“No need to buy for District C... We can get tickets for District D...”

“District D? It’s easy for you to say. Does it not cost money to go to District D? Besides, at a time like this, where can we even find tickets?”

“Dad! Are you getting senile?!” The woman’s once-shrill voice gradually turned into a sorrowful tone, “If you take her along, who will you abandon? Your son who’s still running a fever? Your less-than-a-year-old grandson? Or your daughter-in-law who’s less than an outsider now?”

“It’s not...” Old Cheng’s defense grew weaker and weaker, eventually fading into an embarrassed silence.

Song Ke lowered her eyes, studying the patterns on the floor, silently repeating the word she had heard.

“Starship.”

The Lu Starship, the most advanced flight terminal of the Alliance, was one of the outstanding products born during the “Glorious Thirty Years.” It was also the most conspicuous and eye-catching feature high above the isolated island, the brightest neon, the only passenger route connecting to the outside world.

A place like F177 District was easy to get into; the ticket price was practically a giveaway. However, leaving was as difficult as reaching the sky. Even to travel to the cheapest Grade D city required a substantial amount of money.

Song Ke’s wallet was cleaner than her face; she was as poor as a church mouse. Given her financial situation, not only in this lifetime but also in the next and the one after that, she couldn’t afford a starship to fly out of District 177.

After Old Cheng came out of the study, he didn’t dare to meet her gaze. The argument they had was so loud that Song Ke was sure she had heard it all. He awkwardly explained, “Girl Ke, these tickets are now valuable commodities without a market... Grandpa put all his assets into this, exhausted every possible way, and managed to buy only four starship tickets.”

“I, I know,” Song Ke comforted him in turn, “Thank you, Grandpa Cheng. Grandpa have said before, you’re a good person.”

After saying this, Old Cheng’s expression changed dramatically.

Song Ke’s use of “Grandpa” felt like a sharp knife, accurately piercing his heart.

...

Six years ago, a sickly-faced Song Zhiyuan stood before him, smiling as he entrusted him, “Old Cheng, hold onto this money. Song Ke doesn’t understand the ways of the world, and we don’t have any other family. When I’m gone, take care of her. When she grows up, if she’s willing to stay in District 177, this money will last her for generations.”

“What if she wants to leave?”

“If she wants to go out and see the world, that’s fine too. Let her choose between District C and District D. She doesn’t have any identification, so you’ll

have to help her buy starship tickets. As for District B... District B isn't suitable for her. Tell her not to go there, say it's my request."

Old Cheng accepted the money. At first, he did indeed take care of Song Ke as instructed by Song Zhiyuan. He cared about her needs, her clothing, her shelter, her transportation. He even found a way to send her to school in District D. But then, midway through high school, Song Ke returned on her own and refused to go back. Old Cheng asked her many times, and each time, she shook her head with resistance, saying she didn't want to go out again.

And so, that money became a constant concern for Old Cheng. He could see it and touch it, yet he couldn't have it.

One night, in the depths of the night, Old Cheng woke up again and finally mustered his determination. At first, he thought of just using a small portion, buying a few new model ships, expanding his transportation fleet. Later... later his son got married, they bought a house, his grandson was born...

Ultimately, it was all about money. Who wasn't spending money on someone?

His business grew bigger and his family life became more fulfilling, and gradually, he couldn't spare much thought for Song Ke anymore.

...

Returning to the present, Old Cheng's heart was pounding heavily.

At the time, Song Ke was still young and, theoretically, unaware of the money Song Zhiyuan had left for her.

He observed Song Ke's expression and cautiously began, "Girl Ke, before your grandfather left..."

Caught off guard by Song Ke's penetrating gaze, Old Cheng suddenly felt guilty. He gritted his teeth and admitted, "He left some money before he departed, asking me to take care of you. Over the years, your expenses for food, clothing, study, and martial arts, every expenditure, Grandpa kept track of it all.

"That money... wasn't much to begin with, and now, if you were to ask around outside, you can't even afford a single starship ticket. I truly considered you

like a granddaughter, and Grandpa really had no choice, no way to help you...”

Old Cheng’s daughter-in-law stood at the study door, watching coldly, the baby in her arms wailing loudly, the piercing cries particularly jarring.

Song Ke remained stunned for a moment, then nodded slowly.

She didn’t know that her grandfather had left her money, so she had always felt grateful and close to Old Cheng for taking care of her over the years. Now that the truth was revealed, she felt a sense of realization. The Cheng family’s decision to leave District 177 didn’t include her, an outsider from the beginning. It was her who rushed to the door and made things awkward.

In terms of closeness and distance, everyone’s motives have a priority. And Song Ke had long grown accustomed to being placed last.

She was “distant,” she was “far,” the one most easily discarded.

If it weren’t for the apocalypse, Song Ke wouldn’t have considered leaving District 177, let alone think about starship ticket prices. Old Cheng could’ve taken this secret with him to his grave, and in Song Ke’s heart, he would still be the kind, benevolent old grandpa from the past.

Song Ke looked up and smiled, “I can’t leave, I still need to go, go to Yue Mountain to find, find my master.”

Old Cheng seemed to shed a psychological burden, immediately chiming in, “Right! You can still go find your master. Or ask him if there’s any solution. He’s definitely much more capable than me!”

The electronic clock on the wall pointed to one in the afternoon. Old Cheng discreetly cast a few glances toward it.

Song Ke caught his hint and stood up gracefully, “Well, Grandpa Cheng, I’ll be leaving now.”

Old Cheng responded somewhat sheepishly, “Oh? Leaving? Alright, alright.”

Just before leaving, his expression was complex, betraying inner struggle.

Such a fragile young girl, staying alone on an isolated island overrun by monsters, her fate inevitably leading to her demise.

Perhaps it was guilt, perhaps it was remorse. Thinking of Song Zhiyuan's pale face from years ago, Old Cheng lowered his voice and quickly said, "Girl Ke, I heard from others. At 8 pm tonight, there will be a military retreat team passing through Fools Wharf. If you can find them, go with them. It's your only chance to leave this place!"

Song Ke's clear gaze met his, and she repeated calmly, "Thank you, Grandpa Cheng."

...

The iron door behind her closed slowly, and Song Ke stood on the steps, exhaling deeply.

Turning around, heading home, packing her things—once all preparations were done, she stepped into the boundless mist once again.

The air raid siren in the entire District 177 continued to blare ceaselessly. However, the streets and squares were eerily silent. Residential building windows were shut tight, ships at the harbor were congested and chaotic. The air was hazy and salty, occasionally punctuated by short, abrupt screams.

Song Ke didn't dare to stop. She rushed towards the direction of Yue Mountain. Finally, as she was about to enter, she had a sudden feeling and abruptly halted her steps.

Inside, it was deadly quiet—no breeze, no birds chirping, no usual shouts from trainees during their exercises.

One could hear a pin drop.

Song Ke's expression tensed, a bad premonition rising in her heart.

She took a shallow breath and proceeded cautiously. However, each room—front courtyard, corridors, training hall, resting rooms—were all empty.

Finally, she stopped in the depths of the martial arts hall, at the entrance of her master's meditation room.

A faint stench drifted to her nose, barely perceptible.

