

Doomsday 51

Chapter 51 – Tongwan Hospital (5)

Xie Zhu

In the oppressive and stifling atmosphere, the actions of the homeless man seemed particularly peculiar.

He showed no interest in conversations with others, as if he hadn't heard anything, his eyes vacant, lying motionless on the ground.

But his mouth moved slightly, indicating that he was indeed still breathing.

"It's okay," Song Ke, who was blocked by Lin Youyou, replied softly, and continued to walk forward.

She squatted down in front of the homeless man, delicate fingers pulling out a bag of bread from his pocket.

Only a small half of the bread was left, and it had been left for several days, becoming dry and hard on the outside. However, the logo "medical support" was still visible, a bread that only volunteers in Tongwan could receive.

A few days ago, in the street garden outside the 119 Hospital, Song Ke had given a homeless man a piece of bread.

Was it the same person? It was hard to tell as the person looked disheveled, and his face couldn't be clearly seen. Song Ke found it difficult to determine.

She stuffed the bread back into the homeless man's pocket, paused for a moment, and then swiftly pulled open his collar, frowning.

There were several wounds on the man's body, with white edges and beneath the crusted black clots, one could faintly see fresh red, torn flesh... It didn't look new; it seemed like old injuries.

The homeless man allowed her actions without any sign of resistance. He glanced at her through his messy hair, his eyes devoid of much emotion. Bluish decay lines appeared on his cheeks, but he remained conscious.

Song Ke was momentarily stunned, a vague and inexplicable mist of familiarity lingering in her mind. This man felt like she had met him somewhere before.

The security team finished checking the others and turned to the homeless man. They noticed Song Ke crouched on the ground and hesitated, "Uh..."

They had just witnessed Song Ke, like a god of death, wreak havoc in the zombie tide, and it made them a bit apprehensive.

Song Ke stepped back, making way for them.

A young team member scanned the homeless man with a radiation meter, looking puzzled, "Level one, huh... Mild symptoms?"

The displayed value on the device was lower than that of typical mild symptoms, almost no different from a normal person.

After finishing up the final matters on the high wall, Zhuang Qingyan arrived late and found Song Ke gathering with others.

"What's going on?" He saw people gathered and casually asked.

Song Ke returned to his side. With the crowd around, speaking wasn't convenient. She simply placed her forearm on the back of the wheelchair, leaned close to Zhuang Qingyan's ear, and spoke softly, "That person is very strange."

Zhuang Qingyan slightly leaned his body, cooperating with her whispered words.

His almond-shaped eyes narrowed slightly as he looked at the homeless man, observing carefully upon hearing her words.

The security team members were still perplexed. "How do we handle this? The wounds haven't worsened... Hey, do you need to be taken to the hospital?"

Someone nearby chimed in, "Are we sure he was bitten by a zombie? Could it just be decaying wounds? His readings are quite normal."

"He hasn't been bitten!" a woman in the corner exclaimed shakily.

The remaining people in the room had managed to escape the zombie attacks through sheer luck, but they were still terribly frightened. The sudden outburst of the woman immediately caught everyone's attention.

"I'm not lying. This man, this man is a monster. The zombies don't bite him!"

"Get him out of here, now!!"

The expression of the security team members was one of doubt and astonishment. Could it be true? The homeless man lay nonchalantly at the door; how could zombies not bite him?

"It's true, I saw it too," murmured another elderly man with white hair. "The zombies don't bite him, not a single one. They just pass by him... pass by..."

He would never forget the scene just now. The gruesome and evil zombies suddenly rushed in, their foul fangs crazily biting into people. Everyone panicked and fled in all directions, except for the homeless man lying on the ground. The zombies didn't even spare him a glance as they passed right over him.

After repeatedly confirming the witnesses' accounts, the security team members didn't dare to be careless. One of them grabbed the homeless man by the collar and pulled him up from the ground.

"Hey, stop pretending to be dead, get up and talk, explain the situation properly."

The homeless man was handled roughly, his head swaying along with the movement. He muttered something like a buzzing mosquito.

"Just kill me."

"What did you say?"

"I said, kill me," he laughed hoarsely, using his finger to point at his own forehead.

"Like just now, bang, blow my brains out."

His voice was despairing, indifferent, lacking any will to survive, just wanting to end it all quickly.

Song Ke straightened her back and softly exclaimed, "Ah."

"It's coming back to me."

She realized where the strange feeling in her heart came from.

—Fools Wharf, Aunt Qing.

The state of this homeless man was similar yet dissimilar to Aunt Qing from back then. Similar in the sense that both were bitten by zombies, their bodies undergoing mutation, but after a certain period, they didn't degenerate into zombies, and they even retained their clear consciousness.

The differences were also evident. Aunt Qing had almost completely decayed; from the outside, she looked like a zombie. But this man had very few, no, almost no signs of mutation.

Could someone be bitten by a zombie and not turn into one?

If that were the case, then perhaps everyone's assumptions had been wrong all along?

Song Ke couldn't comprehend this and asked Zhuang Qingyan about her doubts.

Zhuang Qingyan scrutinized the homeless man from head to toe, a barely perceptible smile playing at the corner of his mouth. "Remember when I said that most people bitten by zombies are assimilated into zombies due to the 'contaminated' radiation impact, causing a surge in their magnetic fields?"

"I remember," Song Ke nodded and followed his line of thought, suggesting another possibility, "But, but there's a very s-small, extremely low prob, probability, of a passive awakening..."

As she spoke, she paused.

There was an exceedingly rare chance that someone who had been bitten by a zombie might awaken as an ability user.

Could it be possible? The homeless man was an awakener?

Could there be an awakener like him who didn't kill zombies, didn't take on missions, and didn't even want to live properly, only desiring a swift death?

"That's not all; there's another possibility," Zhuang Qingyan said calmly.

"The scenario you're assuming now is that he was bitten as an ordinary person, right?"

Song Ke nodded.

Zhuang Qingyan dropped a deep-water torpedo of a question, "But what if he had awakened before being bitten?"

Song Ke: "..."

She was left speechless by the revelation.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled, "Of course, this is just my speculation. If we want to confirm, it will take some time."

While the two were speaking, they kept their voices very low, and only a few people like Xu Xing and Lin Youyou overheard the discussion. Even Xu Xing and Lin Youyou, composed as they were, showed signs of astonishment.

"Song Ke, leave him. Let me observe him for a few days."

"Why, leave?"

Zhuang Qingyan pondered for two seconds, then moved his wheelchair forward and approached the security team members. "Gentlemen, I have a suggestion."

The security team members looked at him with awe. "Mr. Zhuang, do you have any advice?"

"I wouldn't presume to offer advice," Zhuang Qingyan gestured towards the homeless man they were holding, "but there should be other empty rooms around here, right? If you're not sure, you could isolate him for now. If the zombification worsens later, we can handle it then."

"That makes sense," a young security team member scratched his head. "Let's go with that. We'll isolate him first, and I'll go ask the captain."

The group found an empty cargo warehouse, tossed the homeless man inside, set up access restrictions, and just before closing the door, the security team member looked at Song Ke and others. “Uh, do you all have anything else?”

Zhuang Qingyan spoke, “We’d like to have a few words with him. You go ahead and attend to your duties.”

The security team member glanced inside, “Oh, okay. Remember to lock the door when you leave.”

Only Song Ke and her four companions remained on the scene, along with the homeless man lying on the ground.

Zhuang Qingyan’s wheelchair circled around him. The man was like a dead fish, lying motionless on the ground, completely non-violent and non-cooperative.

Zhuang Qingyan smirked, instantly changing his mind. He decided not to communicate with him. “Let’s go.”

Let him be for a few days.

Song Ke stayed put.

She couldn’t quite put her finger on the specific feeling, but if this homeless man was the same one she had encountered in the street garden a few days ago, then his change in condition was quite drastic. The homeless man from back then, though downcast, would at least compete with pigeons for food, indicating a glimmer of survival instinct. Now, he seemed utterly defeated, longing for a quick death.

Song Ke walked into the room and once again squatted in front of the homeless man. “Have you... encountered something?”

The near-lifeless homeless man finally reacted, turning his disheveled head in her direction and grumbled irritably, “I say, have you people eaten your fill?”

Song Ke's good intentions were met with an unkind response. She pursed her lips, and the dimples on her cheeks appeared slightly indented.

The homeless man's gaze lingered on her face for a second, then he averted his head and closed his eyes, showing no further interest.

He lay down on the ground, completely motionless.

...

Two days later, at the 119 Hospital, the three part-time workers, V587, were once again sitting in a row, basking in the sun during their lunch break.

Taking a break together in the corridor had become their routine during this period.

Today, Song Ke didn't push her coolies, Lin Youyou and Su Cha, too much. After all, she had just assigned a B-class contract to the big star at the crematorium yesterday, and when they accepted the mission, the big star had glared at her as if she were about to stab her with a knife.

Xu Xing sat on the railing, swinging his legs back and forth. Suddenly, he pointed to a spot and exclaimed, "Sister, look over there!"

He looked pleasantly surprised, clung to the railing, and leaned out halfway. "Isn't that Uncle An?"

Song Ke was afraid he might accidentally fall, so she tightly held onto the hem of his clothes from behind.

Down below, about ten meters away, a tall man walking alone turned around upon hearing their voices, and upon recognizing them, he waved.

Indeed, it was An Qiwen.

Song Ke tilted her head in puzzlement.

It was quite strange. What was so special about Tongwan? Why were people she knew coming here one after another?

Of course, when you meet acquaintances, it's natural to say hello. The three of them left the corridor and walked towards An Qiwen.

Upon meeting him, Song Ke was taken aback. This tall man, who used to exude confidence and vitality, now had sunken eye sockets and looked somewhat weary.

As soon as An Qiwen saw them, he extinguished the cigarette in his mouth. "Oh, it's you guys. What a coincidence."

Xu Xing, accustomed to reading people's expressions, sensed that he wasn't doing well. His joyful expression faded considerably, and he asked cautiously, "Uncle An, why are you here alone? What about Captain Wu and the others?"

An Qiwen lowered his gaze, rubbed the cigarette butt between his fingers, ultimately unable to discard it.

"The captain is still on a mission."

"Why aren't you with them?"

"Qiangzi is hospitalized, and I'm here to keep watch for a couple of days."

Qiangzi referred to Wang Qiang, the D-level wind-type awakener in the Azure Phoenix squad. Song Ke remembered him; he had traveled with them in a pickup to the Ferrara. In her memory, he was a cheerful and lively young man.

Song Ke was somewhat surprised. They had been fine when they parted ways, so how did Wang Qiang end up in the hospital? Was he injured? She wondered about the severity of his condition.

“Do, do you think we should vi-visit him?” she asked in a low voice.

They had some acquaintance with the Azure Phoenix squad. Since they had encountered them here, it seemed appropriate, both morally and socially, to pay a visit.

“No need,” An Qiwen shifted his steps, effectively blocking their path. His voice choked up, “He’s lost half his body. There’s no need to see.”

Song Ke and Xu Xing fell into silence, not knowing what to say to comfort him.

They found a bench and sat down. The chilly November wind swept over them, thinning out the sunlight. Looking at An Qiwen’s somber expression, their mood was as uncertain as the autumn winds, with depths impossible to fathom.

Song Ke had envisioned that Azure Phoenix squad’s missions would be dangerous, but she had never expected the outcome to be this horrifying. Moreover, Wu Juemin’s team was composed of forty members. How many were left now?

“What e-exactly were you doing, what, what kind of mi-mission?” she asked with little hope.

An Qiwen spread his arms, resting them on the back of the chair. After a while, with closed eyes, he sighed, “An uncompleted mission.”

He held the unlit cigarette in his mouth, looking fatigued, muttering as if he had been holding it in for a long time, “I’ve really messed up.

“A soldier’s duty is to obey orders. I understand that, but lately, I can’t help but think, am I too constrained?”

“Seeing my teammates dwindling while the mission seems hopeless, no way forward, and now even no way back. Can’t find it, can’t return. Heh, can only continue to drift.”

“Phew!” An Qiwen suddenly spat out the cigarette, and with a heavy punch, he hit the chair. The entire bench shook, on the verge of falling apart.

“I’ve been damn repressed for too long, from before the apocalypse until today, a full half year, and not a hair found!”

“What... what hair...”

Song Ke shrank her shoulders and hurriedly reached out to steady the bench.

An Qiwen sighed deeply, exhaling a breath of frustration. “It’s not a top-secret mission, it’s okay to tell you.”

“We’re looking for a key or, rather, a person.”

“A person who has been missing from the entire Alliance for almost twelve years.”

Song Ke exclaimed in surprise.

Zhuang Qingyan’s fingers on the wheelchair paused, and he raised an eyebrow slightly.

Among the three, Xu Xing was the youngest and couldn’t hold back his question, “How is that possible? My dad said your intelligence network is very powerful. Isn’t it easy to find a person?”

“Yeah, just finding a person, how hard could it be?” An Qiwen chuckled self-deprecatingly. “But it’s just not there. All citizen IDs, images, files, and written records about him, whether it’s cameras, checkpoints, social media, or even in the corners of the star network, there’s nothing. It’s as if this person evaporated from the world.”

“No one knows how he managed it. Sometimes I even suspect, did he die a long time ago, so there’s no information. Only the dead can erase all traces.”

“Is there absolutely no clue?” Song Ke couldn’t help but ask.

“There is,” An Qiwen said, opening his eyes.

“The only clue, there’s only a blurry image of him at the age of 15 and a name.”

“Who is he?”

“His name is Xie Zhuo.”

An Qiwen brought up the projection on the terminal. “This is the only image he left before he disappeared.”

The three looked at it with curiosity.

In the projection, the teenager had black hair and dark eyes, with rebellious brows and eyes. Due to the angle of the shot, only half of his profile was visible. He looked coldly at the camera, with a teardrop mole glistening at the corner of his eye.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 52.1: Tongwan Hospital (6)

ROOT

“I have seen, seen this person before.”

An Qiwen straightened his back, and his despondent expression vanished: "Really? Don't joke about this!"

Song Ke didn't dare to be careless and looked carefully again. Although she wasn't certain if it was the same person, she had indeed seen someone similar: "Really, very much alike."

An Qiwen's first reaction was astonishment. After calming down, doubts filled his mind: Was it really this coincidental? Could it happen every time like this?

During their time in Hua City, when Wu Juemin needed to repair T014, Zhuang Qingyan, the "advanced weather simulation system maintenance technician," happened to show up. Although he did eventually fix T014, proving his words and barely dispelling their suspicions, now again, Song Ke said she had seen Xie Zhan, who the Azure Phoenix squad hadn't found for half a year.

Continuous coincidences, either it was fate or someone orchestrating it.

People from the Azure Phoenix never believed in fate.

So, who was manipulating everything behind the scenes?

If it wasn't for him personally taking Song Ke and Xu Xing out of F177 District, An Qiwen might have suspected the origins of the two a long time ago.

But after Song Ke said "seen," her expression remained calm, showing no signs of lying or guilt.

An Qiwen hesitated, could it be she had really seen him?

Song Ke didn't think too much about it; she gazed at the blurry and distant image named Xie Zhan.

It was said that the youth was only fifteen at this time, and his indifference had already begun to show. The Xie Ningyu she had seen earlier was clearly an adult, and the way he spoke, the disdainful look in his

eyes, seemed more arrogant and unrestrained, giving a significantly different impression from the Xie Zhan in the image.

But their faces were excessively alike.

Could it be that as he grew older, his personality also changed? Song Ke guessed wildly.

“What she said is true, we have all seen him,” Zhuang Qingyan, who had been silent for a long time, suddenly spoke. “As for whether he is the person you’re looking for, we can’t help, you’ll have to verify it yourselves.”

“Where did you see him?” An Qiwen inquired.

“Ferrara,” Zhuang Qingyan answered.

An Qiwen repeated softly, “Ferrara, indeed... the intelligence is accurate.”

Song Ke provided another valuable clue: “Not only him, but also, also his friend.”

Xie Ningyu appeared at the same time as Lu Xinglan. That cunning and malicious blue-eyed person at Mirror Lake had given her trouble more than once, so revealing his whereabouts to Azure Phoenix’s people. Song Ke felt no guilt.

“We didn’t have an image of him, but his friend does, and there are recordings of the competition.”

The Throne Race was Ferrara’s nationwide feast, having extremely high popularity locally. Starting from the main competition, each round was live-streamed. As long as they followed this clue, the Azure Phoenix squad would find the man with a teardrop mole in the corner of his eye—it was only a matter of time.

“However, the person we saw is called Xie Ningyu.”

Zhuang Qingyan propped up the wheelchair casually and reminded, “The name is a bit different, you know.”

An Qiwen paused for two seconds, “Real or fake, we’ll figure it out.”

Names were just code names, a principle understood by intelligent people. Regardless, this was an important clue.

An Qiwen could hardly contain his excitement as he paced back and forth. “I’ll inform the captain right away.”

After searching aimlessly for so long, there was finally a glimmer of hope. How could he sit still?

An Qiwen took two steps away, dialed the terminal, and quickly reported to the other side, nodding occasionally.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at his retreating figure, his eyes deep.

However, Song Ke remembered another detail. An Qiwen had initially mentioned—they were looking for a “key.”

“A key, what is it?” she asked Zhuang Qingyan curiously.

“Who knows?” Zhuang Qingyan replied casually.

“You, you rea-really don’t know?” Song Ke was surprised.

“Of course, I’m human too. How can a person know everything? Admitting one’s ignorance doesn’t mean denying oneself.”

Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped her head. “Come on, volunteer, break time is over.”

The next day, Song Ke learned some good news from An Qiwen: Tongwan truly lived up to being the medical capital. Not only did the doctors save Wang Qiang, but they also provided a treatment plan that could prolong his life.

The damaged right half of Wang Qiang's body would be replaced with bionic materials, allowing him to survive in a semi-mechanical form, somewhat similar to the "Anna Knights" they encountered in Ferrara. However, the surgical risks were enormous, and Wang Qiang had not yet passed the critical period. An Qiwen had to stay in Tongwan for a while.

"After Qiangzi's transplant is done, come visit him. We'll have a meal together!"

An Qiwen's voice was as loud as ever, and he had regained his energetic demeanor.

"Oh, I'm going out tomorrow. You're a volunteer at the hospital, right? Help me support Qiangzi's side too."

Song Ke was speechless. Big brother, I'm a volunteer for zombie cleanup. My daily job involves running back and forth to the incinerator. How can I support Wang Qiang? Throw him into the incinerator?

"Oh, I forgot. That's so inauspicious! Forget what I said. I'll ask the attending doctor for help."

An Qiwen slapped his forehead on the other end, the sound echoing, and Song Ke could hear it through the terminal.

"Where are you going?"

"Going to U-Lab to retrieve some data."

What An Qiwen was going to do tomorrow wasn't a classified mission, and he didn't hide anything. He told Song Ke openly.

...

“Where did he say he was going?” Zhuang Qingyan put down the light screen in his hand and asked, raising his voice.

“What, what U...” Song Ke recalled for a few seconds, but she couldn’t remember what the full name An Qiwen said was.

“Unique Laboratory,” Zhuang Qingyan’s voice was low.

“Yes.” Song Ke tilted her head, that was the correct name.

Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped the wheelchair with his fingers, and after a moment of contemplation, he said something startling, “He doesn’t have any help, and tomorrow we happen to be free. Why not go and help?”

A question mark slowly appeared on Song Ke’s face.

She jumped off the writing desk, folded her arms, and stared at Zhuang Qingyan silently.

Zhuang Qingyan raised an eyebrow, “What’s the matter?”

Song Ke pursed her lips, “Liar, you’re not really this, this kind-hearted.”

Was she supposed to be that naive? Since when did Zhuang Qingyan start caring about others’ lives? Even lending a hand, not stepping on them is considered good enough.

Zhuang Qingyan chuckled, his peach blossom eyes forming a charming curve. “Oh dear, you’ve seen through me. Do you know me so well?”

“Speak, what, what do you want to, to do?” Song Ke wasn’t swayed, pressing for a clear answer.

Zhuang Qingyan feigned resistance, spinning his wheelchair halfway. Song Ke circled around to face him and steadfastly blocked his way.

He turned right, and Song Ke followed. 'Smack.' She reached out and firmly held the wheelchair still. "Speak!"

No way to escape.

Zhuang Qingyan reluctantly raised his hands in surrender. "Fine, I'll tell you, but you have to let go first."

Song Ke didn't believe him. "You, you tell me fi-first."

"U-Lab is promoted as an independent laboratory to the public, but in reality..."

"In reality, what?"

"Few people know that it's a suborganization Qinglan uses to research special biological entities."

Qinglan, again related to Qinglan. No wonder Zhuang Qingyan was so concerned upon hearing the name.

"So what? What do, do you want?" Song Ke remained puzzled.

"For two reasons. On one hand, I want to know what An Qiwen is retrieving. After all, I am affiliated with Qinglan, so it's understandable, right?"

"On the other hand, this incident also reminded me, the homeless man in Luo Shelter wasn't willing to talk, right? Some things in U-Lab can make him talk. Don't look at me like that; it's legitimate."

“Is it dan-dangerous to go the-there?” Song Ke, as the captain of V587, naturally had to consider the safety of her companions.

“Yes, the risk rating for U-Lab before the apocalypse was H (high-risk zone). As for now, I’m not sure.”

A special laboratory, researching bizarre biological species and conducting illegal experiments like gene fusion. Before the apocalypse, it was a restricted area with a high degree of confidentiality. Zhuang Qingyan couldn’t be sure what the things inside had turned into now.

He thought for a moment and cautiously spoke, “But since An Qiwen dared to go alone, the Azure Phoenix must have cleared things beforehand. No need to worry too much.”

If it was really dangerous, An Qiwen wouldn’t act alone, and he even had the leisure to communicate with Song Ke, showing no signs of nervousness.

“Then shall I ask him?” Song Ke reached for the terminal.

“Wait,” Zhuang Qingyan cleared his throat lightly, “since it’s about helping, how about leaving a little surprise for him?”

Surprise? Are you sure it’s not a shock?

Song Ke secretly complained, finding Zhuang Qingyan’s casual suggestion quite unexpected.

Her fingers slid and she accessed another communication. Since the mission seemed a bit challenging, she decided to get some more help.

The so-called “coolie” was, of course, meant to be ordered around. After all, one shouldn’t make oneself suffer when they can make others do it.

...

The next day, An Qiwen, dressed in a sharp combat suit, glanced at the sleeping Wang Qiang through the visiting window and walked out of the 119 Hospital.

As he stepped out of the main entrance, he stopped after a few steps.

On the opposite street, five people, some sitting and some standing, turned their gazes towards him.

This was a team that, even if one couldn't discern their rank, was definitely not to be messed with.

A tall woman stood leaning against the shade of a tree, her appearance dazzling. She was delicately laughing, covering her lips. Beside her was a tall, wild man, his eyes lowered, exuding a restrained aura of danger. His taut muscles could erupt into combat at any moment, appearing to be a formidable opponent.

In front of the two, a handsome young man sat in a wheelchair, tilting his head slightly as he chatted with a girl with shoulder-length black hair. At the very front was a ten-year-old boy, his fingertips surrounded by two sparkling snowflakes, thoroughly enjoying himself.

Upon seeing him, Xu Xing immediately put on a smiling face. "Uncle An, we're here to help!"

An Qiwen couldn't help but exclaim, "Oh," the tone fluctuating melodiously, resonating deeply.

Well, if you're helping, just help. Did everyone need to come together like this?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 52.2: Tongwan Hospital (6)

ROOT

U-Lab laboratory.

The location of this laboratory had already moved beyond the scope of Tongwan and was situated at the outskirts of a nearby D-grade city, a semi-underground high-tech building with a white hemispherical surface, completely sealed walls, revealing no details from the outside.

An Qiwen, bypassing the outer defense alert, arrived at the side with a few people. "The personnel inside retreated after the apocalypse, but many experimental samples and equipment couldn't be taken away in time. It took some effort to clear them. Be careful when you go in."

"What, go in?" Song Ke tapped along the wall but found no gaps.

They didn't consider using the main entrance. Given the security level there, it was impossible to open it unless the latest heavy weapons from the Alliance were used for a continuous bombardment for a day and night.

However, the material used for the walls of U-Lab was also peculiar. An Qiwen had mentioned on the way that it had an automatic repair function. There were faint traces of smoke residue on the surface, but no breaches could be found.

An Qiwen took a particle cannon from his shoulder, a half-smoked cigarette dangling from his mouth, his expression relaxed and casual.

"Step back a bit, be careful not to get hurt."

Song Ke and the others obediently stepped back two paces.

An Qiwen stepped on a step, aimed the hyper-particle cannon at the wall, and the crimson light gradually condensed. In the next second, it shot out.

"Boom!" The cannon fire blasted open the side wall, creating a hole a few meters wide. As the rubble flew, purple lightning followed closely, weaving into a dense web, firmly holding the breach and preventing it from bouncing back temporarily.

It was An Qiwen's ability, controlled quite skillfully, with no energy leaking out.

“Come in, hurry.”

The group entered one after another.

The laboratory was cold and sterile, with glaring white spotlights, bright glass corridors, and a lingering chemical smell in the air. Staying in such an environment for a long time could easily make a person feel dizzy and disoriented.

An Qiwen, after entering, had an unusually serious expression. “Stay close to me, and whatever you do, don’t wander around.”

Although most of the dangers had been removed, caution was still necessary.

The group moved forward along the spacious corridor. Because it was too quiet, they could even hear each other’s footsteps. The rooms on both sides were mostly messy, with numerous capsule storages of various sizes and shapes, most of them vacant. Occasionally, projection texts and images of certain experiment processes flashed across the electronic screens.

Experimental subject number: RYH9001

Biological prototype: Anura – Alien Toad

Experimental record: ... February 15, 40 NE, 54th gene fusion failure

Target status: Deceased

Experimental subject number: PJK9321

Biological prototype: Lamprey – Parasite

Experimental record: ... July 22, 44 NE, successful parasitism; July 29, host deceased

Target status: Deceased

Experimental subject number: SFP2056

Biological prototype: Lepidoptera – Vertical-striped poisonous moth

Experimental record: ... December 24, 45 NE, radiation levels stable, recommend continued observation

Target status: Alive

Lin Youyou grew paler as she ventured further in. The experiment data and the remnants of images were too disgusting. In just a short distance, she had accidentally seen frogs with two heads and over a dozen legs, funnel-mouthed seven-gilled eels, and numerous grotesque images, making it impossible to distinguish the original insect species. This place was truly a nightmare for those with trypophobia!

Lin Youyou averted her gaze, took a breath, and calmed her nerves. She unexpectedly noticed that someone's complexion was even worse than hers.

Song Ke, at the back of the group, stared blankly at those capsule storages.

The interiors of the compartments were very clean, with no stains. However, Song Ke felt a reddish hue and caught a hint of a pungent smell.

She extended her fingertip and gently tapped the electronic label on top. What did these numbers mean?

"What's wrong? Did you find something?" Lin Youyou asked in a low voice.

“...No,” Song Ke was interrupted and momentarily forgot what she was thinking. She quickened her pace to catch up with the others.

It must be due to poor ventilation and difficulty in breathing, causing hallucinations. She felt very uncomfortable in this place.

An Qiwen led them to the end of the corridor, into a noticeably larger laboratory.

The glass door slowly opened, revealing a giant fish tank connected to the ceiling. In the pitch-black liquid, there was a huge deep-sea octopus soaked, its entire body in deep red color and its body resembling jelly. It was in a semi-decomposed state, with sunken eye sockets, pale eyes, and drug tubes inserted at the ends of each tentacle, floating motionless inside.

An Qiwen searched the room following the signal and indeed found a dormant central system. This concealed central system had a timer function. They had missed it the last time they were here because it was turned off.

A few days ago, the signal left in the laboratory suddenly detected data fluctuations and reported it to Wu Juemin. He then ordered An Qiwen, who was still in Tongwan, to go and retrieve the data from this central system.

An Qiwen took out a small chip-like object, connected it to another instrument, and began the data transfer.

During the waiting time, he didn't forget to scare Xu Xing playfully, “Just look, don't touch anything. Be careful, it might move.”

Xu Xing, being timid, immediately clung to Song Ke's thigh, acting as a mobile accessory, keeping his eyes tightly shut throughout, too afraid to open them and look.

An Qiwen chuckled twice and stopped joking.

The data retrieval took about ten minutes. After it was done, they retreated along the corridor and returned to the initial fork.

So far, they had only explored about half of the entire laboratory. However, the expressions of everyone present were not very pleasant. Just by deducing from the current scene, it was clear that U-Lab was conducting prohibited biological experiments.

Why did the Alliance allow such a black laboratory to exist?

This time, An Qiwen chose the left path.

This path was evidently more difficult to traverse. The ground was littered with debris and fragments, and one could easily step on gravel and shards of glass if not careful. An Qiwen explained, "We don't have authorization. Last time we came, the captain had to force his way through the door."

"What's this?" Lin Youyou stopped, and in front of them was a tightly closed metal door.

Highly glossy and with smooth lines, the access control system was firmly attached to the door, emitting a flickering light. The electronic eye automatically scanned everyone passing by, capturing various heat sources and displaying them in red characters.

"Recognition failed."

"Recognition failed."

"NO ACCESS"

"This is a hidden door. We checked the 3D map, and this should be the central control of the entire laboratory."

"Unfortunately, we can't open it."

An Qiwen placed the signal source on the door, but the screen didn't show any fluctuations.

"The central control can manipulate all the lights, systems, instruments, and devices in the laboratory. However, the captain confirmed that there were no signs of life or information flow inside. If we forcibly dismantle it, it might trigger a self-destruct program, so we left it for the time being."

Even Wu Juemin couldn't figure it out, so they had no means to open the door.

A few of them glanced at the blinking access door and left the spot.

After turning a corner, the path ahead was blocked, and there lay a huge, putrid corpse on the ground!

The length of the corpse was over three meters, resembling a human and a fish. It had strange webbed hands and feet, gray-white eyeballs staring lifelessly, and horrifying sharp teeth in its mouth, capable of easily tearing an adult apart.

"Wow, this is so disgusting... What is this?" Xu Xing almost jumped.

"Zombie fishman."

"This is what injured Qiangzi," An Qiwen's expression turned cold, and his purple lightning ability crackled around him.

"Don't worry, it's already dead. We had to evacuate in a hurry and couldn't deal with it at the time," he reassured Xu Xing.

Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan were okay; their acceptance level had visibly increased after facing such challenges.

Su Cha seemed quite composed.

The one who couldn't bear it the most was Lin Youyou. She held her nose, took a few steps back, looking disgusted.

"Su Cha, deal with it quickly."

Su Cha took a couple of steps forward, flipped out a dagger from his palm, and stabbed the fish person's head. The residual impure blood oozed out. Just then, the dagger lit up with a faint dim light, and the fishman's body gradually corroded, turning into a liquid and eventually disappearing on the spot.

An Qiwen clicked his tongue twice, his gaze stopping at the black snake tattoo on Su Cha's back, and suddenly everything made sense.

People from the rainforest, no wonder.

While everyone circled around the fishman's body, Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair slid back, and he alone returned to the tightly sealed door.

He rested his chin on his hand and stared at the door in place, expressionless, for a while. Suddenly, he let out a light sneer.

Zhuang Qingyan raised his head slightly, staring directly at the door.

The silver access control aimed at his pupils.

Capturing biological information, the electronic eye automatically checked the iris data. The central system rapidly calculated for two seconds, and then, green characters lit up.

"Recognition successful."

"ROOT"

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 53: Tongwan Hospital (7)

A Big Moth

“What are you doing?”

The moment the secret door opened, Song Ke appeared behind Zhuang Qingyan like a ghost.

The two people’s gazes collided unexpectedly. After a few seconds, Song Ke turned her head and glanced at the open door.

In the mysterious silence, Zhuang Qingyan’s heart beat a bit faster.

At a time like this, as long as Song Ke shouted, An Qiwen and the others would be attracted over.

Although he hadn’t done anything guilty, he couldn’t explain the current situation at all.

Song Ke hesitated for a moment, didn’t shout or scream, just looked at Zhuang Qingyan quietly, and stared at him.

Then she subtly turned on her tiptoe and moved to the doorway, blocking Zhuang Qingyan’s figure perfectly.

“You, hurry up,” Song Ke urged softly.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled slowly.

Anyway, Song Ke had chosen to stand on his side.

Even though it wasn't said out loud, in that moment just now, there was a strange understanding flowing between them.

Zhuang Qingyan seized the time, flashed into the dark room, glanced around, and indeed, as An Qiwen had said, it was just an ordinary control center with nothing noteworthy, let alone any forgotten important information, top-secret data, and so on.

However...

The control center controlled the access system of the entire laboratory. The logs of visitors stored in different areas were interconnected, and one could still find some traces of the people who entered and exited U-Lab over the past decade.

Zhuang Qingyan unlocked the panel, rapidly inputted the commands with his fingertips, and deleted all the data from the access control.

Then he surveyed the area, picked some equipment that could be taken, and stashed them all into his space.

The silver wheelchair slid out silently, the secret door closed slowly, and Song Ke leaned against the wall, staring at him without blinking.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, "All done."

Song Ke didn't ask what he had done inside. She took the wheelchair and pushed him to catch up with An Qiwen and the others.

They had been gone for two or three minutes, but because everyone's attention was focused on the fish-like zombies, they were fortunately not discovered.

After clearing the zombie fishman's body, the road became clear again, and An Qiwen led the group to proceed, reaching the depths of U-Lab.

After leaving the cold and oppressive research lab, the light suddenly brightened, and before everyone's eyes was a glass conservatory.

It was hard to imagine that in such a grim and eerie place like U-Lab, there was a dreamlike transparent garden. Artificial sunlight from the top freely poured in, brightening and warming up the room. The garden was lush with vegetation, fresh air, and the display cabinets on both sides held many intact insect specimens, vivid and lifelike.

"The last set of data, once it's copied, we're done," An Qiwen connected the chip to the cabinet-like instrument and began the data transfer.

The mission was about to be completed. He relaxed his nerves, rubbed his neck, and stretched the tense shoulders.

"Uncle An, what kind of machine is this?" Xu Xing asked as she approached.

"This? It's a visitor system's information cabinet. Inside are all sorts of miscellaneous data, we'll take it back and see if it's useful or not."

"Oh," Xu Xing responded obediently.

He turned his little head, looking left and right, curious about everything but refraining from reaching out.

The little guy was quite smart. How could he touch things randomly here? It was portrayed that way on television, with stupid cannon fodder breaking things or accidentally touching something, only for a super powerful monster to come out, leading to everyone's demise!

He was not that kind of idiot!

Xu Xing's gaze fell on a specimen inside a display cabinet.

There was a giant insect specimen, seemingly a kind of moth based on its appearance. Its grayish-white antennae were thick and short, with pitch-black compound eyes. The spread-out wings were covered in brown and black scales, with brush-like ripples around, making it dizzying after a while.

Xu Xing blinked. Just now, the large moth specimen seemed to have moved.

He rubbed his eyes in disbelief and then his eyes widened slightly.

He hadn't seen it wrong; it moved again!

Xu Xing shivered, subconsciously wanting to grab his sister's leg. But when he raised his head, he realized that Song Ke was pushing Zhuang Qingyan a bit away from him. He didn't dare to run around, so he settled for the next best thing and tugged on An Qiwen's sleeve nearby. "Uncle An, that specimen is moving!"

The garden was extremely quiet. Not only An Qiwen but also the others heard Xu Xing's warning.

Song Ke looked alert, looking at the glass walls, the control desk, and the display cabinets one by one.

There were too many; there were at least a thousand specimens here. Which one was Xu Xing referring to?

Soon, everyone figured out which one it was.

A giant flapping moth with a body length of over forty-five centimeters flew up leisurely. As it flapped its wings, a flurry of fine powder drifted down from the air, resembling a gentle rain.

"Vertical-striped poisonous moth, female. Don't inhale those dust," Zhuang Qingyan quickly warned, "...they are all its eggs."

The faces of everyone turned grim, hurriedly covering their mouths and noses.

But an even bigger crisis was yet to come.

After the mother moth appeared, countless young moths flew out from the corners of the walls, the control desk, the cabinets, and even from the shadows of the trees. They had extremely bright and vibrant colors—yellow-green, yellow-brown—with long hair covering their tarsal joints. They looked fuzzy, but combined with the grayish-white, they presented an obvious zombified appearance, far from being cute. They could be described as creepy.

Zhuang Qingyan quickly recited a series of numbers, “SFP2056.”

Song Ke was puzzled at first but then lightning-fast recalled the capsule warehouse they had just passed by. Experimental subject SFP2056, the lepidopteran vertical-striped poisonous moth. According to the last experimental record, it was still alive!

So... this mutated poisonous moth was hiding here and using the glass garden as a warm bed to hatch its larvae!

Zhuang Qingyan’s reminder was correct; those flying all around were definitely not dust but its parasitic eggs.

It was utterly disgusting!

Su Cha’s dagger was swift and precise, killing one larvae with a single swipe. However, there were simply too many of these mutated insects, and they couldn’t be killed off.

Lin Youyou’s extraordinary singing ability was nearly useless in this situation. Every time she opened her mouth, she would inhale a multitude of bugs.

Luckily, they had two awakeners capable of causing a group damage. Xu Xing unleashed a blizzard, while An Qiwen was surrounded by a surge of purple electricity. Their abilities covered the garden, and a brilliant light filled the air.

However, the larvae were like wildfire, cut one down, and another immediately took its place, becoming more and more numerous.

No one knew how many eggs this poisonous moth had laid. There were countless little creatures dancing wildly in every direction, blocking their vision with a bright yellow color and muffling their hearing with the sound of flapping wings. Soon, they couldn't see each other clearly.

A terrifying moth disaster had arrived.

"Focus on capturing the big ones," An Qiwen gritted his teeth and shouted these three words.

He controlled the lightning to shuttle through the larvae swarm, attempting to find the culprit, the mother moth. The idea was correct, but doing this was as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack.

Song Ke pushed Zhuang Qingyan towards Xu Xing and An Qiwen. The two of them, by continuously releasing their abilities, barely managed to create a vacuum zone, temporarily preventing the larvae from coming closer.

Then she faced the surging wave of larvae and ran her fingers over the control desk. A blue light burst forth, and in her palm, a peculiarly shaped spiritual weapon took form. Looking at the lower half, it resembled a long-handled halberd, flat and straight in structure, with a horizontal blade edge and a vertical hilt. However, the upper half was vastly different, featuring a hooked iron mesh with countless tiny barbs and blades, which were extremely sharp.

Holding this iron racket, Song Ke rolled and moved towards An Qiwen. "Lend me so-some ability."

Without a second word, An Qiwen released a dark purple thunder snake, tightly coiling around the mesh.

On the surface of the spiritual weapon, the interweaving blue-purple energy glowed. With a single push from Song Ke, she jumped onto a counter, swinging the iron racket in the air.

Crackling sounds filled the air as the larvae that hit the iron mesh were first caught by the barbs and blades, then roasted by the lightning. The powerful electric currents lit up along the mesh, and the smell of burnt protein filled the air.

The larvae's bodies were instantly charred, falling like raindrops.

Holding her homemade electric racket, Song Ke jumped and danced around the garden. The swarm of larvae seemed to sense the danger and huddled together, trying to evade. However, they couldn't escape. With crackling sounds, a large number of them were electrocuted.

The chaotic scene, after this action, suddenly became absurd and comical.

An Qiwen encountered an awakener with this kind of style for the first time. His eyes widened in astonishment, forming a complete circle. Countless thoughts piled up in his mind, ultimately condensed into a sentence, "Oh my goodness, impressive, really impressive."

After a thorough cleanup of a large number of larvae, Song Ke finally found the hiding mother moth. The massive poisonous moth was lurking above them, circling around the artificial light sphere and continuously dispersing parasitic eggs. Song Ke swung her electric racket and fiercely struck towards it!

The purple lightning and barbs emitted a dazzling light. The poisonous moth leaped into the air and skillfully evaded the attack.

Song Ke pursued, striking in the opposite direction. The mother moth agilely evaded, and the mesh brushed against its wings. It received an electric shock and got pricked, causing half of its body to shiver, yet it didn't fall off!

"Not good... It's resistant," Zhuang Qingyan said with a grave expression, throwing out a terrifying speculation.

"!" Song Ke was shocked.

She almost forgot that this poisonous moth was an experimental subject. U-Lab had undoubtedly conducted various modifications on it. Since it managed to survive, its genes had definitely mutated, perhaps more than once!

The electric racket was too large. It was better suited for group attacks, and using it against the mother moth alone made the target too obvious.

Moreover, An Qiwen's lightning ability had minimal effect on it.

Song Ke thought for a moment and shouted, "Xiao Xing, freeze it!"

Xu Xing, with a serious expression, nodded vigorously. "Okay!"

A small amount of ice and snow appeared in front of him, and Xu Xing kept his eyes fixed on the mother moth, controlling his ability unsteadily.

Also possessing a B-level AOE (area of effect) ability and being more experienced, An Qiwen saw what was going on and kindly advised him, "Don't use your eyes; use your ability. Allocate a bit of your mental energy to control it more precisely."

Xu Xing took a deep breath inwardly, calming down. The flight trajectory of the ice and snow became more stable. He held his breath and focused, controlling his ability with great concentration. In a swift movement, he teleported near the poisonous moth, and the ice and snow broke into tiny ice crystals, some landing on its wings.

The movements of the mother moth showed a slight delay.

It was only a moment, but it was a rare opportunity!

How could they eliminate it in one go?

Among these people, one possessed the strongest ability to obliterate the evidence.

Song Ke's mind raced, and she extended the iron flail back towards Su Cha.

"Lend me some ability," she said.

Su Cha hesitated for a moment, then without refusal, placed the dagger on the spiritual net. A dim green light poured out.

Song Ke smoothly borrowed the ability and leaped into the air!

The blue-green racket swung heavily towards the mother moth. The mother moth had just been frozen by Xu Xing and struggled desperately. It flew upwards, about to escape the attack range. With a flick of her wrist, Song Ke extended the length of her spiritual weapon, and the poisoned mesh hit its body squarely.

"Splat—"

A pungent corrosive odor filled the air. The mother moth, from its abdomen to its wings and antennae, was eroded inch by inch by the toxic liquid, turning into black viscous fluid.

Success!

The larvae lost their leader, and in a headless and aimless manner, they attacked persistently, but they were no longer a threat.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Song Ke transformed several more electric rackets, attaching An Qiwen's abilities, and distributed one to each companion, starting to deal with the moths in the garden.

Crackling sounds filled the air as the green and yellow larvae piled up on the ground, gradually reaching the height of everyone's ankles.

After spending some time cleaning up, the garden finally fell completely silent.

An Qiwen had already completed the data retrieval, and the murky air was no longer suitable for lingering.

Song Ke and the others withdrew.

There were still some unexplored areas in U-Lab, but An Qiwen's mission was only to retrieve data. Since that was accomplished, there was no need to continue staying. The others were also not particularly interested. Just thinking about it, apart from the various strange experimental creatures, there was nothing else inside.

They were, however, very interested in the iron rackets Song Ke had transformed.

"Ke'er, you're really something. How did you come up with this?" Lin Youyou observed the iron racket, poking the fine thorns on the mesh with her slender fingers, and they instantly cut her skin. "Give this to me, we did contribute, after all."

An Qiwen also seemed quite pleased, holding onto the iron racket tightly. He hadn't expected that his ability could be used in such a clever way.

Song Ke wasn't stingy, and everyone had exerted a lot of efforts inside just now. She slightly controlled her mental energy, cutting off her connection with this batch of spiritual weapons. She straightforwardly said, "Here, for all of you."

...

Back in Tongwan, the temporary team parted ways. An Qiwen had to return to the hospital, and Lin Youyou also informed them of the upcoming arrangements. The famous celebrity from District C, after a period of excitement, had visibly lost weight, but she appeared much more resilient.

Lin Youyou smiled at Song Ke. "Just to make it clear, I'm not trying to avoid my debt."

“The top 32 game is about to start, and given my job nature and some personal matters to handle, I have to return to Ferrara tomorrow.”

“As for the remaining two tasks, I’ll owe you for now. You can contact me when you need them.”

Song Ke nodded.

She didn’t have any other tasks at the moment, so there was no need to stop Lin Youyou from leaving. Anyway, whether it was Ferrara or Tongwan, catching Lin Youyou as a coolie wouldn’t be difficult.

The three members of V587 returned to their residence. Xu Xing kept yelling about parasites, parasites all the way. Zhuang Qingyan and Song Ke were made itchy all over by his words. Originally, they weren’t worried, but Xu Xing scared them with his remarks, so they rushed back to their rooms and took a shower.

...

With one hand supporting the crutch, Zhuang Qingyan came out of the bathroom, wiping his wet hair. He casually glanced and saw someone sitting on his bed.

Also with wet hair, dripping down to the shoulders, the small face looked extremely serious, staring intently at him.

Oh, it’s time for the settlement of accounts.

Zhuang Qingyan didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

The next moment, he sighed softly in his heart.

She didn’t even knock on the door.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 54.1: Tongwan Hospital (8)

Did I guess it right? Dr. Fang.

Song Ke silently watched Zhuang Qingyan.

Since picking up this man in the pouring rain, her wandering journey has undergone indescribable changes.

Things she couldn't understand before, as long as she asked, she could get answers from him: information about the apocalypse, abilities, Qinglan, C-grade districts, commissioned tasks... Zhuang Qingyan said he wasn't omniscient, but in Song Ke's eyes, he knew everything.

As long as Zhuang Qingyan was by her side, even ignorance became a luxury. Song Ke would no longer feel puzzled about the unknown world. Everything could be solved theoretically, and she only needed to be responsible for execution.

But this didn't mean she lost her ability to think.

Who is Zhuang Qingyan, what is his true identity? An ordinary researcher at Qinglan Institute?

—Absolutely impossible.

The first time they met, he said he was a drug researcher. After encountering the Azure Phoenix squad, he changed his claim to a weather mimicry system maintenance engineer. It seemed that Zhuang Qingyan could easily come up with any identity that favored him, completely indifferent to its authenticity.

And his true origin was concealed in an unclear fog, surrounded by layers. Unless he personally tore apart the layers of disguised veils, Song Ke would probably never know.

In front of the U-Lab's secret entrance, Song Ke caught Zhuang Qingyan in the act.

He quietly left the team, wanting to do something, and this something couldn't be known to others.

Since when did he start his secretive plans?

From when he proposed to go to U-Lab with An Qiwen? Or even earlier, from when he knew that the Azure Phoenix squad's mission was to find someone who had been missing for a long time?

Song Ke was not a fool. Of course, she understood that even if U-Lab was a subsidiary of Qinglan, the heavily guarded access control system was definitely not something an "ordinary researcher" could open.

Song Ke frowned and sternly said, "Confess and cooperate."

Zhuang Qingyan looked relaxed and responded, "Leniency to those who confess, severity to those who resist?"

Song Ke pouted, "You, honestly, confess..."

Zhuang Qingyan smiled and said, "Will you spare me in your great mercy?"

Tsk, Song Ke was annoyed. Why did he always catch her words, making her lose track of what she wanted to say next?

Her fingertips moved slightly, and a faint blue light flickered, slowly aiming at the man in front of her.

"Why not settle it with words? Do you have to resort to violence again?" Zhuang Qingyan leaned lazily on his writing desk, supporting himself with a crutch. "Can you bear treating me like this?"

Just out of the shower, he didn't use the wheelchair. His tall figure stood there, creating an imposing shadow.

Song Ke glanced up. It wasn't actually a shadow; it was just that his bathrobe wasn't tied properly, revealing half of his chest.

"Stop, joking. Speak, quickly."

Song Ke persisted, using this time alone with him, having come to his room, to clarify her doubts. If he didn't explain today, she wouldn't easily give up.

"Tell, the truth."

Considering his talent for lying, Song Ke added without missing a beat.

Being cornered by her relentless questioning, Zhuang Qingyan sighed helplessly.

"I can indeed unlock the door because I have high-level access within Qinglan.

"As for why I entered the central control room... a few years ago, I visited U-Lab."

Song Ke frowned deeply, "You went? What for?"

Zhuang Qingyan wouldn't have been involved in those illegal biological experiments, right?

He could tell what she was thinking from her expression. Zhuang Qingyan chuckled and shook his head slowly.

"Don't think too much. I didn't participate in any experiments. At that time, I went as an internal inspector.

“The information An Qiwen needed to retrieve included the visitor list. If my presence showed up there, it would be hard to explain and bring unnecessary trouble to us. So, I deleted the access records and completely eliminated this potential problem.

“Other than that, I didn’t do anything.”

“A-are you telling the t-truth now?” Song Ke looked at him with a skeptical expression.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled slowly, “Song Ke, as I mentioned before, I have no reason to lie to you.”

No need to lie to me? There’s one more thing, will you answer?

Song Ke was silent for a moment and asked a soul-penetrating question, “Do you know, that person, Xie Zhuo?”

Even if Song Ke wasn’t clever, her intuition was always accurate.

On the night at Mirror Lake, Zhuang Qingyan had a distinct reaction when he saw Xie Ningyu.

He reacted to that face.

The smile on Zhuang Qingyan’s face disappeared, and his eyes narrowed slightly, falling into a long silence.

The crutch used to maintain balance moved, and the end made a “creaking” sound against the ground.

“No, lying, allowed,” warned Song Ke.

“I know,” Zhuang Qingyan finally spoke, after a long while.

As expected, Song Ke thought to herself, there was a feeling of 'I knew it' in her heart.

"W-Who is he?"

"You can say... an old acquaintance."

Zhuang Qingyan took a few slow but steady steps forward. He came to Song Ke and sat down on the other side of the bed.

They sat side by side, gazing at the hazy night outside together.

"Sorry, I can't tell you his identity for now.

"But An Qiwen is right. It's an impossible task. Azure Phoenix's people will never find Xie Zhuo."

"Why?" Song Ke was puzzled.

"Because he's dead," Zhuang Qingyan's voice was hoarse.

"Xie Zuo died a long time ago."

"..."

"Dead in terms of biology or sociology, he has completely disappeared," Zhuang Qingyan continued.

Thinking seriously, Song Ke contemplated the biological meaning of death, which referred to a person ceasing to breathe, their body decaying, becoming bones and dust. To achieve the sociological meaning of disappearance, this person's habits, social relationships, behavioral trajectory... must be completely erased from the memories of others.

“Why did he die?”

“Because someone wanted him dead, or rather, he had no choice but to die. Xie Zhuo lived each day facing endless pursuit,” Zhuang Qingyan explained.

Pursuits, forced to die... Every word spoken by Zhuang Qingyan carried a certain cruel meaning.

Song Ke couldn't help but fall silent. She remembered that stunning image, that defiant youth—did he ultimately not live to adulthood?

So, as an acquaintance of Xie Zhuo, what was Zhuang Qingyan feeling now, knowing everything?

Song Ke's gaze fell on Zhuang Qingyan's hand hanging by his side, where the veins protruded, seemingly indicating the speaker's fluctuating emotions.

Following up the arm, she looked at the bangs falling down, covering half of Zhuang Qingyan's face, leaving the other half unusually cold.

Song Ke asked cautiously, “Are you, okay?”

Zhuang Qingyan remained silent, looking back at the young girl sitting in front of him.

Song Ke's eyes were clear, showing concern as she gazed at him.

Zhuang Qingyan moved his fingertip and revealed an extremely cold smile.

“Song Ke, if someday I'm hunted by the entire Alliance, if everyone wants me dead, what would you do?”

“...,” Song Ke didn’t speak.

“Would you save me?”

Zhuang Qingyan reached out, gently touching her cheek, applying a little pressure, creating a dimple there.

“Hmm, would you?”

He lowered his head, staring into Song Ke’s eyes, still pursuing the question, insisting on an answer.

They had known each other for so long, and this was the first time Zhuang Qingyan had voluntarily come so close to her.

Song Ke felt a mix of emotions, a complex feeling that was hard to describe.

She tilted her head back, moving away from his palm.

“No, I wouldn’t.”

Zhuang Qingyan, having received the answer, smiled slowly, his deep eyes sparkling with wisdom.

“Smart child, remember, no matter what trouble you encounter in the future, preserving yourself should always be the top priority.”

Song Ke’s lips moved slightly, wanting to say something, but ultimately held it back.

Her grandfather had said to her, ‘Live well’, so she had to take care of herself.

Their gazes met, and after a few seconds, they looked away, tacitly changing the subject.

“Wh-what did you get from the ce-central control?” Song Ke asked.

Zhuang Qingyan retrieved a small device from the space. “An ability measurement device.”

It looked somewhat similar to the black box they had used at the Fools Wharf with Wu Juemin, but Zhuang Qingyan’s was orange and appeared more delicate.

Song Ke reached out, wanting to touch it, but quickly withdrew her hand.

“Won’t it break?” she asked, still bearing a psychological shadow.

“It’s an L-type, a common popular style on the market. It won’t easily break.”

Though it couldn’t compare to the fully functional R-grade or the widely used P-grade by awakener bases in District C, the L-type ability measurement device was the best-selling among these models due to its portability.

Song Ke felt relieved. Following the device’s instructions, she placed her hands on the measurement port. The precise instrument scanned her body, various colored lines surged, and it eventually stopped at the A mark, the energy value maxed out.

“Too bad, it can only measure up to A-level,” Zhuang Qingyan expressed regret.

Curious, Song Ke asked, “C-can this m-make the ho-homeless man speak?”

They had been to Luo Shelter twice in the past few days, and no matter how they asked, the homeless man showed no willingness to communicate.

“Wait for me another day; we’ll have a few more bargaining chips,” Zhuang Qingyan said.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 54.2: Tongwan Hospital (8)

Did I guess it right? Dr. Fang.

The next day, at the 119 Hospital.

Wearing a tan-colored vest, Song Ke took advantage of the lunch break and started wandering aimlessly like the Mountain King.

She first went to find Xu Xing. The little guy had now moved on from running errands in the eighth-floor pharmacy and had been “promoted” to a zombie cleaner on the thirteenth floor, with the same job as Song Ke. He earned a net of 180 Alliance coins each day.

Even though there were endless zeros in his terminal account, and the work of a volunteer was even more exhausting and grueling, Xu Xing didn’t seem to mind at all. He did the job quite happily.

“Xiao Xing, come over here.”

Song Ke found Xu Xing lazing around at the nurse’s station. He, being a sweet-talking little guy, often won the hearts of the nurses and got stuffed with various snacks in his pockets. So, Song Ke knew exactly why he always burped when he got home.

Seeing Song Ke, Xu Xing’s face lit up, and he skipped over. “Sister, are you looking for me?”

Song Ke nodded. “Yes. Let me sho-show you a tre-treasure.”

The two of them went to an empty corridor, and Song Ke grinned, pulling out an ability measurement device from her spatial storage.

“Let’s play wi-with thi-this.”

“What? Isn’t this what Captain Wu uses to measure abilities?” Xu Xing frowned, remembering his embarrassing past of losing control.

“This one’s ad-advanced,” Song Ke solemnly persuaded him.

Reluctantly, Xu Xing agreed and embraced the instrument, placing his fingers on the measuring port. The lines on the screen went up and down, finally stopping at the B mark, surpassing it by quite a bit.

“Wow, impressive!” Song Ke applauded enthusiastically, giving him face.

“Hehe,” Xu Xing scratched his head and excitedly suggested, “Sister, let’s go find Tao Tao and have her measured too.”

Children will always be children, with their imaginative thoughts.

Equally childish, Song Ke agreed eagerly.

The two of them set off with the measurement device to find Tao Tao.

Tao Tao wasn’t as cooperative as Xu Xing. Seeing the unfamiliar device, she was on high alert, her ears perked up, barking wildly, and her short legs darted around the ward, even releasing her domain, pushing the two of them out several times.

Song Ke was determined and didn’t give up. She engaged in a protracted battle with Tao Tao. Finally catching her, she held down Tao Tao’s paw and placed it in the measuring port. Tao Tao grimaced and whimpered, unable to resist.

The screen lit up again, and colorful lines fluctuated before finally stopping at the C mark.

Song Ke and Xu Xing were amazed.

Tao Tao turned out to be a C-level awakener... Oh no, an awakener dog!

The C-level ability dog Tao Tao displayed her power, releasing her domain once again, catching the two off guard and sending them tumbling.

Beside them, Tao Tao's mom casually snacked on sunflower seeds, leisurely watching the show with her legs crossed.

"This thing is really useful.

"I was thinking of registering Tao Tao. This makes it easier—just fill in the details."

"Tao Tao needs to register too?" Xu Xing asked curiously, rubbing the bump on his head.

"Of course! We're talking about Tao Tao, an awakener, entitled to perks," Tao Tao's mom said matter-of-factly.

Song Ke imagined a dog going to get an awakener certificate—it felt a bit surreal.

"Come, have some sunflower seeds," Tao Tao's mom enthusiastically invited them, casually shaking the light screen used as a tray for sunflower seed shells.

Song Ke peeked inside and saw medical news—mostly gossip like 'Tongwan's Most Handsome Doctor Competition,' 'The Heartthrobs of the Medical Field,' 'The Gentle Surgeon,' and the like. Tao Tao's mom assumed she was interested and pulled Song Ke to sit down, enthusiastically promoting the handsome doctors of Tongwan.

Song Ke glanced a couple of times, forced to listen to half an hour of gossip. The doctors all seemed to have similar faces, but their hands were quite attractive—slender and long with well-defined joints. When they picked up the surgical knife, they exuded a unique elegance.

*

On the other side, Zhuang Qingyan found the time to visit the Tongwan Security Team and met with Zhao Liqiang.

“You want to access the records of all registered awakeners in Tongwan?” Zhao Liqiang was particularly surprised upon learning his intention.

“Yes, and I’d appreciate Captain Zhao’s assistance,” Zhuang Qingyan politely nodded.

These were internal records that Zhuang Qingyan couldn’t access in the hospital’s archives, so he had to ask for Zhao Liqiang’s help.

He was checking these records to confirm his suspicions.

Zhao Liqiang looked puzzled, “Why are you interested in that? There’s not much useful information; it’s mostly just age, place of origin, and the like. Plus, our security team alone has over 200 people, not to mention the outsiders. Tongwan has over 500 registered awakeners, right?”

Zhuang Qingyan smiled, “It’s not about gathering information. I just want to confirm a few things.”

The records cabinet in the archive room was tall, extending all the way to the ceiling. Different cabinets stored different kinds of records, categorized neatly. All the information could be accessed through the central computer.

After verifying the credentials, Zhao Liqiang led Zhuang Qingyan inside. “I’m sorry, but you can’t take the records out. You’ll have to read them here.”

Zhuang Qingyan showed understanding. “Of course, I’ll try to finish reading them today.”

“Then go ahead and focus on your work. Just let me know when you’re leaving.”

Zhao Liqiang had a lot on his plate and couldn’t afford to waste time accompanying him here.

“Thank you, Captain Zhao.”

After the others left, Zhuang Qingyan brought up the interface of the central computer and quickly started browsing the records, beginning from the earliest registered awakers before the apocalypse.

*

Luo Shelter.

V587 came to visit the homeless man for the third time.

His condition was hardly any different from a few days ago; the wounds hadn't worsened and instead showed signs of gradual healing.

This man indeed hadn't undergone any mutation.

Though not mutated, after several days of relentless efforts, he was on the verge of self-destruction, emaciated with shallow breathing. Just from his unkempt appearance, he looked even more like a zombie than a zombie itself.

Reluctantly, Xu Xing took two steps forward, given a significant responsibility.

He crouched in front of the homeless man, raising his innocent and cheerful face, his voice soft, “Uncle, would you like something to eat?”

“I have a sandwich, and there are ham sausages, cookies, juice... It's kiwi juice, really delicious.”

He thought that children could at least somewhat break down the other person's defenses, but the homeless man remained lying on the ground, unmoving.

Xu Xing was completely ignored, and the curly hair on top of his head tilted unwillingly. Suppressing his frustration, he continued to persuade, "Uncle, if you encounter any difficulties, you can tell my sister. She's really nice, and we can help you."

The homeless man slowly turned his head, leaning towards the other side, seeming to find Xu Xing annoying, and waved his hand like shooing away a fly.

Xu Xing held back for a moment, then couldn't hold it anymore and shouted, "Hey! Why are you such a dog?"

Calling you a dog is an insult to Tao Tao. You're even worse than a dog! At least dogs react! Can't you say something?

This time the homeless man reacted; he made a faint "hmpf" sound from his nose.

Xu Xing threw the bread and juice, almost exploding with frustration, his irritable nature exposed. "I'm talking to you, can't you have some sense? You're this old, is it interesting to seek death? Can't you have a bit of dignity?"

"Getting on my nerves, you're getting on my nerves, you bad old man!"

Xu Xing panted heavily, turned around, and saw Song Ke gaping at him, staring blankly. It was the first time she had truly seen him lose his composure.

Xu Xing: QAQ

Oops, forgot that big sister was right there. Sob, sob.

Defeated, Xu Xing stepped back, and Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair stopped in front of the homeless man.

The man didn't pay any attention, not even bothering to lift his head.

Zhuang Qingyan stroked the patterns on the blanket and spoke in a calm tone.

“You’re not a vagrant.”

“You weren’t born to be this desolate.”

“You were born in Tongwan, a renowned city of medicine. You grew up in a well-off family, with a gentle and considerate personality. You grew up without any illness or worries. You progressed into a respectable and prestigious profession. You once had youthful aspirations and became an outstanding figure in your industry. Your family life was exceptionally happy, and you enjoyed the admiration and envy of others. You lived this way for over thirty years, accustomed to it, until the apocalypse arrived.

“The apocalypse not only destroyed the entire world but shattered you.

“You faced a devastating blow, which can be termed as a catastrophe in your life. From then on, you faltered.

“You abandoned the past glories, relinquished the glamorous identity. You lost beloved family and dear friends. Your life turned into a mess, and you felt helpless, so you could only escape.

“Whether as a drifter or a beggar, you no longer cared about anything, just wanting to die quickly, isn’t that right?”

Song Ke was astonished.

She didn’t know what information Zhuang Qingyan had gathered these days or what preparations he had made. He summarized the first half of this homeless man’s life in just a few simple sentences.

Although the man lying on the ground remained unresponsive, Song Ke distinctly noticed his back tensing, and his fingers curling up.

Right, his fingers.

That was another aspect that caught Song Ke's attention. She noticed unintentionally that this homeless man had a pair of hands that could be considered works of art. Different from his disheveled appearance, although his fingers were stained and dirty, filled with grime, the bone structure, as well as the lines of the joints, were the most exquisite she had ever seen.

"You wanted to die, but you couldn't easily die because you had awakened."

Zhuang Qingyan seemed like the most merciless judge, delivering each word with cold, ruthless sentencing.

In a deathly silence, the homeless man's breath gradually quickened.

"Do you know how I figured out that you're an awakener?"

"There are many ways for a person to die. The simplest is to be bitten by a zombie. Why didn't you do that?"

"You knew clearly that you couldn't die because you had tried it long ago."

"You tried but couldn't succeed. So you became even more despondent, resorting to the foolish method of starving yourself."

"Or more directly, you let someone shoot you dead."

Zhuang Qingyan took out the ability measuring device from his space.

He wrapped a tissue around his hand and forcibly placed the homeless man's hand on the measurement port. The homeless man had been fasting for several days and couldn't resist at all.

“Dididi—”

The lines on the screen fluctuated violently, and the scale quickly rose to A.

Song Ke : ” ! ! ! ”

No way, this person was actually an A-level awakener?!

Nowadays, you can pick up a homeless person on the street casually, and they’re already an A-level awakener? Isn’t it absurd?

The homeless man saw the result and struggled violently, his disheveled hair falling, revealing a half-face with a resentful expression.

Song Ke gasped, she seemed to have seen this face before somewhere, it seemed familiar...

The gossip news that Tao Tao’s mother had watched in the afternoon suddenly flashed in her mind.

“The Gentle Surgeon,” that news, isn’t it about...

“You! Y-y-y-you!” Because she was too shocked, Song Ke’s stuttering problem resurfaced, making it even harder for her to speak.

Zhuang Qingyan bent down and stared coldly at the homeless man.

“Did I guess it right? Fang Zhixu?”

“Or should I call you... Dr. Fang?”

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 55: Tongwan Hospital (9)

I want to kill a person

Fang Zhixu, at the age of thirty-seven, was a chief physician with a medical doctorate. He was the head of the surgery department at Tongwan's 119 Hospital, and an honorary professor at several top-tier hospitals, including the 123 Hospital and the 137 Hospital. He was renowned as the ultimate conqueror of difficult and critical cases, a genius surgeon acclaimed in District C. The myth he created in the industry remained unbroken to this day—every surgery he performed had a 100% success rate.

This was the information about Fang Zhixu that Song Ke had glimpsed in passing from a news snippet.

If one were to delve into the illustrious career and legendary feats of this individual, it would likely take up an entire three-page screen, and even the always decisive and efficient Lu Ning regarded him as the idol of his professional career.

No one could have imagined that this former star of medicine would fall to this extent, like burnt-out decayed wood, awaiting complete erosion.

Zhuang Qingyan's repeated provocations caused the seemingly lifeless figure to react.

Fang Zhixu broke free from his restraints and awkwardly crawled a few steps, managing to sit up halfway after turning over.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked, disheveled and sneering. "How big of a grudge do you have against me? Going to such lengths to investigate me?"

Song Ke looked up sharply.

He didn't deny it; he admitted to being "Fang Zhixu."

“Dr. Fang, you’re overly suspicious,” Zhuang Qingyan said, wiping his fingers clean with tissue one by one, smiling slightly. “We have no prior acquaintance, naturally no grievances. I was also surprised when I found out about your identity.”

“Overly suspicious?” Fang Zhixu chuckled, his eyes sharp through the messy hair. “Since we’re strangers, are you so bored? Do you have to interfere in whether a stranger lives or dies?”

His voice lacked strength, but his words were dripping with mockery. “Don’t call me doctor, I’m not worthy. As for the compassion to save lives, you are the greatest saints and saviors of this century! Cheers to you!”

Song Ke: “...”

She pursed her lips, and regardless of what the other party said, she had only one thought in her mind—Fang Zhixu must not die.

If, from the beginning, they noticed him because of his special physique, being a person who had been bitten by zombies but hadn’t mutated, then Fang Zhixu definitely hid a secret. Knowing his true identity changed the significance of this person to them. According to the information provided by Lu Ning, Fang Zhixu was probably the only hope for curing Zhuang Qingyan. As of today, Song Ke was even more determined not to let him die.

“Stop beating around the bush. Just say it, what do you want to do?” Fang Zhixu’s tone was weary, and his face was full of world-weariness.

Zhuang Qingyan presented the results of the ability assessment device to him and asked, “What ability have you awakened?”

Fang Zhixu, an A-level awakener.

Among all the officially registered ability users in Tongwan, there were over 500 people, and only three were A-level, along with one D-level in the healing category.

Fang Zhixu not only possessed an A-level ability but was also a former outstanding surgeon. Even though hope was faint, what if? What if the ability he awakened was...

Steady like Zhuang Qingyan, his breath involuntarily quickened as he waited for an answer.

Song Ke and Xu Xing were equally nervous, staring at Fang Zhixu, waiting for him to speak.

“Oh, I see,” Fang Zhixu’s gaze slid past Zhuang Qingyan’s deformed calf, gradually understanding. He extended his hand, slowly raising it in front of him, his eyes coldly fixed. “An ability, so what? I’m just a useless person.

“I’m no longer a doctor, and I won’t pick up a scalpel again.

“I can’t do what you want.

“Leave me alone, let me die.”

Song Ke sighed silently.

This person, truly, could infuriate anyone with just his words. What gentle surgeon? Clearly, he was a dark reptile king. No, a reptile!

“Hey! You stinky old man, watch out we’ll throw you to the hospital and in front of your colleagues, won’t you be ashamed at all?” Xu Xing, with a fiery temper, couldn’t hold back and threatened fiercely.

“Whatever.”

Dignity and pride, Fang Zhixu had long abandoned them.

“Then we’ll... we’ll take you to the lab for dissection and research!” Xu Xing continued with the intimidation.

“Heh heh, I can’t wait for it.”

Whatever was said, it seemed like nothing could provoke his emotional change.

Fang Zhixu closed his eyes, and lay back down, looking completely indifferent.

Song Ke approached Zhuang Qingyan, looking down at the assessment device. The prominent ‘A’ level on the screen seemed like the most absurd joke.

There’s a simple truth, actually. Regardless of whether Fang Zhi Xu had awakened a healing ability, regardless of these subsequent conditions, he was still a top-tier genius doctor.

They couldn’t just give up like this.

Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan locked eyes, and with a subtle, unwavering nod, they made up their minds.

Fang Zhixu, they were determined to have him.

Zhuang Qingyan realized what she meant and lowered his eyes.

Fang Zhixu’s experiences, words he said, and subtle expressions flashed rapidly in his mind, taking turns like a revolving lantern.

A sudden light appeared, dispelling the desolate fog, making all the details instantly clear.

When he spoke again, Zhuang Qingyan’s voice was incredibly calm, “Dr. Fang, I return the same question to you: What do you want to do?”

“After all this time, you haven’t succeeded in dying. Don’t blame it on the physique of an awakener. Instead, ask yourself: Are you really willing to die like this? What do you really want to do? What is your obsession?”

It was time to relax during the meal, and the shelter was bustling with activity. The footsteps and muffled conversations could be heard outside the window, making the room they were in even more pin-drop silent.

Fang Zhixu tilted his head back, and for a few moments, Song Ke suddenly felt a kind of painful twitch on his face.

“What’s it to you?” he said hoarsely after a while.

Song Ke took a deep breath and took a step forward, “You, t-tell me, and I’ll do it f-for you.”

This was her commitment. No matter how difficult, she would definitely follow through.

“Just with you all?” Fang Zhixu half-opened his eyes, looking disdainfully at the three of them.

One in a wheelchair, one with an unpredictable temperament, and the remaining one...

Song Ke stood straight, her eyes burning, “Just me.”

“I’m Song Ke, A-level Gold-type, a p-powerful and offensive type a-awakener. Whatever y-you want to d-do, I’ll do i-it for you.”

The spiritual weapon transformed in her palm, gradually condensing into the shape of a willow leaf blade.

Outside the window, there were exclamations as someone’s mutation worsened, turning them into a zombie. Others were in a frenzy, knocking things over, and the screams for the security team could be heard intermittently.

Just then, a freshly turned zombie jumped in through the window. Before it could show aggression, the sharp willow leaf blade pierced through its head, and the heavy body fell to the ground, the pale eyeballs facing Fang Zhixu.

Fang Zhixu slowly sat up straight, then suddenly laughed, followed by increasingly manic laughter. His voice grew louder and louder.

“Zombies, hahaha, what do zombies even matter?”

“What do I want to do?”

“I want to kill a person, a magistrate from District C.

“Can you do it?”

Song Ke’s eyes widened slightly.

“Can you do it!”

Fang Zhixu shouted hoarsely, the full extent of his grief and pain almost overflowing.

He pounded the ground with his fist, leaving bloody marks on his joints.

Song Ke remained silent, first glancing at Zhuang Qingyan’s legs, then back at Fang Zhixu.

She crouched down, her gaze firm, staring straight into his eyes.

“I can do it.”

...

Song Ke took Fang Zhixu away. His intense emotions were only exposed for a moment, and then he quieted down. The last thing he said was, "Whether or not you can do it should not just be empty words. Let me see your abilities first."

Regarding Song Ke's strength, Fang Zhixu still had reservations and, therefore, was unwilling to reveal more of his secrets. However, there was some good news; at least he was no longer entirely fixated on seeking death.

The sound of running water came from the bathroom.

Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair stopped at the door, and he communicated with Song Ke, who stood by the wall: "Sometimes I wonder, do you have some sort of collecting habit?"

"Ah?" Song Ke looked puzzled.

"You go out for a bit, and you bring someone back. How many times has this happened?"

"A-aren't you the s-same? I brought y-you back," Song Ke retorted.

Zhuang Qingyan raised an eyebrow. "Can you compare me with them?"

"?" They were all picked up; what's the difference? Song Ke muttered to herself.

Zhuang Qingyan's expression turned serious. "Are you really going to kill for him?"

"This is probably the most difficult task we've taken so far."

To reach the position of the magistrate, to rule over an entire C district, none of them were good people. For instance, the super artificial intelligence Ilya they encountered, or the magistrate of Tongwan, who single-handedly preserved peace and kept the entire C60 district intact.

Moreover, Fang Zhixu hadn't told them yet who the magistrate he wanted to kill really was.

Song Ke didn't respond immediately, but thought carefully. "What are your thoughts on his ability?"

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head. "It's hard to determine; he's tight-lipped."

Song Ke remained silent and provided the answer in her mind.

'If Fang Zhixu can really heal your legs, I'll do it for him.'

The bathroom door suddenly opened, and Fang Zhixu came out, looking at the two guarding the door with a mocking tone. "What's the matter? Regretting it?"

He had washed his face, cut his hair, and even shaved, no longer looking untidy. He appeared much neater, with a height of around 1.75 meters, very thin, with sunken cheeks. One could vaguely see the former elegance from his facial features, but unfortunately, as soon as he spoke, that impression was completely shattered.

"No, I'm not re-regretting i-it," Song Ke explained unhappily.

Fang Zhixu snorted and went to a room, falling asleep again.

This person...

Song Ke sighed.

Xu Xing passed by while biting on a jelly, leaving a resentful remark: "I hate him."

Xu Xing's "Hate List" was updated again. His grudge notebook was filled with names. Counting from the beginning, the names were Lin Youyou, Zhuang Qingyan, Su Cha. Now, a new name, Fang Zhixu, had been added, and the rank was steadily rising.

...

After a good rest for two days, the news of the Throne Race's Round of 32 came out.

This competition would be held at the Ferrara Central Tower with the theme "Fight Against Fear." The specific format had to wait for the on-site announcement. It was said that due to the lively ticket presales, the organizers would use the most advanced holographic projection for real-time synchronized broadcasting.

V587 should return to Ferrara as well.

Starships in various districts were not operating, so they had to resort to the old-fashioned transportation method. They rented a private off-road vehicle and drove back on autonomous mode.

Xu Xing held Song Ke's hand, bouncing around like on an outing, happily getting into the car.

As soon as they got in, they noticed a person lying in the back seat.

Fang Zhixu was wearing a large cotton coat and pants, hands tucked into the sleeves, showing half of his head, soundly asleep.

They had informed him yesterday that they were leaving this morning, and he hadn't shown any reaction. However, he came on his own. It seemed to be his style. In a day of 24 hours, he was fine with sleeping 25 hours if possible.

Xu Xing's good mood was mostly ruined. He pouted and sat in the middle row, while Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan got into the front seats.

After driving for a while, the atmosphere in the car quieted down. Xu Xing's eyes slyly glanced around.

Taking advantage of the inattention of the two in front, his fingertips moved slightly, and thin ice and snow flowed out silently, floating towards the back seat.

After fighting in U-Lab, Xu Xing's ability control had improved. The clear and translucent frost first enveloped Fang Zhixu's shoes and then gradually spread, connecting with the seat, freezing into ice lumps.

Fang Zhixu had slept in the same position for a long time and subconsciously turned over. However, his shoes were frozen solid, catching him off guard. His head was upside down, and his upper body fell crookedly to the ground with a "thud," hitting the bottom of the car.

He looked dazed and sluggish, half-opening his eyes. Only then did he realize that his lower legs were completely immobilized, and ice crystals were falling off. Someone was playing a prank on him with abilities.

"Hahaha!" Xu Xing laughed heartily, holding his stomach mercilessly.

But he soon couldn't laugh.

Fang Zhixu didn't mind him at all. He took off his shoes, turned over directly on the ground, and continued to sleep in a daze.

Xu Xing was dumbfounded.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 56: Tongwan Hospital (10)

Freedom

When they returned to Ferrara, it was close to midnight.

The city that never sleeps still shimmered with neon lights.

Ubiquitous holographic projections sliced the gloomy sky into red and blue blocks, and the gem-like Ferris wheel slowly rotated.

Song felt a strange illusion; they seemed to have left and yet never left this place. Ferrara felt unchanged, still open-armed, welcoming travelers from afar. The wandering musicians at the city gate lightly strummed their instruments, singing tirelessly.

“Ferrara~ Free Ferrara, the dream you linger in~”

The off-road vehicle smoothly entered the inner city, and after returning it at the rental center, they had to continue on foot.

The four walked along the bustling streets, and the floating billboards in front happened to be playing an

A sweet-smiling female star with a cherry blossom pink princess hairstyle and a gorgeous dress danced gracefully in a sea of flowers.

“I like~ like your smile, like a gentle rain sprinkling in my heart~”

Around the billboard, many fans were scattered, wearing pink cat-ear headbands and enthusiastically distributing support gifts to passersby, promoting their idol.

“Youyou’s new song ‘Gentle Rain’ is released today, please pay more attention~”

“Sweet songstress, a healing idol, investing in her won’t disappoint.”

“Let’s come together to the concert and get the best Youyou in the world!”

In Song Ke’s arms, several posters and merch of Lin Youyou were stuffed. She glanced down and saw the chibi cartoon on the support card, smiling sweetly at her. The last time they met, Lin Youyou disregarded her image, tucking her long dress into her waist, her hair messy, and slapped at a moth while cursing loudly, “I hate caterpillars the most in my life! All of you, diiiiie!!!”

Song Ke picked up the pink cartoon keychain, held it up to her eyes, and silently looked at it for two seconds, feeling utterly speechless.

Should she mention it? Ferrara’s star-making ability was truly terrifying. All those idols and personas, they were all fake, indeed...

Unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable.

She stuffed the keychain into her pocket and turned to look at her companions, ready to discuss the plans for the next steps.

Xu Xing also couldn’t escape the recommendations of the fans, holding a Lin Youyou doll in his hand, his little face filled with disdain. Zhuang Qingyan remained as indifferent as ever, lazily leaning on the wheelchair. As for Fang Zhixu, he was hunched over, his head tucked into a cotton coat, showing no interest in anything happening around him. He kept his eyes closed throughout, as if even walking these few steps was a struggle for him.

Song Ke opened her mouth, about to speak, when suddenly deafening noises came from the other side of the street.

Over a hundred engines roared as powerful motorcycles whizzed by, intense rock music cutting through the night’s silence.

Song Ke quickly pushed Zhuang Qingyan to the side of the road to avoid them. The arrogant convoy passed low over them, causing a whirlwind and disheveling their clothes and hair. Then, they sped off in a certain direction.

“Roar—”

These street ruffians rampaged through the streets, recklessly throwing Molotov cocktails, and smashing buildings and structures, including blinking signs. The bottles shattered, and the gasoline inside spilled out, creating thick smoke that billowed into the sky.

The rampant arsonists excitedly whistled and shouted.

Molotov cocktails exploded one after another, thick smoke rising, and colorful, pungent gases filled the air, blocking the vision of the pedestrians. Song Ke covered her mouth and nose, choking, and watched as deep red fireworks rose into the sky, gradually forming clear words: “Freedom.”

“Freedom, we want freedom, resist artificial intelligence, humans never surrender!”

“AI is the root of all evil! AI will only eradicate humanity!”

“Artificial intelligence, get out of Ferrara!”

“These damned rebels, deserving a thousand deaths!”

The passersby on the street were furious, and the curses continued.

However, the turmoil did not stop. The motorcycle convoy suddenly accelerated, turned a corner, and stormed into the nearby Starlight Square.

Coincidentally, an IP exhibition of Luo Qinghe was being held here, funded by the fans themselves, creating an exclusive cultural community. The mob, upon seeing this spectacle, became even more excited. Their actions were full of destructive desires. They raised high-pressure flamethrowers from the rear of their motorcycles and sprayed wildly. The intense fire instantly engulfed Luo Qinghe.

Sculptures, signs, images... everything was submerged in the blaze. The painstaking efforts of the fans over the years were destroyed in an instant.

In the scorching flames, Luo Qinghe's green clothes were charred, his jade flute incinerated, and his handsome, gentlemanly face was gradually ruined. His eyebrows were lowered, and his eyes were icy.

...

After returning to the hotel, Song Ke approached the French windows and looked down from a height. The ground was shrouded in smoke and chaos, with occasional flames.

"Wh-who are those p-people?" Song Ke asked.

"The official term is the resistance faction. They oppose any form of artificial intelligence and support humans regaining political power," replied Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan organized the information obtained from the dark web during this period. "The previous magistrate, Lyon, had support from the Century Consortium. After Ilya was elected as the magistrate, he was unwilling to accept it. He has been secretly active and recently funded the resistance faction, breeding a large group of rioters."

Song Ke sat down and began to contemplate about the relationship between the scene she had just experienced and the change of regime in Ferrara.

"The resistance fa-faction wants to o-overthrow Ilya's rule for t-true 'freedom,'" she said.

"That's right," Zhuang Qingyan said. "Their goal is to escalate the conflict."

Where there is light, there is darkness. Just as some idolized and adored the omnipotent artificial intelligence, there were others who detested it.

With Ferrara's technological development today, ambitions and desires have continued to expand. The dream of artificial intelligence and humans peacefully coexisting has become a luxury.

Song Ke still had a question.

She pulled up the schedule from the terminal. During their time away from Ferrara, the participating teams in the Throne Race event were in turmoil. Out of the top 64, over 30 players had either voluntarily withdrawn or died for unknown reasons. 8 teams were unable to participate in the next competition, leaving only 56 teams.

“Is the Throne Race event related to the resistance faction’s plans?” she asked.

The Throne Race event, pushed to its current popularity by Ilya, had a financial allure surpassing all music festivals and concerts. It was a nationwide entertainment event in Ferrara. More importantly, this major competition was entirely controlled by artificial intelligence, and humans couldn’t interfere. If the resistance faction truly wanted to incite war, would they pass up this excellent opportunity?

“You guessed right. If I were Lyon, I would target this,” Zhuang Qingyan said. “In any case, be cautious in every upcoming match.”

Song Ke looked toward the towering skyscrapers. The surging undercurrent in Ferrara could hardly stay hidden anymore.

Ilya, what will you do?

When the two mainstays were discussing matters, the old and the young were dozing off. Xu Xing, who had been obediently listening on the sofa, tried to participate with some involvement. However, beside him was Fang Zhixu who fell into a deep and pleasant sleep, and almost as if the drowsiness was contagious, unknowingly, Xu Xing also hugged the cushion and fell into a deep slumber.

Song Ke covered him with a small blanket and carried him back to his room.

As she walked, she suddenly realized that when they were talking earlier, they didn’t avoid mentioning anything in front of Fang Zhixu.

From following them to Ferrara, to hearing Ilya's name, Fang Zhixu didn't show any abnormalities. In this light, it seemed that the person he wanted to kill wasn't this super artificial intelligence.

However... there were 50 District C in the Alliance. Who was the magistrate he held a deep grudge against?

...

In the early morning, Song Ke received a message on her terminal.

It was sent by An Qiwen. Wang Qiang's mechanical limb surgery was successful, and he wanted to inform Wu Juemin. However, his communication terminal was turned-off. The Azure Phoenix's people were in Ferrara now, so An Qiwen sent the temporary address to Song Ke, hoping she could help and make a trip to deliver a message. He said that after finishing matters in Tongwan, he would immediately come over to meet the others.

At the same time, the team list for the Top 32 Game of the Throne Race Competition was announced.

Song Ke didn't find Lu Xinglan's name in it and didn't know if he had withdrawn or was using another alias.

In addition to the teams analyzed by Zhuang Qingyan, she also unexpectedly found Wu Xianghai's name. Thinking back to his suspicious behavior that night, Song Ke felt this person was quite suspicious and went to Zhuang Qingyan to study the game footage.

"Pause," Zhuang Qingyan said, and a certain frame was frozen. "In the Mirror Lake competition, Wu Xianghai's footage is scarce, and he didn't make many moves. From what we can see here, he uses an ability similar to mechanical-type."

On the screen, Wu Xianghai's left arm swelled into a mechanical scythe, and he slashed several times in a panic while snatching the mutant zombie.

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head. "A total of six strikes, half of them missed. Moreover, the movements were awkward. It seems he doesn't have good control over his ability. Judging from the attack strength, his level is around D-level."

D-level, not E-level? It was strange for Wu Xianghai to deliberately conceal his own level.

Even if he was a D-level awakener, there were many players stronger than him. Except for Song Ke and her team, no one would pay attention to him.

Song Ke recalled his timid appearance in Hua City and always felt that there was a mystery about this person.

Anyway, since she was going to pass a message for An Qiwen, she might as well ask Wu Juemin while she was at it.

Song Ke followed the address and went to Azure Phoenix's temporary residence in Ferrara, an empty airship repair shop.

When she arrived in the vicinity and didn't see anyone, she realized something was wrong.

Several powered motorcycles were hovering low around the perimeter, skulking around the residence.

Song Ke furrowed her brows. Before she could take action, a stern figure appeared behind the group. Wu Juemin's movements were so fast that they were almost imperceptible. With a few "bang bang," the members of the resistance fell miserably from the sky, and the powered motorcycles spun and flew in reverse, exploding in place.

Wu Juemin's voice was cold and sharp, "The military is performing a mission, who allowed you to spy on it?"

A few members of the resistance faction were held down by their heads, arrogantly shouting, "Freedom!!"

Wu Juemin was ruthless, kicking them unconscious.

Song Ke: "...” Such resilient antagonists.

Wu Juemin grabbed the unconscious individuals and handed them to the team members who had come out: "Interrogate them thoroughly and find out their objectives."

Then he turned and saw Song Ke.

"What's the matter?" His tone was as stern as ever.

Song Ke came out from her hiding spot and honestly explained that An Qiwen had sent her to deliver a message.

Wu Juemin frowned, "Why didn't he contact me himself?"

Song Ke defended An Qiwen, "Your te-terminal was turned off. He co-couldn't reach y-you."

Wu Juemin paused, and took out his own terminal. During this time, he had been too busy, and he needed to concentrate when executing missions. To avoid disturbances from the outside world, he had indeed turned it off.

"Come in." With many people and prying eyes outside, Wu Juemin led her into the residence.

Familiar faces like Ouyang Pei, Maeda Jiu, and others were present, but as Song Ke scanned the area, she keenly noticed that their numbers had decreased again.

The original team of twelve members, excluding An Qiwen and Wang Qiang who stayed in Tongwan, now had only eight people left following Wu Juemin.

Is it this dangerous just to find someone? Or perhaps, are they on a different mission?

Out of habit, Song Ke asked, “Are you s-still searching for pe-people?”

Wu Juemin’s expression stiffened, his gaze sharp as he stared at her. “Who leaked this to you? An Qiwen?”

Song Ke belatedly covered her mouth, looking sheepish. Oh no, An Qiwen would definitely scold her.

“This big mouth,” Wu Juemin commented coldly.

As the captain of the Azure Phoenix squad, Wu Juemin had a strong sense of duty and confidentiality. Although his demeanor was cold, it couldn’t be denied that he was an excellent soldier filled with a sense of responsibility. An Qiwen would sometimes complain, but from Wu Juemin, you’d never see any weakness or retreat, only a relentless and determined will.

“Do y-you need help?” Song Ke asked hesitantly.

As expected, Wu Juemin declined, “No need. Azure Phoenix’s missions don’t require external involvement.”

Song Ke also felt a headache. From the information provided by Zhuang Qingyan, their mission seemed impossible to complete. She couldn’t just go up to Wu Juemin and argue, ‘Hey, stop looking, that Xie Zhu died a long time ago.’ Her attempt to subtly remind him was also rejected.

“Oh,” she replied dejectedly.

Thinking about her original purpose, Song Ke turned to ask about Wu Xianghai.

“Wu Xianghai?” Wu Juemin furrowed his brow. “I don’t have a strong impression of him. He was evacuated by Maeda from District D161. His level is E, with the ability ‘Object Stitching.’ I checked his credentials; there’s no way I could be mistaken.”

Maeda Jiu, the vice-captain, was even more difficult to deal with than Wu Juemin, being rigid and blunt in his demeanor. “Wu Xianghai was an E-level awakener evacuated from District D161. I’ve examined his credentials; it’s impossible for me to have misremembered,” he stated, his dark eyes glaring at Song Ke as he let out a cold hum.

“As for why he participated in the competition, that’s not within my obligation to inform you. You should go ask him.”

“We still have a mission to carry out. If you’re free, you should go back.”

He’s so fierce, Song Ke thought to herself, rolling her eyes. At least she had gathered some useful information and was ready to leave.

As she started to move, she suddenly saw something familiar.

In Maeda Jiu’s uniform pocket, a pink keychain peeked out.

Song Ke touched her own coat. She seemed to have a similar one.

That’s not, that’s not... Lin Youyou’s merchandise, right?!

Almost forgot, this Maeda Jiu was a loyal fanboy of Lin Youyou!

Times have changed, and now Lin Youyou was her coolie, tightly controlled by her. In a way, doesn’t that mean she had control over Maeda Jiu too?

Song Ke’s mood suddenly brightened. She cleared her throat lightly and giggled.

“I like, I like~ humm, humm smile, like a gentle r-rain~”

The melody of the new song she heard last night was quite catchy, but the lyrics were hard to remember. Song Ke immersed herself, singing in a haphazard manner.

Veins throbbed on Maeda Jiu's forehead. He glanced towards Song Ke and rebuked, "Shut up!"

He paused, lowered his voice, and grumbled discontentedly.

"It's out of tune."

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 57.1: Tongwan Hospital (11)

The Disappearing AI

"Old Zhang, going to watch the match again?"

Old Zhang, dressed in new clothes and unusually wearing a tie, walked to the central square with a radiant expression.

The person who greeted him looked at him and said in a sour tone: "You're having a lucky streak now, making a big profit."

In the past, they used to watch the qualifying matches together, and Old Zhang always ended up losing the most. As long as they bet against him, the others could make a small profit. Unexpectedly, after the main matches, this guy somehow had a stroke of luck and reportedly made a big fortune. Look at him now, all flashy and splendid.

Old Zhang chuckled innocently, "It's just luck, good luck."

As for how he turned things around, he was quite clever and didn't reveal a word.

After that person left, a friend nudged his shoulder, teasing, "Are you betting on that team again tonight, what's it called, Vme50?"

Old Zhang's face lit up with a smile, "V587! Definitely, going all in!"

At exactly eight o'clock in the evening, the tower's lights lit up, and Ah K and two charming girls appeared on the elevated stage.

"Dear audience, long time no see!" Ah K was as enthusiastic as ever. "It's still me, here to provide you with exciting commentary on the Top 32 promotion game for everyone.

"Before the match begins, let me explain a little unexpected situation. Qinghe, due to personal reasons, cannot attend tonight's match. But it's okay, we have invited the equally popular Yulica and Nana to accompany you and watch."

The energetic girl with twin ponytails and the gentle and knowledgeable older sister, the two virtual idols, appeared in a stunning holographic display, greeting the audience and displaying lively expressions as if they were right there.

The central square and open streets were filled with spectators, all looking up at the sky, erupting in enthusiastic cheers. After the cheers subsided, hushed whispers began: "Why is Luo Qinghe suddenly absent? The day before yesterday, I saw on his profile that he admitted to being a special guest."

"Do you not know what happened last night?" said the person next to them mysteriously.

"What happened, what happened?"

"It's those rebels causing trouble..."

In the backstage lounge, Song Ke was talking to Lin Youyou, who was wearing a mask.

"After the match, d-don't leave r-right away. I'll i-introduce you to s-someone."

She intentionally informed Maeda Jiu of tonight's match time, planning to surprise him, but she wasn't sure if he would come.

The deputy captain of the Azure Phoenix sneered dismissively upon receiving Song Ke's invitation, "No time."

Lin Youyou's lips curved slightly under the mask, and she echoed Maeda Jiu's words, "No time, I've been busy lately with my new song."

Song Ke pouted, pulling out a pink keychain from her pocket, "I'll re-report you, big s-star."

Lin Youyou: "..."

Song Ke imitated Zhuang Qingyan's way of speaking, dragging her words slowly, "Like a soft~ light r-rain~"

Su Cha, who was originally sitting nearby, quietly listened to the two of them talk. When he heard Song Ke's off-key singing, the dagger he was twirling with his fingertips slipped and clattered onto the table.

It was too hard to listen to. How could anyone sing so off-key, not hitting a single note right?

Lin Youyou hurriedly covered Song Ke's mouth, looked around, and fortunately, there was no one else in the lounge. She sighed deeply, "My goodness, where did you learn this annoying habit from? Alright, alright, I'll go to the main venue.

Her expression was resentful, "I've disguised myself so meticulously, and nobody could tell, yet you almost exposed me!"

Song Ke, with her mouth covered, protested unhappily, "Mhmmhmh!"

While the two were talking, the door to the lounge was pushed open, and a familiar person entered, Irene from “Guns and Roses.”

Irene had a few more scars on her right face, her hair was almost shaved, and she had two mobile mortars on her forearms. There was a sense of calm and toughness that came from experiencing the refining of gun smoke and battles.

Seeing the people in the room clearly, she nodded calmly.

“The favor I owed you has been repaid. In the future, it’ll be fair competition. I won’t back down.”

During the Mirror Lake siege, Irene recognized Song Ke and showed mercy, leading to her later participation in the Endless Slaughter mode.

Although Song Ke would not necessarily lose even if she tried to snatch it, she understood the other party’s goodwill.

“G-good, fair competition, no need to b-back down.”

Irene glanced at Lin Youyou, reminding her with a meaningful look, “The most perfect disguise doesn’t just change your appearance. Microexpressions, including unconscious movements, will all reveal your true identity.”

Irene recognized Lin Youyou.

Although she didn’t say it directly, everyone present understood the obvious implication in her words.

Just moments ago, Lin Youyou, who had boldly claimed “nobody could tell,” suffered a big blow.

Fortunately, Irene was not one to gossip, nor was she interested in publicizing Lin Youyou’s privacy. After saying this, she took her belongings and left.

As the match time approached, the teams drew lots for their groupings.

Song Ke specifically went to wash her hands, brimming with confidence as she drew a lot—Group G.

Great, at the bottom again.

Taking another look at the list of teams in the same group, the “Anna Knights,” an absolutely tough opponent.

Song Ke exchanged a glance with Xu Xing, her tone bitter, “Next time, y-you do it...”

Before the match began, each participating player received a peculiar piece of equipment: the “Insight Glasses.” It was said that this device contained thousands of sensory conduits. When worn on the head, it would connect with the nerves, capturing the subject’s subconscious activity and projecting their innermost thoughts.

And its name, “Insight Glasses,” precisely matched the theme of this competition: “Fight Against Fear.”

High up in the tower, Ah K passionately commented, “The rules for this match are very simple. Within the limited time, the team that kills the most zombies wins. Yes, just ordinary zombies. Do you think it’s that easy? No no no. Do you still remember our theme?”

Ah K passionately shouted, “Fight Against Fear. Players will wear the Insight Glasses, facing their darkest memories.”

Holographic projections of terrifying zombies appeared at the right moment, lifelike images flashing in front of everyone as if they could smell the stench from the monsters’ cracked mouths. The audience was not lightly scared and yet excitedly screamed.

“Roar~” Ah K imitated the roar of a zombie, “I wonder what each player is most afraid of? Don’t get scared!”

“I announce, the match begins!”

Brilliant fireworks burst open in the sky, colorful beams flickered rapidly in the dark night, and seven large suspended screens rose slowly between the towers, displaying real-time images corresponding to Groups A to G. The prize pool opened, accumulating and rolling, the numbers increasing crazily every second, and a constant stream of money flowed behind the scenes.

[Group C]

Irene blasted away approaching zombies with a shot, and the Insight Glasses suddenly flashed. The surroundings changed, and she was no longer in the tower but back in the pitch-black Mirror Lake without stars. Blood splattered on her retina, and comrades fighting side by side slowly fell before her eyes.

Irene returned to that day, back to the nightmare she couldn't escape from.

“Oh~ our contestant Irene, her greatest fear is Mirror Lake,” Ah K said with a regretful tone. “Emotional people always cherish their lost companions, but at times like these, emotions can become burdensome. How will Irene handle this?”

Irene's movements slowed down, and her eyes wandered forward for two steps, trying to reach out and grab her falling companion.

In that moment of hesitation, she revealed a clear flaw. Several zombies pounced on her, biting her small arm and breaking her cannon.

“Irene! Snap out of it, Yula is already dead!”

The companion's roar abruptly awakened Irene. She screamed in pain. The mortar on her left arm was completely damaged, the zombie's sharp teeth pierced her skin. Irene kicked the approaching group of monsters, lifted her right arm, aimed the cannon at the zombie's head hanging on her and pressed the trigger without hesitation. A blazing red light flashed by. The zombie's head, Irene's arm, and the cannon she held all flew out together.

“A heroic sacrifice, Irene blasted off her own left hand! This is the most sensible choice right now, but not something an ordinary person can do. Let’s cheer for Irene, and keep the votes rolling!” Ah K seized this wave of high traffic, desperately encouraging the audience.

“I will always love Irene, she’s like resilient grass facing the raging wind, never giving up even in desperate situations.”

Nana was a sensitive artificial intelligence, and tears were welling up in her eyes as she saw this.

“Irene! Irene!” The audience’s cheers surged higher and higher, and Irene’s approval ratings peaked, surpassing all the other players.

[Group D]

Lin Youyou retreated while singing, her voice never stopping, buffing Su Cha, who held the front and cleared the kills.

When the Insight Glasses lit up, a damp, eerie rainforest covered the entire field of vision. Giant plants above blocked the sky, and the fetid air made it difficult to breathe. However, Su Cha seemed to be accustomed to walking in this environment. His movements were not slow at all. The venom-enhanced abilities spread extensively, causing swathes of zombies to fall.

On Lin Youyou’s side, the surroundings turned into a hospital, resembling an intensive care unit. A blurry figure lay on the bed, and countless zombies were pressed against the glass outside, roaring and banging on the walls. In the next second, they were about to rush into the ward. The person lying inside seemed to sense the danger, and the ventilator alarm blared, signaling imminent danger to their life.

This was probably the last thing Lin Youyou wanted to face in her mind. She shook her head, forcing herself to stop thinking about these things and focused on dealing with the zombies in front of her.

Named Randomly, since entering the competition and deliberately keeping a low profile, they had always maintained a moderate to lower popularity. Apart from them, there weren’t many popular

contestants in Group D. Ironically, this group had the lowest level of attention. Ah K glanced at the screen, uninterested, and switched to the next group.

[Group G]

Song Ke and Xu Xing stood back to back. Xu Xing released a blizzard to gather a hoard of zombies, while Song Ke harvested the zombies' heads with her twin blades.

Facing ordinary zombies, the two coordinated seamlessly, with no pressure throughout, and the kill count kept rapidly increasing.

The Insight Glasses lit up, and the surroundings changed. On Xu Xing's side, it was like a zoo, with all sorts of strange and bizarre zombies: zombies with two heads and six arms, water monsters with an elephant's nose and an eel's body, vividly appearing before everyone.

Children fear simple things, and their imagination is overly rich. The style of zombies and monsters imagined by Xu Xing was so different from reality that it actually helped them distinguish better.

"The fears of contestant Xu Xing are very... very simple," Ah K remarked. "Team V587 is the dark horse of the Mirror Lake competition, and so far, the only team that has not received sponsorship from the consortium. Although there are only two of them, they have brought us quite a lot of surprises. What do you think, Yulica? Have you watched the Mirror Lake competition?"

"Of course I have!" Yulica's orange eyeshadow twinkled. "This is also a treasure team that I support. I'm curious about contestant Song Ke's fear. Could it be the water monsters she has killed?"

Both guest invitees directed their gaze towards the screen for Group G.

What was Song Ke's fear?

The Insight Glasses flashed, revealing an unexpected image.

Pure white.

A blinding pure white.

It seemed to be a closed room, but the space was extremely small, with dazzling spotlights from all directions. The bright lights made it difficult to open one's eyes. In the distant sky, there seemed to be blinking red dots.

“Huh? Is the Insight Glasses broken?” Yulica asked disappointedly.

“Well...” Ah K was also at a loss for words. “Technically, official equipment shouldn't break. It can only be said that contestant Song Ke's thoughts are very unique. Perhaps, she's afraid of the dark? So she prefers to stay in bright places?”

Ah K speculated boldly, stroking his chin.

Finding herself in a brightly lit setting, Song Ke also looked confused. What was this situation? Was this her fear?

Inexplicably, a glint flashed in front of her eyes, and amidst the group of zombies she was dealing with, a sudden figure emerged.

Sai Ang's mechanical exoskeleton bent into claws and lunged directly at Song Ke.

Song Ke reacted very quickly, raising her twin blades to block, “Clang!” The intense friction between the metals produced sparks.

“Wh-what are you doing!” Song Ke exclaimed angrily.

This competition was about killing the number of zombies without requiring them to kill each other. Why did Sai Ang attack her?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 57.2: Tongwan Hospital (11)

The Disappearing AI

“Finally caught you. Last time you slipped away pretty fast,” Sai Ang laughed sinisterly. “Your level 2 crystal, give it to me!”

Sai Ang was inherently greedy and had long set his eyes on the green crystal in Song Ke’s hands. Unexpectedly, the day after the Mirror Lake competition ended, Song Ke left Ferrara and completely disappeared. He searched for a long time but couldn’t find her.

Now that he finally got into the same group, he naturally wanted to seize this opportunity and snatch the crystal.

If Song Ke was sensible, she should have obediently handed it over. If she dared to resist, he would kill her immediately.

Crazy!

Song Ke cursed in her heart, always acting like he’s someone’s superior. I’ll show you who’s the boss.

She turned around and advised Xu Xing, “Xiao Xing, keep killing the zombies.”

Then she fearlessly went up to confront him.

The short knife sliced across Sai Ang’s chest, causing sparks to fly. Sai Ang’s mechanical body seemed to be made of some unknown material; it didn’t cut through even after a strike. Song Ke frowned slightly, pushed forward another half meter, narrowing the distance between her and Sai Ang, preparing to strike again.

Sai Ang took a half step back, his mechanical chest rapidly reassembled, and suddenly activated automatically, revealing a small hole. The dark gun barrel aimed at Song Ke, and countless superpowered shotgun pellets shot out!

Sneaky. He deliberately exposed a vulnerability to bait Song Ke into attacking!

“Hahaha! Naive! I will kill you and then take the crystal. Wouldn’t that be even more enjoyable—”

Before Sai Ang’s laughter could end, Song Ke clashed her twin blades, merging them into a spiritual weapon umbrella. In a critical moment, she quickly opened the umbrella, and all the shotgun pellets hit the blue umbrella surface, being completely absorbed.

Then she leaped into the air. In Sai Ang’s astonished eyes, her emei thorn rotated and stabbed fiercely into his skull!

After piercing through the skull, Song Ke didn’t stop. She picked out the two tubes connected at the back of his brain, cutting them one by one.

Sai Ang’s head was mostly mechanical. It rolled down to the ground, smoking, and was severely damaged. The mechanical skull was probably scrapped. It was unknown if he could salvage his life.

“Ohhhh!!” Ah K exclaimed, “Contestant Song Ke single-handedly killed Contestant Sai Ang!”

“She soloed a B-level awakener!!”

...

Outside the central square, Zhuang Qingyan watched the screen, observing the slender and seemingly frail yet explosively powerful figure. His lips slightly curved.

“Doctor Fang, you should consider yourself lucky for making the right decision.”

Fang Zhixu soberly watched Song Ke's entire match. He slowly raised his eyelids and, after a moment of silence, spoke hoarsely, "I admit she's strong, but so what? The opponent is just a B-level awakener."

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head, his voice carrying deeper implications. "You're wrong. She is far stronger than you imagine."

"And the 'luck' I mentioned is not about Song Ke's strength."

"Oh, then what is it?" Fang Zhixu retorted coldly.

Zhuang Qingyan sighed vaguely, "She is not only powerful but also compassionate."

Fang Zhixu looked at the screen where Song Ke's face was full of disdain, kicking Sai Ang's head away, then turning back to the battlefield and rapidly harvesting the zombie heads, as if chopping vegetables and cutting fruits.

Fang Zhixu shrugged his head slightly inside his cotton coat, not commenting on Zhuang Qingyan's assessment of her being 'compassionate.'

Zhuang Qingyan smiled and didn't say more.

He turned his gaze to Group F, where Wu Xianghai was.

Zhuang Qingyan watched the actions of the people in the footage, his brows furrowing more and more.

Wu Xianghai changed his attacking technique again, this time using an ability similar to devouring. A black hole appeared in his chest corresponding to the same position on the zombie, creating a rather disgusting sight. The clearing speed was not fast, clearly lagging behind the leading teams. Wu Xianghai's own face was grim, and it was unclear whether it was because of the peculiar ability or the lagging progress.

Zhuang Qingyan silently observed for a while and softly exclaimed, "Ah."

"So that's how it is..."

Originally, it wasn't his own ability, so naturally, he couldn't use it well.

Regarding the types of abilities, Qinglan Institute had conducted numerous experiments. The final data showed that the awakening of abilities was not entirely random. Some individuals were born with a predisposition to malevolence, a base nature, accustomed to stealing and robbing. Consequently, their awakened abilities were akin to rats in the sewer, dirty and dark.

...

Ten minutes before the countdown ended, Song Ke had already defeated enough zombies to advance early. She and Xu Xing walked out of the competition area and looked up at the suspended display screen in the sky. There were still three groups of matches yet to conclude, but the participants she knew had mostly secured their advancement.

Song Ke retrieved her terminal and glanced at the message, then chuckled.

"What's going on?" Xu Xing asked.

"Something good," Song Ke happily shared with him.

Maeda Jiu unexpectedly came to watch the competition. Although his attitude was indifferent, he specifically sent his location to Song Ke, urging her to come as he had only half an hour before returning to his team.

Song Ke planned her next steps in her mind. First, she would meet up with Zhuang Qingyan, then call Lin Youyou, and together they would go find Maeda Jiu. She wondered what expression this old-fashioned person would have upon seeing his idol in front of them. The thought was quite exhilarating.

Song Ke held Xu Xing's hand and eagerly headed towards the central square. Suddenly, the sky erupted in a brilliant fireworks display, which Song Ke assumed was arranged by the organizing committee. She glanced back.

Almost immediately, she realized something was wrong. After the crimson fireworks burst, a glaring word appeared.

“Freedom.”

It was the resistance faction!

But could they, relying on those motorbikes, truly impact the Throne Race Competition?

Song Ke couldn't help but doubt.

Soon, she realized she was mistaken.

This time, the ones taking action weren't petty street thugs. The fireworks were just a signal. The high-voltage pulses at the top of the tower suddenly surged by several million volts, “bang bang” – the high-frequency floodlights burst in succession, and the entire city's power grid short-circuited instantly!

The Ferris wheel stopped, the neon dimmed, and the ubiquitous music fell silent.

And on the high-altitude stage, the figures of Ah K, Yulica, and Nana, projected by holograms, suddenly froze while speaking, like light screens losing signal, rapidly flickering for a few seconds, and then, they disappeared into thin air!

After losing power, all artificial intelligences disappeared!

The venue plunged into complete darkness, and the audience fell into endless confusion and chaos.

“What happened? Why is there a power outage?”

“Where’s Ah K? Where’s the screen? Why is everything gone?”

“Damn, don’t step on me, it’s too dark!”

For a while, the long-abandoned loudspeaker was “pop pop” tapped twice, and from inside came a panicked voice.

“Um... that, sorry everyone, I am a committee member in charge of cleaning... no, logistics personnel. Due to that... technical issue, the Throne Race Competition is temporarily suspended. The results of the 32 qualifiers will be announced at a later date.”

Song Ke tightened her grip on Xu Xing’s hand. “Let’s go quickly.”

...

Maeda Jiu studied the point where the competition ended and hurried to the scene. Suddenly, Ferrara experienced a power outage. He stood at the alley’s entrance, waiting for Song Ke to come.

In the quiet night, faint sounds of a heated argument came from deep within the alley.

“When I sold the spot to you, how come you assured me? Didn’t you promise guaranteed advancement? Now that I’m eliminated, I’ve lost all my money!” a man’s voice sounded angry.

The other person apologized meekly, “I’m sorry, I’ll try to figure something out, get another spot...”

“What are you thinking? You’re useless. You claim to be a C-level awakener, but I think you’re not even E-level. Truly pure trash. I must have been blind at that time...”

The first man’s voice abruptly stopped, followed by a thud as a heavy object hit the ground.

Maeda Jiu furrowed his brow and headed towards the source of the sound.

A man of medium build had his back to him, panting heavily. In the man's hand was a sharp stone, and on the ground lay a warm corpse, its head smashed, blood flowing all over.

Hearing footsteps, the man turned around in panic, a bewildered expression on his face.

“Wu Xianghai? What are you doing here?” Maeda Jiu glanced at the corpse on the ground and raised his voice, saying, “You killed someone!”

Wu Xianghai was sobbing, his legs giving way as he knelt down. “Deputy captain, it's not like that... Listen to my explanation, I didn't mean to kill him.

“He forced me; I didn't want to. I just lost control... I, I just hit him once.”

Maeda Jiu's face turned solemn, and his words were cold and cutting. “I don't care about your conflicts, but you're an awakener. Even if your awakened ability isn't offensive, you shouldn't harm civilians. I will report tonight's incident to the Ferrara patrol team. Explain yourself to them.”

Wu Xianghai turned pale upon hearing this. “No, Deputy Captain, please don't tell the patrol team!”

Maeda Jiu snorted and turned away. “I should have known what kind of person you were. I shouldn't have brought you out of District D.”

Wu Xianghai's pleas fell silent for a moment.

Maeda Jiu was in a bad mood, and after dealing with the trouble, he just wanted to find Song Ke quickly and then return to the team.

Suddenly, his steps halted—

A cold black hole appeared in front of him; a strange ability unfamiliar to him devoured him.

Maeda Jiu was caught off guard, falling down with his eyes wide open.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 58: Tongwan Hospital (12)

She wanted to kill this person with her own hands

The city of Ferrara, known as the nightless city, was suddenly attacked by the rebels. The energy to the tower was cut off, plunging the entire city into chaos.

Song Ke and Xu Xing hurriedly made their way back to the central square. In Song Ke's mind, Zhuang Qingyan and Fang Zhixu were both "weak" men and had no ability to protect themselves. Putting them in a crowded place was usually fine, but the current situation was too dangerous.

As darkness fell, the audience at the scene was initially briefly bewildered. Then, internal panic was infinitely amplified, spreading outward. Countless people desperately pushed to get out, and due to not being able to distinguish the direction, there was shoving, falling, and even trampling incidents.

Fang Zhixu stumbled and was bumped by people rushing out from an unknown direction. Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair was constantly jostled and scraped, tilting and swaying, making it difficult to maintain balance. His face was stern, his eyebrows furrowed, enduring as much as he could. His right hand was just about to rise—

A slender hand reached from behind, steadying him.

Song Ke had come back.

Song Ke held the wheelchair with her left hand and pulled hard with her right hand, pulling Fang Zhixu, who was being tossed around, back. Then she dragged Xu Xing like a little tail, against the crowd, and managed to escape the congested center with difficulty.

The four of them moved away from the chaos and found a relatively less crowded corner to stand in.

“The resistance faction, they’ve taken action?” Song Ke asked.

“It was Lyon who took action,” Zhuang Qingyan corrected her.

The rebels were just troublesome pests and couldn’t stir up a major storm. But Lyon, supported by the century-old consortium, was different. He used a killer move as soon as he acted.

Cutting off the tower’s energy was a direct attack on the vital point. After all, Ferrara’s artificial intelligence was composed of data, and the central hub that stored massive data required energy support, much like a human heart. An artificial intelligence without a heart, losing its central hub of stored data, undoubtedly entered a “death” state.

After listening to the explanation, a hint of doubt flashed in Song Ke’s mind. Lyon’s success tonight came too easily, right? The tower was Ilya’s stronghold. Would he really surrender so easily? This super AI was said to control everything in Ferrara, so did he really have no knowledge of the underground activities of the rebels?

Song Ke voiced her doubts, and Zhuang Qingyan hesitated for a moment before speaking. Just then, a gentle female voice came from behind them.

“Ilya won’t lose so easily.”

It was Lin Youyou and Su Cha. They had arranged to meet here after the match, and despite the unexpected events, the two of them still showed up.

“Wh-what do y-you mean?” Song Ke asked.

Lin Youyou adjusted her mask, not taking it off even in the darkness. "I've heard Nana mention it. The central hub of Ilya is not in the tower at all. In the whole Ferrara, no one knows where its true form is. So even if the rebels destroy the tower's energy, it won't restrict Ilya."

"Moreover, they've underestimated this ruler," Lin Youyou sighed. "Ilya doesn't have much sentiment for the people of Ferrara, but his desire for power is top-notch. He won't allow anyone to challenge his authority, especially—humans."

In the central square, the panicked crowd was running around like headless flies, and the ruler of this city had yet to appear.

Zhuang Qingyan suggested reasonably, "We shouldn't get involved in this matter. Let's observe quietly for now."

Song Ke nodded. In any case, the struggle between Lyon and Ilya was Ferrara's internal affair. Their identities were just participants in the Throne Race event. It was not their place to intervene.

It was time to get things done. Song Ke turned to Lin Youyou, eager as she tugged at her sleeve. "Come with me, let's go meet s-someone."

Lin Youyou looked helpless. "You have to tell me who we're meeting first."

"Your fan," Song Ke grinned foolishly.

She glanced at the terminal and noticed that Maeda Jiu had not moved for a while. She urged, "Hurry."

What if he got impatient and left?

Song Ke dragged Lin Youyou towards the location, with Zhuang Qingyan and Su Cha following behind.

“Who is this person that you’re treating so well? Why do I have to go meet them personally?”

“Hehe, you’ll k-know in a mo-moment.”

When they arrived at the alley where Maeda Jiu was supposed to be, it was empty. Song Ke double-checked, yes, this was the place. So where was he?

“He wo-wouldn’t shy away and hide, would he? That’s not li-like him. He sh-shouldn’t know that I’m b-bringing Lin Youyou,” she wondered aloud.

Song Ke looked left and right but couldn’t find Maeda Jiu. All she saw was a dark, seemingly endless alley.

She thought for a moment and then stepped into it.

The further she went, the dimmer the light became, and the surroundings grew eerily quiet, as if even the flow of air had come to a halt.

Deep in the alley, a faint figure lay.

Song Ke halted her steps, a bad premonition rising in her heart.

She slowed her breathing, and a blue light flashed in her palm as her emei thorn spun into view, slowly approaching the dark figure.

In the bleak moonlight, the person’s face gradually became clear. The sight made Song Ke’s pupils shrink, her heart pounding violently, blood rushing to her brain, and her whole body buzzing.

Maeda Jiu’s eyes were open, breathless, lifeless, lying on the ground.

“Maeda... Maeda?!” Song Ke rushed forward and touched him. His body was cold; he had been dead for some time.

She struggled to accept it, attempting to feel his pulse and listen to his heart, but there was complete silence, no response at all.

“Ting—”

The emei thorn fell to the ground, making a crisp sound.

“Maeda!!”

An incredulous and pained cry echoed throughout the alley.

How could this be? Maeda Jiu, how could he die here?

Due to the immense shock, Song Ke’s thoughts descended into chaos. He was fine just moments ago, even messaging her. Why, why hadn’t they been in touch for a while, and he was already dead? So close to her, right before her eyes, Maeda Jiu was killed by someone!

Song Ke trembled all over. It was a tremor of extreme, infuriated grief.

Who was it? Who killed Maeda Jiu?

Tears streamed down her face.

It was all her fault. If she hadn’t invited Maeda Jiu over, if she hadn’t insisted on surprising him, pulling him along to meet Lin Youyou, would this have happened? Did she cause Maeda Jiu’s death?

Song Ke cried; she couldn’t control her tears, grieving inconsolably.

The others behind caught up, witnessing the scene, their faces filled with shock and disbelief.

Fang Zhixu glanced at the person on the ground, momentarily stunned, then closed his eyes.

Once a doctor, he used to be saddened by the departure of life despite being accustomed to life and death. However, later, those devastating blows completely extinguished his compassion. Now, his heart would no longer fluctuate.

Lin Youyou had the most intense reaction among the remaining people. She stared blankly at Maeda Jiu's body, at a loss for words.

Song Ke kept talking all the way, unusually talkative, sharing a lot about this person. She mentioned how he was usually very old-fashioned but oddly liked to listen to her songs. If someone else sang poorly, he would get angry. Lin Youyou could tell that, even though Song Ke kept saying what was wrong with him, she was actually full of anticipation. Otherwise, she wouldn't have dragged her to meet this fan.

And now, the person described by Song Ke, who was old-fashioned and awkward yet genuinely loved her as a fan, had died silently and unceremoniously. They hadn't even met.

Lin Youyou exhaled heavily, a bitter feeling in her chest. She could understand Song Ke's pain. "Su Cha, go have a look."

Su Cha silently approached, squatting down to examine Maeda Jiu's body. There was a clear missing piece on the left side, exposing a hollow wound. He activated his ability, and small dark green dots entered Maeda Jiu's mouth, capturing the traces left by the awakened energy. The killer was a person with abilities.

A few meters away lay another person, fatally injured in the head. Su Cha picked up some of the blood dust on the ground, brought it close to his nose, and sniffed. Besides the smell of blood, there was also an unfamiliar scent. The killer had hastily escaped after the murder, leaving behind many traces. Being from the rainforest, he had the innate skill of tracking ingrained in his blood. Given some time, he could find the culprit.

Zhuang Qingyan wheeled forward, Song Ke with her back turned, trembling slightly. He sighed silently and gently pressed Song Ke's shoulder.

"Let's inform Wu Juemin first."

"...Yeah." It took a long time before Song Ke replied in a low voice.

The next thing she had to face was probably Wu Juemin's wrath.

...

Wu Juemin arrived very quickly.

Not only him, but all seven remaining Azure Phoenix team members from Ferrara had also come.

Seeing Maeda Jiu's body, Ouyang Pei couldn't contain himself and cried out in deep sorrow, "Deputy Captain!"

Wu Juemin walked closer step by step, surrounded by surging abilities, exuding an oppressive feeling of an impending storm.

He squatted down, silently gazing at Maeda Jiu for a while, then reached out and gently closed his eyes.

Then he stood up again and said somberly, "Salute."

The seven Azure Phoenix team members, including Wu Juemin, uniformly removed their hats, placing their left hands flat in front while saluting with their right hands in the standard Alliance military salute.

"Maeda was an excellent soldier, obedient to orders, strictly disciplined. Since joining the Eleventh Team, he has been diligent and has never made any mistakes," Wu Juemin said.

“A person like him could die on the battlefield, die at the hands of enemies, or die in the course of a mission, but he cannot die here without reason.”

Wu Juemin turned to Song Ke, his voice dangerously low, “Tell me, why did he die?”

Song Ke hesitated.

Lin Youyou stood in front of Song Ke, blocking her, “Hey, Captain, she didn’t kill him. She came here with us and knows nothing. Song Ke is already upset. Don’t question her like this.”

Wu Juemin remained expressionless. “Maeda took an hour off today to come and meet her. Now, something has happened to him. If I don’t question her, who should I ask?”

“He wouldn’t leave the team easily. What did you say to him?” Wu Juemin continued.

Song Ke answered slowly, “I said, I-I had a s-surprise and a-asked him to come and w-watch the competition.”

“What surprise?” Wu Juemin’s tone was cold as ice. “Why did you specifically want to surprise him?”

“Because of me, the person Song Ke wants to take him to see is me,” Lin Youyou said, removing her mask and revealing her true face in front of others.

Wu Juemin frowned, apparently not recognizing Lin Youyou’s face. Maeda Jiu always respected Wu Juemin and regarded him as a role model for his actions, so he naturally wouldn’t reveal his star-chasing preferences in front of him.

Ouyang Pei, who had a closer relationship with Maeda Jiu, recognized her. He approached Wu Juemin and quietly explained Lin Youyou’s identity.

Song Ke patted Lin Youyou and stepped forward to explain, “We had a-an arrangement to m-meet after the competition. Fi-fifteen minutes a-ago, he sent me his location. I-I didn’t tell a-anyone about his wh-whereabouts.”

The other members of Azure Pheonix team had already checked the nearby surveillance cameras. However, due to the citywide power outage, the cameras were off, and the patrolling city defense robots had stopped working. At the scene, apart from the two bodies, there was no evidence left.

After listening to Ouyang Pei’s explanation, Wu Juemin’s gaze returned to Song Ke. His eyes were red, his hands clenched tightly by his sides, and he looked like a taut bow, and he was on the verge of breaking out.

Wu Juemin calmed down and realized that Song Ke couldn’t have killed Maeda. She had no motive and no time to commit the crime. However, the incident was indeed related to her, and he acknowledged his own prejudice born out of losing control of his emotions.

But Wu Juemin was also human, a person with flesh and blood. A fellow comrade, fighting shoulder to shoulder, had died in this filthy place. How could he face this rationally? How could he swallow this indignation?

The atmosphere in the narrow alley grew even colder than the harsh winter. It was at this moment that Zhuang Qingyan spoke up.

“Captain Wu, I may have some clues regarding the killer who murdered Maeda Jiu.”

All eyes turned towards him, and Zhuang Qingyan saw mirrored expressions of grief and hatred.

He organized his thoughts and began to analyze slowly, “Maeda Jiu was a C-level awakener. He awakened a defensive ability. If he was on guard, the assailant couldn’t have succeeded easily. However, besides the fatal wound, there were no signs of a struggle on Maeda Jiu’s body.”

“You mean the killer was someone he knew,” Wu Juemin noticed the key point.

Zhuang Qingyan confirmed his statement, "Most likely not just knew, but in Wu Juemin's eyes, the killer wasn't even aggressive. At least, the killer didn't possess the ability to kill him. That's why Maeda turned his back to the assailant."

Zhuang Qingyan's gaze fell on Maeda Jiu's mouth. Su Cha had just removed the clothing fragments there, revealing the hollow in his heart that looked like a black hole.

"I'm trying to reconstruct the crime scene. Maeda Jiu was originally positioned at the alley's entrance. After the power outage, he wouldn't have left his spot for no reason. So it's very likely that he discovered or saw something, like... the killer committing the murder. However, this person didn't seem threatening to him, so after dealing with the situation, he didn't feel the need to be on guard and turned to leave. The assailant took advantage of this opportunity and killed him."

Wu Juemin furrowed his brow, pointing out the contradiction in Zhuang Qingyan's deduction.

"Unreasonable. If Maeda was sure that this person wasn't a threat, why was he killed?"

"Because..." Zhuang Qingyan's expression turned cold. "From the very beginning, the killer deceived everyone."

Su Cha waited patiently. Tiny green light dots emerged from the black hole in Maeda Jiu's mouth, tracing the traces of awakened energy, leaving luminescent marks on the ground, extending in a certain direction.

"I think I have an idea of who it might be."

"I can find this person," Su Cha and Zhuang Qingyan spoke almost simultaneously.

Wu Juemin's expression became stern. "Who is it? Where is he?"

His black finger joints creaked. "Lead me to find him."

“I’m going with you.” Lin Youyou stood behind Su Cha.

Song Ke also stepped forward, her eyes reddened, a smoldering fire burning within them.

“And me.”

Never before had she felt such a strong urge to kill.

She wanted to kill this person with her own hands.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 59.1: Tongwan Hospital (13)

Bad Seed

There is a kind of person in this world, born in the dark and cramped slums, wandering in the dirty sewers. They envy others’ wealth and happiness, often cursing the unfairness of the heavens and harboring a deep resentment towards their own incompetence.

Wu Xianghai was one such individual.

He was a seasoned pickpocket, or rather, a thief, with a vile and shameless nature. He targeted the elderly, the weak, and women and took pride in it.

After the apocalypse, Wu Xianghai’s awakened abilities were related to this. Although it was only the lowest E-level, he could “steal” others’ abilities through theft and even level up using this stolen ability. The condition was that he had to personally kill the wielder of that ability to completely strip them of it.

The first person Wu Xianghai killed was a fragile female awakener. He relied on a sneak attack from behind. When he struck, he was trembling with fear, his heart pounding wildly. With an axe, he viciously

smashed the back of her head. Blood sprayed out, and Wu Xianghai was both terrified and oddly exhilarated.

During the process of taking the ability, fragments of the woman's consciousness entered Wu Xianghai's brain. He saw her past—her gentle lover, caring parents, friends... Her happy upbringing remained untouched even by the apocalypse.

“Good.” Wu Xianghai licked his lips, a perverse sensation filling his mind, ‘Everything is mine now.’

Knowing that his true ability must remain hidden, Wu Xianghai used the stolen “Object Sewing” ability to register as an E-level awakener. Later, when he fled his homeland, he luckily encountered the Azure Phoenix team and others who were evacuating, and he was taken away as an awakener.

Wu Xianghai acted timidly and pretended to be a simple and honest person, successfully following them to District C72.

Ferrara, this free city, amplified his ambitions and malevolent thoughts completely.

The second person he killed was a carefully selected D-level awakener, possessing an aggressive dark-type ability. As usual, it was a sneak attack. Upon killing the person, Wu Xianghai learned from the fragments of consciousness that this individual intended to participate in the Throne Race Competition.

The countless points, Alliance coins, and the possibility of fulfilling desires... The enticing conditions and plentiful rewards further inflated Wu Xianghai's desires. He firmly believed that he was like the protagonists in those leveling-up stories, rising from being a useless underdog, crushing everyone in his path, and couldn't wait to obtain a powerful ability to trample everyone.

By stealing abilities, Wu Xianghai became a D-level awakener. He used the money and channels left by the deceased to buy a slot from the intermediary, replacing that person in the Throne Race Competition. However, the reality that followed was different from what he had imagined. In this world, there were far too many individuals stronger than him. On the night of the Mirror Lake competition, Wu Xianghai was in dire straits. He almost *capsized in the gutter, nearly sending himself to the underworld.

Wu Xianghai, who luckily advanced, felt a dark mood. No, he needed an even more powerful ability.

Later, he finally killed a C-level awakener. The person had an incredibly elusive ability called Black Hole Devour.

From this person's memories, Wu Xianghai unexpectedly learned about the secret of Ferrara. The deceased belonged to a convoluted organization that claimed to be a resistance faction. Their goal was astonishingly to destroy all artificial intelligence!

Wu Xianghai realized he had gotten himself into serious trouble. He carefully destroyed the body and all evidence of this person's existence.

But he never expected that in the round of 32, he would lose. Despite having acquired the ability of devouring, he could never fully integrate it. It was as if it was inherently rebellious and could not be completely controlled. The consequences of losing the match were dire. The intermediary interrogated him vehemently, but Wu Xianghai was no longer the initially obedient character. He had transformed from a thief to a butcher, his hands stained with blood. Wu Xianghai's malevolent thoughts spiraled out of control. He picked up a stone from the ground and killed the defiant intermediary.

“What are you doing? You've killed someone!”

Wu Xianghai never expected that Maeda would witness the murderous scene.

The wrong person appeared at the wrong time and place, discovering his vile nature.

Wu Xianghai begged desperately, pleading for mercy. If his true ability was exposed, everything would be over.

But Maeda simply didn't listen. He was stern and merciless, threatening to inform the patrol team.

Wu Xianghai knocked his head on the ground, looking at Maeda's retreating heels through the cold gap. His eyes were gradually consumed by darkness.

“I gave you a chance. Since it's come to this, then just die!”

Seizing the opportunity while the other was off guard, Wu Xianghai made another sneak attack, killing Maeda and stripping him of his ability.

Then he fled in a panic.

Back at his residence, Wu Xianghai was engulfed by immense panic. He anxiously bit his fingers, drawing blood.

What to do? What to do? The people from Azure Phoenix won't let him off. Wu Juemin... thinking of the captain's sharp eyes, Wu Xianghai couldn't stop shivering, cold sweat trickling down his forehead.

'It's okay, it's okay,' he consoled himself. He had escaped quickly, leaving no traces. Tonight's power outage ensured that no one knew.

After the panic subsided, a familiar excitement gradually surged. Wu Xianghai moved his right hand gently, and an invisible air barrier appeared around him. It could spread out or change shape with his movements, wrapping around him like layered soft armor, its transparent surface indestructible.

As expected of Azure Phoenix team's deputy captain, Wu Xianghai's smile was greedy and cruel. This was the most practical ability he had ever seen.

The chaotic night passed without any incidents. There were no pursuers and no patrol teams. Wu Xianghai, who had been living in fear, slowly began to ease.

He had escaped, he was safe. In a few days, he would leave Ferrara and start anew somewhere else.

Wu Xianghai relaxed his mind, lying on the bed with his legs crossed, humming a pleasant tune. He flipped his palm back and forth, admiring his new ability.

A few fireflies drifted in from the window, their dim green light flickering and dotting his body.

Wu Xianghai reached out to shoo them away, but they didn't budge.

The next moment, his movements abruptly stopped.

These weren't fireflies at all; this was... psychic tracking, an awakener!

Wu Xianghai jumped up from the bed.

A poisoned dagger shattered the wall, a murderous aura surging as it pierced the gap between his legs. The venom spread, corroding the bed instantly. Thankfully, he moved quickly, or he would have lost his legs.

Wu Xianghai, like a mouse, lowered his head and darted into the corner, trying to escape through the hole.

Ethereal singing echoed, infiltrating his ears. His legs felt like they were filled with lead, making it difficult to even lift them. A strong debuff control ability.

More than one awakener had come!

Wu Xianghai frantically erected a defensive barrier, tightly wrapping himself up.

“Bang!” The door blew open, and a stern figure emerged against the dawn's light.

Wu Xianghai turned his head in terror, saw the person clearly, and his eyes widened in despair.

Wu Juemin... it was Wu Juemin who had come personally to capture him.

“Captain... Wu...” he stammered.

Wu Juemin's expression was icy, giving him no chance to speak. Quick and decisive, he vanished on the spot.

The person was an A-level speed-type awakener! Wu Xianghai's awakened energy surged, exerting all his power to ensure the barrier covered his entire body without any gaps.

“Clang!”

A terrifying force struck the back of his head, causing the barrier there to teeter, a large crack forming.

Wu Xianghai hurriedly began repairing it in a fluster.

Wu Juemin reappeared from high-speed movement, his voice furious and shocked, “You... you're using Maeda's ability?!”

His gaze made Wu Xianghai tremble all over, as if he had fallen into an abyss.

“You killed Maeda and deprived him of his ability,” Wu Juemin said each word distinctly.

Under the terrifying pressure, Wu Xianghai struggled to form a coherent sentence.

It was already winter, and the biting cold wind blew in from outside, bringing with it two figures, a man and a woman.

There were three awakeners chasing him. Cold sweat dripped down Wu Xianghai's forehead, and he felt trapped.

Wait, something's wrong...

The air seemed to stop moving. A more domineering and overbearing pressure than Wu Juemin's swept over, brushing against Wu Xianghai like a wild wind sweeping leaves. His whole body stood on end, paralyzed.

Behind Wu Juemin, another figure emerged, encased in frost.

The girl held a fierce Tang sword, stepping towards him, the tip of the blade exuding extreme killing intent.

Wu Xianghai knew her; this woman named Song Ke had terrifying combat power. In Mirror Lake, she could single-handedly kill mutant zombies and mutant water monsters, escaping unscathed from a hundred-person siege. Last night, she even decapitated the mechanical head, Sai Ang, with a single stroke.

Why would such a grim reaper appear here?

Wu Xianghai's legs weakened, unable to withstand the dual pressure. Tears and mucus mixed together as he cried and begged, "Captain Wu, don't kill me. I was wrong, I know I was wrong. Please, don't kill me..."

"I beg you, I know many secrets! I'll tell you everything, spare me, please..."

Wu Juemin coldly looked down at him, as if looking at a corpse.

Wu Xianghai cowered and turned towards Song Ke, trying to break through from her: "You... You're participating in the Throne Race Competition, and you want to win, right? I know many secrets, the resistance faction, yes, I know their next plans. I'll tell you everything, please don't kill me."

While begging for mercy, Wu Xianghai carefully observed their reactions and cautiously retreated.

Song Ke's expression remained unchanged, her eyes locking onto him. "You, deserve to die."

No matter what this person said, she wouldn't spare him.

The blade turned, and without a second thought, it slashed at the air barrier, a sharp and grating sound filling the air.

Wu Xianghai was terrified, knowing there was no hope in pleading with this person. He turned towards Wu Juemin, shouting desperately.

“Captain Wu, Captain Wu! The key! I know where the key is, I've seen it!”

Wu Xianghai accessed the fragmented memories of Maeda Jiu, seeing the image of Xie Zuo and unexpectedly learning about Azure Phoenix's mission.

This was his only bargaining chip at the moment.

Wu Juemin moved lightning-fast, blocking Song Ke's attack with his black gloves.

Song Ke was stunned and turned to glare at him. Why was he still listening to him?

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 59.2: Tongwan Hospital (13)

Bad Seed

“Where is he?” Wu Juemin stared intently at the kneeling man.

There was hope! Wu Xianghai's eyes darted around, attempting to buy some time.

“Once, when I was buying a slot from the intermediary, I saw that person, he was with someone with blue eyes, at, at...”

“Where!” Wu Juemin shouted sharply.

Wu Xianghai’s breath became rapid, the pressure making his mental power run wild, about to explode.

“Manzoni Street, Number 16! The person is there! I’m sure!”

While Wu Juemin pondered the address for a second, Wu Xianghai’s ability suddenly expanded outward, pushing away the few people in front of him.

Wu Juemin realized and punched.

“Bang!”

A severe impact rang out. The ability barrier, released at full strength, surprisingly withstood his attack.

Wu Juemin attacked again, one punch after another, with astonishing destructive power. However, the air barrier tightly wrapped around Wu Xianghai, like an impenetrable cocoon, unable to reach his true self.

“You can’t kill me! You can’t kill me!”

Wu Xianghai laughed manically. He now possessed a defensive ability, and nobody could break his barrier.

“Great stuff, Deputy Captain Maeda’s ability. Hahaha, great stuff!” He described wildly, shouting fearlessly.

Wu Juemin was furious, thinking of Maeda Jiu, a trustworthy teammate who always stood behind him for support. That was his comrade’s ability; how could it be desecrated by such a person?!

With a slight movement of his palm, a highly destructive particle weapon appeared out of thin air. Wu Juemin adjusted the aim, targeting Wu Xianghai.

If this shot went off, the entire house would be leveled.

But a figure rushed past him even faster.

Song Ke leaped high in the air, her weapon slashing with the force of tearing the sky apart!

The ferocious Tang sword chopped down, directly clashing with the barrier. A dazzling light flashed, the air barrier shattered inch by inch, and the blade continued down. Blood splattered as Wu Xianghai's left arm was severed.

“Ah!!” A heart-wrenching scream resounded.

What did a defensive ability matter? What did an air barrier matter? A metal-type ability could cut through everything!

He was just a vile thief, inherently evil. If Song Ke wanted him dead, there was no way he could survive today.

Wu Xianghai rolled around in a miserable state on the ground. Seeing Song Ke raising her blade again, he raised his voice, babbling incoherently, disregarding everything.

“You can't kill me, don't kill me. Maeda Jiu, there's something he hasn't had a chance to tell you. Don't kill me, I'll tell you!”

This was becoming unbearable.

Song Ke lowered her eyes, her offensive in no way paused.

Never give the enemy a chance to speak; this was a lesson reiterated by her master.

The Tang sword once again chopped towards the barrier, transparent glass shattered, a clear path unhindered, viciously plunging into Wu Xianghai's mouth!

Same position, same method of death—just how he killed Maeda Jiu, that's how he died under Song Ke's blade.

Blood splattered, and Wu Xianghai's heart burst instantly.

His breathing abruptly stopped, his eyes bulging out, like a dirty rat in the sewer, stomped to death.

Song Ke withdrew the Tang sword, her face covered in bloodstains, expressionless. Another fierce strike, stabbing down.

Completely dead.

The room fell quiet.

Song Ke walked up to Wu Juemin, silent for a long time, unsure of what to say.

Finally, she said, "I'm sorry."

The one who should have received the apology was Maeda Jiu, but he could never hear it again.

Wu Juemin looked at Wu Xianghai's body on the ground and spoke coldly, "To enter the Azure Phoenix's ranks of awakeners, one must not only pass the ability assessment but also undergo a test of character. Both are essential. Therefore, not all awakeners can travel with us."

"I was wrong. I shouldn't have taken you with us."

Song Ke had no words in response.

If it weren't for Wu Juemin, she might have been trapped on the island in F177, helpless and waiting to die. This captain of the Azure Phoenix had done everything within his power, rescuing civilians and awakeners from different places, leading them all the way to evacuation.

He was undoubtedly a good man, but now, he said he was wrong.

Wu Juemin glanced at her and said coldly, "From now on, don't see anyone in the team, don't contact anyone."

"That's it. There's no connection between Azure Phoenix and you anymore."

Wu Juemin left.

Song Ke looked down at her own shoes, lost in thought for a long time.

"Ke'er..." Lin Youyou called her worriedly.

Song Ke snapped out of it, and when she looked up again, her expression was calm.

"It's okay, let's go."

...

On the hotel's upper floor, Song Ke sat on the railing, silently looking outside through the floor-to-ceiling window.

She had been in this state for several hours.

Xu Xing peeked at her from behind, hesitant to approach. Instead, he went to fetch reinforcements.

First, he went to find Fang Zhixu. Dr. Fang was lying on the sofa, the back of his hand against his forehead, eyes half closed. He wasn't asleep, lost in thought about something.

"Hey, lazy old man," Xu Xing lightly kicked his leg, "Aren't you a doctor? My dad said you can come up with all sorts of comforting words. Hurry, go talk to my sister."

Fang Zhixu grunted, "What's it to me?"

He turned around, his back to Xu Xing, and added nonchalantly, "In situations like this, you have to find your own way out. I can't do it myself, so how can I advise others?"

Xu Xing felt helpless in the face of his indifference, stomped his foot, and went to knock on another person's door.

Zhuang Qingyan was in his room scrolling through the display, fingertips sliding rapidly, swiftly perusing a massive amount of data and information. Daylight shone on his profile, his expression especially focused. A night had passed, and Ferrara's energy had been restored, but artificial intelligence was still absent.

Xu Xing fidgeted on the carpet, reluctantly speaking up, "Uh, could you go and talk to sister?"

He never really got along with Zhuang Qingyan. Strictly speaking, this was the first time the irritable little lion had ever softened, using a somewhat imploring tone to speak to him.

Zhuang Qingyan glanced at him curiously and teased, "What? Worried she'll keep sinking into despair?"

Xu Xing pouted. Although he didn't answer, that was exactly what he was worried about.

Zhuang Qingyan turned the wheelchair and changed direction, pressing the pause button. “Rest assured, she’s not as fragile as you think.

“But, it’s time to end the indulgence.”

As he passed by Xu Xing, Zhuang Qingyan flicked his head, saying, “Instead of worrying about your sister, why not focus on improving your abilities? Don’t always hold her back. Are you aiming to become the champion of swimming, or do you want to be a lazy fish that only shouts ‘666’?”

Xu Xing held his head in his hands, yelling in annoyance, “Mind your own business!!”

Zhuang Qingyan chuckled lightly and went to the balcony, passing by Xu Xing.

“What are you thinking?”

The wheelchair stopped behind Song Ke, and he asked in his usual tone.

Song Ke didn’t look back but instead tapped the invisible glass in front of her. This marvelous piece of technology could seamlessly blend into the air, like a barrier. Only when you pressed on it with your fingertips would it slightly reveal itself.

“Wu Juemin sa-said he was wr-wrong,” she calmly recounted. “He said he sh-shouldn’t have taken us to e-evacuate.”

Today was the first day of energy recovery. Looking down from a high vantage point, Ferrara’s streets were desolate, the whole city eerily quiet.

“He told m-me not to c-contact anyone e-else in the t-team.”

“Does this upset you?” Zhuang Qingyan asked.

“Not upset,” Song Ke shook her head. “I’m thi-thinking that m-maybe I was wrong t-too.”

She sighed and counted on her fingers. “I’m very, v-very unlucky, and n-not very s-smart. I-I shouldn’t have kept s-such a close distance fr-from them, br-bringing disasters upon o-others.”

She still remembered back in Hua City when Zhou Anqi called her a star of disaster. Song Ke didn’t take it seriously at the time and just wanted to give her a good slap. But now, she felt her words were prophetic. It seemed like people around her were always unlucky because of her.

“I-I shouldn’t have brought y-you all back. M-maybe wi-without me, things w-would be b-better.”

Her fingers weren’t enough, and Song Ke slumped her shoulders in frustration.

“…I won’t p-pick up people a-again in the fu-future.”

“As for Wu Juemin, I won’t comment; let him solve it himself,” Zhuang Qingyan said. “As for you, don’t take everything on yourself. Maeda’s death was because he encountered a natural bad seed like Wu Xianghai. In a sense, it was his own carelessness that was the fatal cause. It’s not your fault.

“Your luck is a bit lacking.” Zhuang Qingyan smiled. “It’s quite difficult to drag others down. At your young age, don’t be so superstitious.

“As for the people you brought back, let’s start with Xu Xing. There’s no need to say much. Those two coolies were turned around at your whim, yet they didn’t storm off. Even Fang Zhixu, if you were to go back and ask him if he regrets following you, he’d probably just roll his eyes and continue sleeping where he is.

“Their answers are all there for everyone to see. Aren’t you clear about it? No one regrets it.”

“A-and what about y-you?” Song Ke’s clear eyes looked at him.

“Me?” Zhuang Qingyan’s smile gradually widened. “You’re my golden thigh. I haven’t had a chance to hug you tightly, how could I regret it.”

Song Ke was left speechless for a moment. But strangely, her lips couldn’t help but curve upward, and a small dimple showed on her cheek.

Zhuang Qingyan’s gaze lingered on her face for a couple of seconds, and he leisurely added, “However, I agree with the last sentence. Don’t bring people back anymore. Your arms are so thin, and there are too many people to carry.”

Song Ke slowly turned her head, staring at him expressionlessly.

After a while, she hopped off the railing, murmuring to herself as she touched her stomach, “I’m hungry.”

Zhuang Qingyan’s wheelchair followed behind her. “Now that there’s no robot butler, we have to do everything ourselves.”

After walking a few steps, all the terminals, televisions, screens, and projections in the hotel suddenly lit up, displaying the same image.

A middle-aged man with a stern face was seated at a desk, arrogantly delivering a speech.

“I am Lyon, the newly appointed magistrate of Ferrara. I now announce that the artificial intelligence known as ‘Ilya’ has been completely eradicated. From today onwards, Ferrara will enforce new rules.”

“Rule one: Strict entry restrictions will be implemented citywide, expelling unidentified refugees.”

“Rule two: All music performances and entertainment activities are prohibited. Holding large public events must be approved by the City Hall.”

“Rule three: All residents are prohibited from hoarding any form of artificial intelligence. Those found in violation will be severely punished.”

“Rule four:...”

“Rule ten: The ongoing Throne Race Competition will be taken over by the City Hall, and the rules and procedures will be redesigned.”

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Qingyan let out a cold laugh. “Cancel all major events, but conveniently leave the Throne Race. It seems they don’t intend to let go of this lucrative opportunity.”

Song Ke furrowed her brow. “Is he announcing Ilya’s death like this?”

The resistance faction had just succeeded last night, and they hadn’t confirmed the final result yet, but Lyon was in a rush to declare sovereignty. Was Lyon too proud and reckless?

Wouldn’t Ilya make any move?

As they were speaking, a deafening roar echoed from a certain direction within the city.

Song Ke focused her gaze, “Is that the Sycara Theater?”

Just as Lyon was delivering his speech, thousands of zombies surged out from underground beneath the Sycara Theater.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 60: Tongwan Hospital (14)

Are you looking for me?

A drop of ink splattered onto the white paper, spreading out in large splotches.

When a zombie broke free from its restraints, it triggered waves upon waves of frenzy.

This was the current situation at the Sycara Theater. Starting from a single point, it rapidly spread in all directions, an eerie zombie horde that sent shivers down one's spine, crawling out from underground and flooding the streets and alleys of Ferrara.

In all the screens and projected images, Lyon's speech was abruptly interrupted, leaving him with a bewildered expression.

His passionate speech had just been brutally debunked, turning into a ludicrous joke.

V587 had once taken on a commission to clear the zombies at Luli Port. At the time, the system had popped up with a strange prompt, asking them to capture the zombies and bring them back alive. Song Ke had followed a transportation truck, only to discover that these zombies were being transported to the underground of the Sycara Theater.

She, like others before, had thought that zombies were just fodder for the Throne Race Competition.

But now, reflecting on it, perhaps it wasn't fodder, but rather a means to cultivate something, and such crazed behavior would ultimately lead to disaster.

Cultivating zombies was already an extremely dangerous endeavor, especially when their numbers exceeded the threshold they could control. Seven to eight out of ten abnormal sources from nearby C and D grade cities flowed into Ferrara. While this city claimed to be one of freedom on the surface, its dark underground had long belonged to a vast kingdom of the undead.

Now, all the undead had escaped.

The ordinary citizens strolling on the streets hadn't yet grasped what was happening. They looked around in confusion, their dilated pupils capturing the swiftly approaching figures of the zombies. In an instant, the zombies lunged at them, biting their necks.

“Ah!!”

“Help, help...”

Similar tragedies continued to unfold in Ferrara.

In a high-rise hotel, Song Ke furrowed her brow, asking, “H-how did it come to this?”

Zhuang Qingyan joined her in looking down, his tone indifferent, “The Sycara Theater is under integrated management, with everything from security, monitoring, logistics, to defense systems controlled entirely by artificial intelligence.”

Song Ke immediately realized, “The a-artificial intelligence has b-been shut d-down.”

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, “Exactly, Lyon was too engrossed in enjoying the fruits of victory and didn’t promptly eliminate potential risks.”

Song Ke still couldn’t fully grasp one thing: Even if artificial intelligence managed more accurately and was far more secure than humans, could it truly be flawless, immune to any malfunctions? Wasn’t there any emergency plan within the theater, allowing such a significant threat to erupt unchecked?

Zhuang Qingyan seemed to understand what she was thinking and raised an eyebrow, “Do you think these zombies escaped on their own, or were they deliberately released?”

Song Ke: “!!”

She abruptly turned to look at Zhuang Qingyan, his expression was serious and it didn’t look like he was joking.

A chill ran down Song Ke’s spine.

If the zombies were intentionally released, then in all of Ferrara, only one “person” could have done it.

Song Ke remembered Lin Youyou’s statement about “Ilya having no feelings for the people” and a sense of dread enveloped her.

Did artificial intelligence truly have no pity for humanity?

Ferrara, without artificial intelligence, faced disasters far beyond this.

The citizens of Ferrara were like oversized infants indulging in a dreamlike illusion, full of bravado in words but practically useless in combat, with a combat effectiveness of less than zero.

They took pleasure in watching the awakens massacre zombies, but when it came to facing the same situation themselves, they were terrified. Most people trembled in fear, unable to even lift their weapons. The zealous audience who had once criticized the participants as “useless” and “couldn’t even kill a few zombies” were now scared witless, wishing to stay at home forever.

On the first day of the zombie outbreak, 90% of the public sector came to a standstill. The residents of Ferrara neither had work nor needed to go to the office. Engrossed in their leisure, everything from food, accommodation, transportation, and commerce was handled by AI. In their free time, they engaged in various entertainment activities. But now, with a colossal change in their lives and fear surrounding them, the frightened populace hid in their homes, anxious and fearful throughout the night.

On the second day, some awakens came out to hunt and kill zombies, but the effect was minimal. They killed the old ones, and new ones emerged. With too many people being bitten, they kept transforming into mutant zombies. Ferrara’s municipal hotline was almost overwhelmed, flooded with angry citizens denouncing Lyon as a coward for not deploying forces to suppress the zombies.

Lyon was powerless in this situation. The cold artificial intelligence was unafraid of death, enabling it to valiantly confront the zombies. However, humans were afraid. His personal guard consisted of humans, and not a single one dared to step forward to kill the zombies.

Regarding Lyon’s inaction, Zhuang Qingyan gave a cold two-word evaluation: “Utterly pathetic.”

Song Ke wholeheartedly agreed. The resistance faction was a group of spineless individuals who only knew how to bicker amongst themselves. Compared to Tongwan's security team, they were worlds apart. The contrast was stark. Zhao Liqiang and his team, when faced with the zombie tide, could choose to stand their ground, but Lyon couldn't even manage to drive away the zombies.

On the third day, the conflict escalated further. Some of the zombies fled Ferrara, providing the city's residents with a brief respite. The enraged populace regained their senses and initiated massive protests and demonstrations.

Lyon hid behind the screens, attempting to pacify the people through a public speech. However, every place he showed himself was pelted with stones, and countless people cursed at him, "Get lost!"

Within a short day, Lyon faced assassination attempts over a hundred times. Unable to withstand the threat of death, he awkwardly chose to step down.

He became the "three-day ruler," the shortest-serving leader in the history of the Alliance.

After Lyon announced his departure, chants for Ilya erupted throughout Ferrara, starting from scattered calls to a thunderous, unified roar, echoing throughout the entire Ferrara.

"Ilya! Ilya!! Ilya!!!"

In Ferrara, many absurd things were possible.

Ilya achieved victory in this bloodless struggle without expending a single soldier, without even showing up.

...

Song Ke fastened the buttons of her coat and gripped the spiritual weapon on the table. "I-I'm going out to take a look."

The people behind her seemed to want to speak, but she interrupted them preemptively. “None of you are allowed to go.”

It was chaotic outside. She could venture out alone, while her companions should stay in a safe place for now.

Zhuang Qingyan, Xu Xing, and Fang Zhixu remained in the hotel, allowing her to act with peace of mind.

Song Ke leaped and sprinted between the rooftops. The north wind billowed her coat, making it look like wings were sprouting from her back.

The distance between the two buildings in front of her was a bit far. Song Ke accelerated and leaped, releasing her transformed spiritual weapon bone whip mid-air, entangling the low-altitude track above her. With a swing, she smoothly landed using the momentum.

As soon as she landed, heavy panting was heard behind her.

Song Ke didn't stop, rolling forward, and sharp claws sliced through the spot where she had just been, leaving deep marks.

Song Ke quickly turned around, ready for action, but then froze.

The zombie in front of her was noticeably different from the ones she had seen before. It was larger, its skin tougher, its nails sharper, and even its pupils were not the common grayish-white but closer to pitch black.

Her heart skipped a beat; this zombie... seemed to have evolved.

The seemingly evolved zombie crouched down, kicked with its right leg, and sprang forward like a spring, with incredible speed and explosive force!

Song Ke lashed out with her bone whip, the sharp and slender segments tightly entwining around the zombie's neck. She pulled back with one hand, but it didn't budge?

Had its strength increased as well?

She hesitated for a moment, then shifted to a two-handed grip on the whip. Engaging her waist and abdomen, she swung her arms, rotated her entire body, utilizing her core strength to viciously swing a half circle, executing a shoulder throw that flipped the zombie to the ground!

The zombie roared and struggled, but it was trapped, unable to move.

Song Ke tightened the whip's end. "Crack!" The protruding bone crushed its neck, and the fierce head rolled off, splitting the body into two parts.

After this peculiar zombie's death, Song Ke thought for a moment. As a precaution, she pulled out a dagger and forcefully stabbed into its skull. A quick twist left the dagger tip hitting something hard. She pulled it out and found a sparkling, emerald-like crystal.

Though its color wasn't as deep as the one from the Mirror Lake's water monster, it was undoubtedly a Level 2 crystal!

Song Ke stood up abruptly, looking down at the ground. There were still many wandering zombies in the streets and alleys. Given the astonishing number, she didn't believe this was the only evolved zombie. Could Ferrara have really bred a Zombie King?

Suddenly, her gaze focused on a familiar figure passing in a certain direction, entering a tower.

Song Ke had excellent eyesight and quickly identified the person.

Lu Xinglan.

Wasn't he supposed to have withdrawn long ago? Why was he still in Ferrara? And why enter the tower at this time?

Song Ke pocketed the crystal and quickly followed.

The tower was Ferrara's tallest skyscraper, essentially a gigantic server room, housing the central hub for all artificial intelligence.

There were no stairs or elevators inside the tower, making it completely inconvenient for humans. Song Ke could only use the brute method, climbing floor by floor.

Around the seventh floor, she didn't find Lu Xinglan. Instead, she reached a dead end and saw a platform over two meters high.

Subtle movements came from under the platform. Song Ke circled around and found a miniaturized robot in a corner, repeatedly hopping in place, struggling to reach the top but failing.

The little robot had a square body with wheels on both sides, round eyes resembling binoculars, and two short mechanical arms.

Song Ke passed by it, exchanged a two-second gaze with it, and the robot's movements paused momentarily before its two mechanical arms started to sway happily.

All the artificial intelligence in the tower had already been shut down. This was probably a robot with a route programming error, lacking self-awareness, which was why it kept bumping into walls here.

Song Ke ignored it and effortlessly leaped upwards, gripping the platform with one hand, preparing to climb up again.

Unfortunately, she couldn't make it up. Something had caught her trouser leg.

Song Ke looked down, and the adorable little robot was looking up at her. Its mechanical scissor hands were unapologetically latched onto her. She tried to move upwards, but in an attempt to free herself, the hem of her coat got caught as well.

Song Ke let go and crouched down, attempting to communicate with it, “S-stop fooling a-around. I-I have things to do. Can y-you play by y-yourself?”

The little robot tilted its head, its round eyes blinking, not knowing if it understood.

Song Ke took a couple of steps forward, and the little robot was dragged along like a pendant.

She shook her leg, and half of the robot’s body began to dance like seaweed, its program beeping incessantly in alarm but still not letting go.

Song Ke grew irritated with the constant shaking, and with a bit of force, twisted and fastened its two scissor hands together, rendering it completely immobile.

The round eyes of the little robot blinked, seemingly bewildered by the loss of its arms.

Finally, it became quiet. Satisfied, Song Ke picked it up, tucked it into her collar, zipped up, and climbed back onto the platform.

First, she carried it with her, intending to find a random place to dispose of it later.

On the top floor of the tower, a massive floating screen quietly hovered in the center. In front of the wall formed by an immense flow of data, stood a figure.

Song Ke hid in the corner, secretly observing Lu Xinglan. He carefully touched the surface of the screen as if searching for something.

Just as she was about to move closer, Lu Xinglan, who had his back to her, spoke in a deep voice, “Come out, I’ve been waiting for you.”

Song Ke sighed; her hiding skills were indeed lacking.

Lu Xinglan turned around, and upon seeing her face, his ice-blue eyes flickered, slightly surprised. "It's you?"

"It's me," Song Ke answered in a deep tone, thinking to herself, 'of course it's me, who else would it be?'

"Was it you following me just now? Why did you do that?" Lu Xinglan asked as he withdrew his hands and put them behind his back.

"Why did y-you come to the t-tower?" Song Ke asked in return.

"Answer my question first," Lu Xinglan said arrogantly, "And also, things that don't concern you, don't ask or get involved."

Song Ke slowly replied, "Why? Just b-because you... you're from District B?"

"Oh?" Lu Xinglan smiled, and the unique color of his pupils rippled. "You know quite a bit."

The next moment, his smile vanished, and his expression turned as cold as his eyes. "I don't want to waste words with you. Where's the other person? Tell him to come out."

"What other pe-person?" Song Ke was puzzled.

"You've been following me all the way and still pretending? I don't have time to beat around the bush with you. Quickly call him out."

"...Who?" Song Ke was speechless.

Lu Xinglan stared at her bewildered expression, gradually furrowing his brow. 'What's going on? Is she pretending to be clueless, or does she really not know?'

In his hand behind his back, a light orb formed as the code 101010 danced within it. If it wasn't the person he was waiting for, then he wouldn't hesitate to act.

Song Ke opened her mouth, about to speak.

From the bulging collar, a cute little robot emerged, and a rough electronic voice sounded mechanically.

"Are you looking for me?"

Song Ke: "!!!"

Oh my god, how is this one alive?

She was utterly shocked.