

## Doomsday 91

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 91: When the Roses Bloom (9)

Qiong Qi

A group of people burst into the banquet hall, swiftly carrying the unconscious Rong Qin on a stretcher to receive urgent medical treatment outside. Mu Qin followed with a dark expression, while Su Fengsa hastily announced the suspension of the match, busy maintaining order at the scene. Meanwhile, the other central figure, Song Ke, was left alone, ignored, and isolated in the room.

In the preceding matches, the participants won rather effortlessly. Most people understood that the so-called selection process was merely a formality. Mu Qin managed to get Rong Qin on stage, even under the clear awareness of his “young master” status. It was anticipated that they wouldn’t go too far against him.

As it turned out, Song Ke indeed did not go too far—she didn’t even make a move. Rong Qin managed to knock himself out, which was simply laughable.

Could she be blamed? After all, she hadn’t expected this awakener to be so incompetent!

After Mu Qin led the group out, Ruan Wenjun calmly stood up and, looking towards Miao Lun, said, “May I have a word?”

Miao Lun smiled and nodded agreeably. Leading a few mercenaries, including Godanwei, they exited the bamboo house and entered the opposite room. Soon after, Song Ke noticed the beautiful sister signaling to her.

Amidst the noisy chatter in her earpiece and the chaotic background sounds, Xu Xing was cheering for her victory, Zhuang Qingyan and Lu Xiaoyu were arguing back and forth. Song Ke wanted to interject but feared being noticed for her unusual behavior, so she simply shut down all communication devices.

Following the beautiful sister to a spot below the bamboo curtain, she inquired, “Are you one of Sly Fox’s people?”

“Um,” Song Ke nervously replied, thinking to herself that she’d have to apologize to Irene for using her name in this manner.

“You’re lying,” the beautiful sister’s expression suddenly turned cold. “I’m from the Western Street. How come I’ve never seen you?”

“...” Ah, busted. Song Ke sighed. She didn’t possess Zhuang Qingyan’s skill; she was terrible at lying.

“In fact, I’m not affiliated with anyone. Sly Fox is a friend of mine...”

“A friend? What’s Sly Fox’s real name?” the beautiful sister interrupted.

“Irene,” Song Ke honestly answered. “I had no choice but to say that earlier.”

The beautiful sister continued to scrutinize her with suspicion.

Song Ke raised her terminal. “I can contact her now...”

The beautiful sister gently pressed Song Ke’s wrist, frowning slightly. “No need, it’s not convenient here.”

“Do you really know Irene?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Has she returned to Mu City?”

“Yeah, a few days ago, we met.”

“After she goes back, can you still get in touch with her?”

“I can.”

“Give me your address.”

“What?”

“I want to ask for a favor. I want Irene to come to your place. I want to see her tomorrow.”

“...Oh.” Song Ke quickly provided her apartment address, realizing belatedly that the beautiful sister, though dressed in an expensive dress, had no accessories or even a terminal.

The beautiful sister noted down Song Ke’s address and then gazed at her face, her eyes gradually growing distant. Unconsciously, she reached out her hand—

Song Ke held her breath, standing still foolishly, too afraid to make a move.

Just as the fingertips were about to touch her cheek, the beautiful sister abruptly snapped back to reality and quickly withdrew her hand.

“Here’s a piece of advice, no matter the reason, do not join the Guard Unit. It’s a conspiracy.”

Her tone was mild, but a careful listener could detect the goodwill behind her words.

“What do you mean?” Song Ke was taken aback.

The beautiful sister glanced back, seeing that Miao Lun and Ruan Wenjun had already walked away, leaving no time.

“The Guard Unit is just a facade. Their true target... is Shaye.”

“Remember to arrange for Irene to meet me.”

The two passed each other by.

Under the bamboo curtain, only Song Ke remained, now even more puzzled.

Not join the Guard Unit? Besides this route, she couldn't think of another way to get close to the General.

Song Ke activated her receiver, and Zhuang Qingyan's voice immediately came through: “Is everything okay over there?”

“Yeah.” Song Ke briefly recounted what had just happened.

“Hold on, I'll contact Irene to confirm,” Lin Youyou said.

Song Ke casually returned to the banquet hall.

Not long after, Mu Qin and his group returned. His gaze swept over Song Ke, showing no sign of anger.

“Congratulations on passing the selection. You'll officially join tomorrow,” Mu Qin announced with a composed expression.

Song Ke breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed like Rong Qin should be fine.

Miao Lun slyly disrupted the conversation, “Mercenary, what I said earlier still stands. Coming to my side is still a good choice.”

Song Ke looked awkward, silently retreating to a corner. However, a certain gaze followed her like a shadow, akin to a hidden snake lurking in the dark. Song Ke raised his eyes sharply and glanced over, it turned out to be Tun Qin.

The subsequent matches proceeded smoothly until there were only a few participants left. An awakener named Ta Xiong entered the arena.

Taking a little time, he successfully defeated his opponent and joyfully returned to his position.

Ruan Wenjun suddenly spoke up, “Stop right there. Where did you get your crystal from?”

In Ta Xiong’s registration information, there was an exceptionally unique Level 3 crystal, displaying a vivid red hue within a deep blue body. Both in color and purity, it stood out as the highlight among the batch of crystals obtained that day.

Ta Xiong paused, a hint of unease crossing his face, “I obtained it while hunting zombies.”

Ruan Wenjun coldly snorted, “Is that so... Check the production date of this crystal for me.”

Upon Mu Qin’s consent, Su Fengsa immediately arranged for instruments to measure the crystal’s radiation.

“Sir Ruan, this crystal is new, produced within the last week.”

“Within the last week... within the last week...”

Ruan Wenjun repeated this timeframe several times. The military boots hit the ground as he descended the steps of the platform. His tall and straight figure, with his sinister face hidden under the brim of his hat, instilled a shiver-inducing sense of fear in everyone.

Ruan Wenjun finally stopped in front of Ta Xiong, “Tell me properly, when and where did you kill the zombie?”

“I, I...”

Ta Xiong, just a Level B awakener, under Ruan Wenjun’s oppressive demeanor, struggled with shifting eyes, stammering, and eventually speaking in almost inaudible tones.

Miao Lun casually fanned the flames, “Ah, the Hero Banquet is indeed full of surprises. The quality of this crystal is very high, almost approaching Level 4. It seems that the host zombie must have been quite formidable for you to eliminate it. You must have some skill.”

Ruan Wenjun sneered coldly, “Was it you who killed it, or did you steal it?”

“Three days ago, in Xiangang, you shot and killed a Level 3 zombie with an arrow, didn’t you?”

“N-no, it wasn’t me!” Ta Xiong was drenched in cold sweat.

Song Ke’s body slowly lowered, quietly hiding under the table.

Ruan Wenjun was evidently here for the crystal she had snatched.

Ta Xiong’s denial did not ease Ruan Wenjun’s expression. Without a word, he pulled out his gun and fired several shots at Ta Xiong’s right leg. The specialized bullets would explode inside the body after penetration, causing excruciating pain.

“Ahh—!!” Ta Xiong clutched his heavily bleeding thigh, emitting a heart-wrenching scream. Ruan Wenjun used special explosive bullets, causing immense agony.

Ruan Wenjun's military boots pressed down on Ta Xiong's wound, grinding back and forth, "You're going to die either way. Admit it honestly. I can make your death a bit less painful. This is your last chance to speak. Did you steal the crystal?"

"It wasn't me!! I, I... bought this crystal from Shaye," Ta Xiong wept bitterly, "I wanted to participate in the Hero Banquet, to become an officer. I bought it from people associated with Qiong Qi, they killed the zombies and took the crystal. It really wasn't me!"

"Qiong Qi."

Upon hearing the name, Mu Qin's and Miao Lun's expressions noticeably changed.

Ruan Wenjun's mental energy surged, a prelude to stress, and his gaze turned terribly menacing. "Who are you talking about?"

Ta Xiong's face grew paler, "Qiong Qi, the leader of the Shaye refugees. I don't know his real name, they all just call him Qiong Qi."

The whole hall fell silent, even the participants dared not breathe loudly in the banquet hall.

The crystal handed over by Ta Xiong was placed in a transparent instrument, its elusive vivid red hue circulating, captivating everyone's attention.

"Although suppressing the refugees is the joint responsibility of the warlords, Mu Qin and Ruan Wenjun, are you not planning to take action?" Miao Lun, glancing meaningfully at Mu Qin, turned the tables after being questioned by him earlier.

Quelling rebellions and bandits was primarily the responsibility of these two warlords, particularly Ruan Wenjun, known as a war fanatic. If they couldn't handle a small group of refugees, it would destabilize their positions.

"The general is thinking about this," Miao Lun continued to press the issue.

“Colluding with the refugees means death,” Ruan Wenjun pronounced coldly.

“Bang!” The sound of a gunshot rang out, and Ta Xiong’s head instantly burst.

Song Ke looked at Ta Xiong’s body, the one who took the blame for her, and sighed silently.

After this incident, Ruan Wenjun lost interest in watching the matches and left the banquet hall with his men.

Following Ta Xiong’s demise, there were only a few people left. After a few more one-on-one fights, the recruitment of the Guard Unit was hastily concluded.

Song Ke left the mansion with a heavy heart, preparing to exchange intelligence with her companions.

As she was about to leave, she caught sight of Tun Qing standing behind Mu Qin, making a gun gesture towards her head.

Song Ke remained silent for two seconds, then slowly opened her mouth, silently mouthing the word: “Fool.”

She didn’t understand why Tun Qin had such intense animosity towards her. It couldn’t be because she always defeated him in competitions, as he’d never beaten Zhang Ci either. So logically, Tun Qin should hate Zhang Ci equally, right?

Muttering to herself, Song Ke hurried back to her apartment. As she opened the door, she found Zhuang Qingyan and the others waiting for her.

Taking the water from Zhuang Qingyan, she drank it in one go while listening to her companions discuss.

“There’s a problem with the Hero Banquet,” Fang Zhixu, rarely speaking up, said.



“Mmm, too hasty, we were misled by the threshold of the Level 3 crystal. The truth is now out in the open,” Zhuang Qingyan remarked.

Song Ke remembered Rong Qin’s frenzy to gather crystals during the battle and Mu Qin’s seizure of crystals, presumably for him.

Originally, it was believed that Mu Qin, under the guise of recruiting for the Guard Unit, would send higher-level awakeners to the general to fill the vacancies in the guards. However, judging from today’s selection, the abilities of the participants varied greatly, making it seem somewhat strained to appoint them as the general’s personal guards.

“So, should I still go tomorrow?” Song Ke inquired.

Zhuang Qingyan paused for a moment, “Regarding that individual of Miao Lun’s... who wants to meet Irene, what was Irene’s response?”

Lin Youyou brought up the terminal page, “They indeed know each other, and Irene has agreed to come tomorrow.”

“Let’s decide after the meeting. She surely knows something, so let’s see if we can extract more information from her,” Zhuang Qingyan suggested. “Additionally, let’s dig deeper into the information about the Shaye refugees and Qiong Qi. I have a feeling this could be a crucial breakthrough.”

...

The next morning, Irene knocked on the apartment door.

After Lin Youyou opened the door, Irene’s first words were, “Where is she?”

“She hasn’t arrived yet, please come in and wait,” Lin Youyou said softly.

Alertly, Irene walked to the window, propping up her cannon to surveil the street outside, preventing potential surveillance.

Song Ke confessed about lending her name to Irene yesterday, to which Irene shook her head, "It's fine."

"Irene, about the beautiful sister, is she really affiliated with you?" Song Ke asked.

"She can't entirely be considered mine," Irene replied calmly, "She only arrived in Western Street half a year ago. I'd say we have a sort of cooperative relationship."

Song Ke was about to ask further, but Irene suddenly gestured to her in a solemn manner.

"Here they come."

A few minutes later, a series of knocks echoed through the door.

The beautiful sister stood quietly in the hallway, draped in a shawl.

Irene aimed her cannon towards the figures wandering outside the apartment, "You brought a tail."

"They are Miao Lun's private guards, they are just monitoring my movements, they won't follow inside."

Once the four individuals were seated, Irene adeptly handed over paper and pen. The beautiful sister swiftly sketched, creating lifelike portraits one after another.

"I've only located these few, they agreed to wait for further messages from you."

"The others... couldn't be found."

Irene observed the sketches, "They're from Western Street, thank you for the intel."

The beautiful sister simply nodded, "For today... that's all."

"Do you still intend to stay by Miao Lun's side?" Irene suddenly inquired.

The beautiful sister's movements ceased.

Song Ke and Lin Youyou exchanged a glance. Lin Youyou subtly shook her head, and both held their breath.

"I've been thinking for three months, I still don't understand. What do you really want to do?" Irene locked eyes with the person in front of her. "You're not someone who seeks vanity, Miao Lun is capricious, each day with him adds more risk. Why deliberately get close to him?"

The beautiful sister fell silent.

At that moment, the guest room's door opened coincidentally, and Zhuang Qingyan and Fang Zhixu stepped out together.

"Therapy can only suppress muscle atrophy. I've temporarily stabilized your broken bones with my ability. When we return to Tongwan..." Fang Zhixu was giving detailed instructions when he inadvertently looked up toward the living room and was struck motionless as if by lightning.

"...A Yao?" His voice trembled as he called out.

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Chapter 92.1: When the Roses Bloom (10)

Why do doctors save people?

“...A Yao?” Fang Zhixu’s voice trembled as he called out.

The reaction from the beautiful sister was also big. She accidentally knocked over the paper and pen, hitting her shin against the chair, and creating a “scrape” noise.

Her entire face turned pale, staring at Fang Zhixu in disbelief.

“How could you be here? I mean, Mu City, you’re not...” Fang Zhixu took two steps forward, the language system completely disrupted. “You clearly said you wanted to leave Tongwan, start over somewhere else, no, no...”

Fang Zhixu glanced at Irene and then back at the beautiful sister, suddenly having a dreadful suspicion. His face displayed a shattered sadness and an impending enormous pain. “A Yao, what are you doing?”

At this moment in time, the only possible person who could appear here was Miao Lun’s mistress.

Coincidentally, Song Ke had encountered the beautiful sister twice. Both times, due to various circumstances, the communication device was inadvertently switched off. None of the V587 members had heard her voice. Moreover, at the banquet hall, due to the servants arranging screens, everyone’s attention was on Song Ke, naturally overlooking her, as she wasn’t that important.

Judging from Fang Zhixu’s current reaction, it was clear that they had known each other for a while.

Lu Xiaoyu, Su Cha, and Xu Xing heard the commotion and successively came out of their rooms. However, the atmosphere was tense, and no one spoke at this moment.

Song Ke slightly turned her head and noticed that the entire body of the beautiful sister was trembling as if a rose in a violent storm, on the verge of collapsing.

Fang Zhixu slowly reached out his hand but hesitated to touch her. “A Yao, please stop, stop this, okay? Let me take care of the rest. Trust me once more, even if it means death, I will do it.”

Perhaps stung by a specific word, the beautiful sister suddenly raised her head, her eyes bloodshot.

“What will you do? What can you accomplish?” The beautiful sister murmured softly, her voice increasingly poignant. “It’s been seven months. Do you still remember Tian Tian? Do you remember what she looked like?”

“You’ve forgotten, but I remember. Every night, I can see her crying face, she is my daughter, a part of my life. You can easily let go, but I can’t do that.”

The beautiful sister’s eyes welled up with tears, yet not a single drop fell.

“Fang Zhixu, you’re just a coward.”

“I have nothing to do with you anymore. I don’t need you to manage what I do.”

“...I should leave, otherwise Miao Lun will become suspicious.”

The beautiful sister staggered to the door. Song Ke wanted to speak up to stop her, but was held back by Irene and Lin Youyou, who signaled her with their eyes not to intervene.

Just before opening the door, with her back to everyone, she said, “The Guard Unit will have significant movements soon. It’s best for you not to get involved in anything.”

The apartment’s door closed slowly, and shortly after, the tails roaming outside the street also disappeared without a trace.

Inside the room, silence prevailed. Song Ke hesitantly began, “Fang Zhixu...”

Fang Zhixu stood motionless, slowly covering his face. Hot tears streamed from his fingertips. While neither of them had cried during their conversation, now, it was only Fang Zhixu, his emotions collapsing into wordless sobs.

Song Ke had never seen someone cry so heartbreakingly. Although no sound came out, every teardrop conveyed pain.

Gradually, she felt a rising discomfort in her heart, a sensation that made her want to cry too.

After a long while, Fang Zhixu managed to slightly steady his breath. "I'm sorry. I've constantly burdened you with my tasks without ever explaining the reasons."

"I want to kill Nai Kang because I seek revenge, a deep-seated vendetta."

"You and..." Song Ke didn't know how to continue.

"A Yao, her name is Zhang Wanyao, my wife," Fang Zhixu forced a slight smile at the corner of his mouth. Perhaps that shouldn't be called a smile; it was more like an expression of extreme pain. "...my former wife."

...

Different from Zhang Wanyao, Fang Zhixu hadn't dreamt for a very long time.

There was a time when he used to dream. In those distant and beautiful dreams, after returning from the 119 Hospital, on a bright sunny afternoon, he would turn the doorknob. A graceful figure, wearing an apron, stood with her back to him, painting on a canvas. Fang Zhixu's lips curved into a smile. He tiptoed closer, wrapped his arms around the woman from behind, rested his chin on her neck, took a deep breath, and felt all the weariness vanish in the warm embrace.

Zhang Wanyao laboriously turned half of her body, holding up a paintbrush and a palette with nowhere to place them. With a smile in the corners of her eyes, she gently scolded, "Doctor Fang, how many times have I told you? Change your clothes first when you come in. It's hard to clean off the paint."

Fang Zhixu resisted, not willing to let go. He muttered, "I'll clean it, let me rest for a while, I'm so tired."

Zhang Wanyao couldn't do anything about his stubbornness, so she nudged him with her elbow, "What about what we talked about last time?"

"Hmm," Fang Zhixu exaggeratedly grunted, "Take it easy, you want to murder your own husband? Don't worry, you focus on the art exhibition. I'll take care of Tian Tian this week. I've almost cleared my surgeries, only one patient left."

"...Is it that case with Mu City?" Zhang Wanyao furrowed her brow lightly.

"Yeah, that one. He's a high-ranking official. I, as a small doctor, can't decline," Fang Zhixu said.

"Stop it, it's because of the rare disease he has, and you can't resist the challenge," Zhang Wanyao immediately saw through him. Fang Zhixu, a medical genius, lacked interest in ordinary cases but became eager when it came to complex surgeries.

"He's just thirteen, after all, still a child..." Fang Zhixu coughed lightly, awkwardly changing the subject. After becoming a father himself, the sharp edges he once had softened considerably. "Where's Tian Tian? Is she still in class?"

"I'm here, Daddy."

A sweet, delicate voice sounded, belonging to a pretty girl with neatly tied twin ponytails, around eight or nine years old, pouting unhappily. "I'm right here, but you only see Mom, not me."

Fang Zhixu lifted his daughter with one hand, playfully rubbing her nose. "Who says Daddy can't see you? Daddy's heart blooms at the sight of you."

Tian Tian chuckled, revealing two adorable dimples on each side of her cheeks, making her look particularly endearing.

“Our great painter Zhang has to go to work. Tian Tian is on break these days. Will you play with Daddy?” Fang Zhixu asked his daughter.

Tian Tian hugged Fang Zhixu’s neck and gave him a kiss. “Okay, I love Dad the most.”

As the chief physician, Fang Zhixu naturally had his own office and lounge. He was changing clothes for a doll with Tian Tian when a colleague hastily knocked on the door and barged in. “Dr. Fang, the patient in VIP3 is in critical condition!”

In VIP3, the patient’s name was Nai Wen, a thirteen-year-old boy, the only son of C55 District, Mu City’s magistrate, Nai Kang.

He suffered from a rare bone disease: McCune-Albright syndrome (MAS), a more complex form of osteodystrophy. The condition worsened with age, causing clearly defined brown patches all over the body, accompanied by severe bone pain during flare-ups.

“Prepare for surgery. I’ll be there immediately,” Fang Zhixu stood up. “Also, ask the head nurse to arrange for colleagues to take care of my daughter.”

He crouched down to talk to Tian Tian. “Tian Tian, Daddy needs to go save someone. Will you be a good girl and wait for me to come back?”

Tian Tian was a bit displeased, puffing her cheeks, but reluctantly agreed. She raised two soft fingers. “Okay, but I want to eat two strawberry-flavored ice creams.”

Fang Zhixu indulgently smiled, kissed Tian Tian’s head, and gave her an extra scoop. “Daddy will get you three, don’t tell Mom.”

Nai Wen’s surgery lasted a full fifteen hours. Fang Zhixu was fully focused, racing against death, and managed to pull Nai Wen, who was on the brink of death, back from the brink. Just as he exited the operating room, exhausted, he collapsed and fell asleep on the floor.



Tian Tian slept in the lounge for a while, and the next day, when Fang Zhixu hadn't returned, she snuck out, holding her doll, taking advantage of the nurses dozing off. VIP3... Tian Tian faintly remembered this number. Dad must not have wanted to buy her ice cream, so he quietly hid here.

Tian Tian finally found the place and was about to enter when she was intercepted by a fierce-looking mercenary at the door.

"Let her in," a weak voice sounded from inside the ward.

Nervously, Tian Tian went in. Not finding Fang Zhixu, she was startled upon seeing the person inside.

The young man lying in the hospital gown on the bed was thin, nearly the same height as her. His eyes were incredibly dark and his left face bore a large brown mark, similar to a birthmark, which looked particularly frightening.

Tian Tian clutched her doll tightly, terrified. She took small steps backward, trying to escape.

Nai Wen stared fixedly at the little girl in front of him. He knew his illness was severe, having hovered near death countless times. He had been tormented to the point of being unable to bear it. His entire body was in excruciating pain. However, beneath that pain, there was another kind of hidden excitement silently spreading, as if telling him that all his suffering needed an outlet.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 92.2: When the Roses Bloom (10)

Why do doctors save people?

Nai Wen forced a stiff smile and softly coaxed, "Come here, I'll give you candy."

Tian Tian was well-educated; she didn't talk to strangers or accept things from them. She shook her head vigorously. "No, I want to go."

She turned and dashed towards the ward's exit.

“Stop her!” Nai Wen commanded.

The mercenaries, with their strong arms, pinned Tian Tian to the ground. Her doll fell, and Tian Tian cried out in fear.

Nai Wen's voice was cold and light. “I'm in so much pain. Why am I the only one in such agony? Play with me, won't you?”

Hearing the screams from inside, the mercenaries at the door seemed hesitant. “Is this... going too far... even in the hospital?”

Another person nearby said indifferently, “It's the same everywhere. If you don't want to die, I'd advise you not to meddle.”

Under Mu City's influence, Nai Wen could act without restraint. Mu City's hierarchical system was twisted, and even if he committed further wrongdoings, he could be suppressed. He had done this kind of thing many times before. After all, regardless of the ruckus, someone would always cover it up for him.

When Fang Zhixu woke up, he had a splitting headache.

He propped himself up from the cold floor. The nap hadn't lasted long, less than an hour. But after nearly a day and night of standing at the operating table, even his robust body couldn't endure, so he succumbed to sleep for a short while.

Rubbing his forehead, Fang Zhixu walked to the rest area. Just before he entered, he remembered something. He turned towards the hospital's downstairs supermarket and bought three boxes of strawberry-flavored ice cream.

He didn't want to be a father who broke a promise.

As he returned to the rest area, several hospital leaders were standing at the door, each with a worse expression than the other.

“What’s wrong? Don’t worry, the surgery was very successful, everything will be fine,” Fang Zhixu smiled and attempted to open the door.

“Zhixu...” The hospital director placed a hand on his shoulder, preventing him from entering.

“Why?” Fang Zhixu was puzzled, lifting the bag in his hand. “Let me in first. The ice cream is melting. Tian Tian will get angry again soon, and that little girl is not easy to appease.”

“Zhixu...” the hospital director repeated, tears streaming down his face.

Suddenly, Fang Zhixu had a foreboding feeling.

...

In the cold morgue, Fang Zhixu saw Tian Tian’s body.

A tattered doll was stuffed into her arms, her limbs broken, oddly reassembled, and her exposed skin filled with various bruises.

Fang Zhixu’s world collapsed.

“I will kill him!!!”

People around him hurriedly held him back. Fang Zhixu, with bloodshot eyes, kept struggling, wrestling, and tearing, but was firmly restrained.

The hospital director looked grave. “Zhixu, Nai Kang from Mu City is here with the security forces, they have surrounded the entire hospital. There are troops stationed outside Tongwan. This incident has caused a diplomatic crisis, and the news of Tian Tian’s murder has been temporarily suppressed.”

“Even if you rush out now, it won’t help. It will only cost your life,” the director knew the next words were too cruel for Fang Zhixu, but he had to say them. “The Magistrate’s intention is... you will still perform the surgeries, and he will personally oversee your work.”

“Get off me... I will kill him, I will definitely kill him with my own hands!”

Fang Zhixu was pinned to the ground, his head against the floor. His vision gradually blurred. “I was wrong... Tian Tian, Dad was wrong...”

“Dad, why do doctors save people?”

“Because that’s our job.”

“What if they are bad people? Do you save them too?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because bad people are first humans, and then they’re bad people. Doctors don’t have the right to judge, but the law will punish the bad people.”

But would the law really punish bad people?

At least, not in Mu City.

Fang Zhixu had raised a knife countless times, wanting to rush out and kill Nai Wen, but Nai Kang's men imprisoned him and forced him to operate on Nai Wen. Fang Zhixu refused to comply and spent numerous sleepless, painful nights in the dark lounge.

Then, the end of the world came.

Fang Zhixu was hit by a high fever. Having treated several individuals with special abilities, he knew secrets about awakening and a glimmer of hope ignited within him.

“As long as I awaken this ability, as long as I can awaken, no matter what ability it is, I will definitely kill them.”

But reality dealt him a cruel blow.

Fang Zhixu did awaken an ability, but it was the most useless – a healing ability, capable only of saving lives. How ridiculous it seemed that when his heart was filled with hatred, fate demanded he continue to be a doctor, saving lives and aiding the dying.

Three days after the apocalypse, there was an internal shift in Mu City, and Nai Kang left Tongwan with Nai Wen.

Fang Zhixu regained his freedom and returned home, utterly lost. Upon opening the door, he found Zhang Wanyao, who had noticeably lost weight, waiting for him with a calm expression.

“Ah Yao...” Fang Zhixu murmured, reaching out to embrace her, his head resting on her neck as tears streamed down his face.

“Fang Zhixu, you killed your own daughter.” But this time, Zhang Wanyao pushed him away.

Fang Zhixu froze in place. The equally haggard Zhang Wanyao handed him divorce papers.

“For these many days, what have you done? You couldn’t even carry out your revenge. You’re not worthy of being a father, or my husband.”

“I can’t face you anymore. I want to move to another city and start over.”

Fang Zhixu was too exhausted; his mind was not functioning properly. He reached out to grab her, “That’s not true, Ah Yao, I...”

Zhang Wanyao evaded his touch and walked swiftly towards the door.

“You, Fang Zhixu...” Her back trembled, her words cold and harsh, “No matter how much you suffer, you must live, spend the rest of your life atoning for Tian Tian.”

Fang Zhixu stood stunned for a few seconds, then stumbled out after her, but Zhang Wanyao was already gone.

He wandered the streets like a lost soul. His final memory was of several zombies leaping towards him.

...

“Let him be for now.” Lin Youyou closed the door, leaving Fang Zhixu alone in the room, while the rest of the people remained silently in the living room.

“Nai Kang, damn it,” said Song Ke, enunciating each word.

Was Nai Wen, the murderer of Tian Tian, deserving of death? Yes, but it was not easy to kill Nai Wen. The challenge was the magistrate of Mu City, Nai Kang, the ‘tyrant,’ who allowed his son’s actions to go unpunished after the crime, utilizing military force to oppress and even demanding Fang Zhixu continue surgery for the killer, showing no regard for him as a human.

Song Ke finally understood why Fang Zhixu and Zhang Wanyao often appeared absent-minded in her presence – because the similar pear dimples reminded them of Tian Tian, that lovely little girl. Perhaps it was because of this that Zhang Wanyao took the initiative to help her.

Irene touched the cannon in silence and said, “Of the three warlords, Miao Lun and the General have the closest relationship. I initially thought she wanted to get close to Miao Lun, but now it seems...”

Irene sighed silently and left the apartment, V587 resumed the meeting.

“Now, what do we do?” asked Song Ke. “I think she’s not lying to us.”

Regarding Zhang Wanyao’s words before she left, Song Ke believed her intentions were sincere. This matter was undoubtedly important, as she reminded them twice.

“Based on her meaning, Mu Qin’s recruitment of the Guard Unit might not be related to the General, but rather to the refugees from Shaye,” Zhuang Qingyan pondered for a moment and made a decision, “Let’s temporarily hold the original plan. Next, we will monitor Mu Qin’s movements and try to visit Shaye.”

“I’ll go, follow Mu Qin,” said Song Ke.

“I’ll go to Shaye first,” Su Cha said, taking the initiative to take on the other task. He was the most suitable person for it.

Shaye (District D88), Xiangang (District D90), and Emerald City (District D101) were large D-level cities surrounding Mu City. With Su Cha’s skills as an A-level awakener, combined with his proficiency in stealth and concealment, they were not worried when he went alone.

When evening came, Song Ke returned on time. Everyone waited until the early hours of the morning, but Su Cha was nowhere to be found.

Lin Youyou’s messages went unanswered, receiving no response. Su Cha never failed to reply to her messages before.

“Nothing bad would happen, right?” Lin Youyou expressed her concern.

“Should I go look for him?” Song Ke stood up.

Suddenly, there was a loud “thud” at the apartment door. The group turned their heads towards it, displaying alert expressions.

Song Ke’s palms slightly moved, conjuring a spiritual weapon dagger. With caution, they waited for a moment and then forcefully opened the door—

Su Cha was covered in blood. Despite holding on to open the door, his gaze was hazy. He managed to say, “Shaye, there’s... there’s...”

He couldn’t complete his sentence; he collapsed in a pool of blood.

“Su Cha!!” Song Ke quickly examined him. Su Cha had multiple cuts and wounds, with a fatal piercing wound in his abdomen, seemingly from a sword.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 93: When the Roses Bloom (11)

Shaye! Shaye!

Su Cha’s face was as pale as paper, and his limbs were icy cold. Song Ke helped him, laid him flat, and checked his neck; his pulse was very weak.

Lin Youyou dropped the terminal and rushed over, kneeling on the ground. Her expensive silk skirt soaked in blood, but she paid no attention. She wiped the blood off Su Cha’s face, repeatedly calling his name, “Su Cha, wake up.”



Zhuang Qingyan patted Xu Xing's back. "Quick, go get Fang Zhixu."

Xu Xing, the only one available, turned and hurried to the guest room.

Rising on tiptoes, before he could knock, Fang Zhixu had already heard the commotion from inside and came out.

His eyes were faintly reddened, his mental state not too good, but he was already alert. Unlike before, he wasn't excessively indulging in sorrow. Observing the sudden situation at the door, Fang Zhixu briskly walked over and stood beside Song Ke.

"I'll take over." Fang Zhixu gently took Su Cha, covering the most severe penetrating wound with his palm. A luminous white aura flowed out of his palm. The immediate concern was to stop the bleeding; otherwise, Su Cha might go into shock and die before further treatment.

"Prepare for surgery immediately. I need the following medications and tools..." Fang Zhixu, calm and composed, started listing the requirements clearly.

Familiar with the process after Song Ke's previous incident, Lin Youyou and others swiftly acted.

On the makeshift operating table, Fang Zhixu made precise incisions, preparing to cleanse Su Cha's wound. What surprised him was that although Su Cha's internal tissues were severely damaged, apart from the residual agitated spiritual power, there were no signs of infection.

"The wound wasn't caused by a physical object but by an ability," Fang Zhixu whispered. "The person who attacked Su Cha was quite decisive, striking in a single blow."

The group felt a heavy sense of concern. Given Su Cha's cautious nature, whoever managed to injure him was undoubtedly powerful.

The stitching process wasn't too difficult, and Fang Zhixu swiftly finished. Removing his mask, he said, "Don't worry. Su Cha has a good physical foundation. His unconsciousness is due to excessive blood loss. Rest for a night, and he'll wake up tomorrow."

Upon learning that Su Cha was not in critical condition, the group breathed a sigh of relief.

Song Ke stood up abruptly and headed out.

Zhuang Qingyan reacted swiftly, grabbing her wrist. "Where are you going?"

"To Shaye."

"The situation is still unclear..."

Song Ke, dragging Zhuang Qingyan and the wheelchair, rushed forward stubbornly, like a determined calf, impossible to hold back.

About to break free, Zhuang Qingyan exerted a little force, clasping her fingers tightly between his. "Shaye is more dangerous than we expected, you..."

Zhuang Qingyan was dragged forward another two meters. Tsk, the little girl is quite strong.

"I need to go back."

Song Ke's eyes blazed with an intense fire, but in fact, this nameless anger had ignited long ago. It started with the knowledge of the story between Zhang Wanyao and Fang Zhixu, and hearing about Tian Tian's encounters, and gradually intensifying with Su Cha's injury. The more it burned, the stronger it grew. Mu City... Nai Kang... this terrible, rotten place, these despicable people made Song Ke feel a rage she had never experienced before.

She turned to face Zhuang Qingyan, not shaking off his hand but just looking at him, her stubborn eyes shining remarkably bright.

Song Ke's life philosophy used to be simple: whoever bullied her, she fought back. Likewise, anyone who bullied her companions, she'd definitely fight back.

Zhuang Qingyan felt a pulse at his brow, instantly understanding he couldn't persuade her otherwise.

He swiftly assessed the combat power of V587 and finally made a decision: "Then let's go, I'll go with you."

"Plus Lu Xiaoyu and Xu Xing."

Lu Xiaoyu's mechanical arm nodded in place of him, rarely not objecting to Zhuang Qingyan's arrangement.

"You two stay behind to take care of Su Cha," Zhuang Qingyan instructed Lin Youyou and Fang Zhixu.

Three S-class awakeners, along with one B-class group-attack specialist, with this lineup, even if Shaye were a formidable opponent, they could take on the challenge.

"Get ready first, I'll talk to Fang Zhixu for a moment," Zhuang Qingyan said.

He scratched Song Ke's palm, calming her as if stroking a little cat's fur.

"Alright." Song Ke, comforted, pulled Xu Xing's hand and left first.

Once the door closed, Zhuang Qingyan turned to Fang Zhixu, "Get me two doses of the sealant."

The sealant injection was a therapeutic drug improved with abilities by Fang Zhixu some time ago, containing a high-intensity mixture of radiation and anesthetic substances. It had a compulsory effect to suppress pain and promote nerve activity, enabling Zhuang Qingyan to stand up for a short time without relying on any external aid for his broken leg.

However, this stimulating therapy had significant side effects. If administered improperly, it could cause irreversible damage to bones and muscles.

In compliance, Fang Zhixu gave him two sealant doses, driven by his instincts as a doctor, and cautioned, "This substance is still unstable. It's better not to use it. Even if you do, remember, a maximum of one dose within ten days. Overdosing could have unforeseeable consequences."

"I understand, just in case." Zhuang Qingyan subtly stashed the two sealant injections in his hand.

"Keep in touch at all times, if there's any news from Su Cha, immediately sync it with us."

"Alright, take care of yourselves," Lin Youyou nodded.

\*

When Zhang Wanyao returned, there was a large group of private soldiers guarding Miao Lun's courtyard.

Taking a glance, she intended to walk away but was intercepted by Hu Chao: "The master wants you to wait inside."

"I'm very tired and would like to rest first," Zhang Wanyao said with a cold expression.

"The master said for you to wait inside," Hu Chao remained unmoved.

Zhang Wanyao lifted her steps to walk inside. Within the house, occasional cries of women echoed, the bamboo windows reflecting several tall, blurry figures—these were the awakeners.

Miao Lun was just an ordinary person, particularly treasuring his life, and never straying more than five meters from others, not even shying away when doing those sorts of things.

Intense nausea surged up in waves from her stomach. Zhang Wanyao suppressed the urge to vomit and stood expressionless in the courtyard, waiting.

Different from newcomers like Mu Qin and Ruan Wenjun who rose to prominence through their own abilities in recent generations, Miao Lun's family had been military warlords in Mu City for generations. Their local power was deeply rooted, existing for a longer time than even the reign of generals. Many clandestine matters inconvenient for generals were completed through Miao Lun's hands. Hence, his personal relationship with the general was the closest among all the warlords.

Miao Lun could secure a position among the top three warlords despite being an ordinary person, which revealed his deep cunning and ruthless methods.

Although Mu Qin and Ruan Wenjun had gathered a large number of private soldiers, in terms of local influence, Miao Lun was second only to the general.

Nearly half an hour passed before the commotion inside gradually subsided. The door opened, and a bloodstained young girl was dragged out. Zhang Wanyao wore only a simple skirt, feeling chilled to the bone, her lips frozen. As the girl passed by her, she suddenly moved, her bleeding nails accidentally catching Zhang Wanyao's skirt.

"Mengsao..." The girl seemed delirious, uttering these words before being heartlessly pulled away.

In the Mu City language, "Mengsao" meant 'little sister.' Zhang Wanyao hadn't seen her before and assumed she was another one 'acquired' by Miao Lun.

"Come in," Miao Lun's voice rang out from inside.

Zhang Wanyao diverted her gaze and slowly moved inside.

Miao Lun's collar was open, exhaling smoke leisurely, with Godanwei standing behind, a compliant and agreeable look on his face.

"Come, come here."

Zhang Wanyao sat at Miao Lun's feet, with Miao Lun pressing her shoulder with the palm of his hand holding a cigarette. He pushed her down until her forehead touched the cold floor, assuming a reverent posture of submission, the waistline bent, akin to a devout bow.

"Do you know why I favor you?" Miao Lun asked.

Zhang Wanyao remained silent, aware that Miao Lun wasn't actually seeking an answer.

"It's because you are obedient, compliant, and intelligent. You know what to do and what not to do. I can give you some privileges to occasionally act willfully, but crossing the line won't be good."

The scorching cigarette ash dropped down, leaving shallow burns on Zhang Wanyao's shoulder.

"From now on, you shouldn't meet anyone from Western Street, okay?" Miao Lun's command made Zhang Wanyao's heart skip a beat. Miao Lun knew she had met with Irene, and perhaps he also knew about her assistance to Song Ke yesterday.

'Not good! The other people in that apartment...'

Zhang Wanyao panicked for a moment but quickly composed herself. Judging from Miao Lun's current reaction, he was merely warning her to stay away from people from Western Street. He probably didn't know their true identities. Someone as arrogant as him wouldn't bother about insignificant individuals.

"...Yes," Zhang Wanyao murmured softly.

Miao Lun smiled, exhaled smoke, and contentedly admired the helpless rose at his feet.

\*

In the Western Street, Irene walked alone on the road.

A notification sound “beep beep” chimed on her device, a video call from her teammates in Ferrara.

Irene answered, greeted by several bright and cheerful faces on the other end.

“Irene, we’re watching the Rainbow Band’s concert!”

“Look, look! There are fireworks and even flower boats, so beautiful.”

“Ferrara is really nice, I wish I could stay here forever...”

These girls, all taken out of Mu City by Irene over the past half-year, were without exception, all awakeners. For ordinary people, especially women, leaving Mu City was as difficult as reaching the sky.

“Irene, when are you coming back?”

“We really miss you...”

Irene abruptly placed her device down with teary eyes, hastily wiping away tears with her incomplete right arm.

“I’ll definitely come back before the match,” she answered with a smile a few seconds later.

Just after ending the video call, she heard commotion ahead. Her eyes turned cold as she quickened her pace.

“Marsha, you’ve been conscripted. Come with us immediately.”

Several private soldiers dragged a girl from a house. Marsha’s parents followed but were ruthlessly knocked down.

“No, let me go! I’m not going!!” Marsha struggled desperately.

Crack!

A slap struck Marsha’s face, causing her braids to scatter, and the arrogant private soldier showed no remorse.

“Just a mere lowly commoner, being able to join Lord Miao Lun’s ‘Rose Army,’ you should feel honored,” he sneered.

“Don’t waste words, just knock her out and take her away.”

Irene leaped onto the rooftop, positioned herself, switching her weapon to a Barrett M82A1 sniper rifle, slowly aiming at the heads of a few individuals.

Marsha was still resisting: “You’ve already taken my sister, I absolutely won’t go with you!”

The private soldiers grew impatient and were about to act.

Bang! A mild sound emitted from the silencer-equipped barrel.

A flash occurred as bullets infused with awakened energy precisely struck the bodies of the private soldiers, tearing them apart instantly.

Hot blood splattered all over Marsha, leaving her stunned.

Irene leaped down from the rooftop and approached her with light footsteps. It was only when she emerged partially from the shadows that Marsha exclaimed in a daze, “Irene.”



Most people in the Western Street knew this 'Sly Fox.'

Marsha rushed into her arms and wept, "Sister, they took her away. Irene, can you take me with you too?"

Irene patted Marsha's head, "I've killed their men. It won't be long before they find out. It's not safe for you to be with me."

Marsha looked despairing, "Then what should I do? I absolutely won't go with them."

Irene pondered, "You should go to Xiangang and find Samuel. It might be tough facing zombies every day, but at least no one will force you to do things you don't want to do. Are you willing?"

"Yeah!" Marsha nodded through her tears.

"Um, excuse me..." a hesitant voice came from the street corner.

Irene immediately raised her gun, aiming at the newcomer.

A man in his early twenties jumped out from the alley, raising his hands sincerely. His face looked somewhat familiar, seemingly also from the Western Street.

"You're the Sly Fox, right? I've heard so much about you. I'm Kansu, I joined the freelance mercenaries two months ago. I really admire you..."

Irene's expression turned stern, but she eased the pressure on the sniper rifle.

"Just a moment!" Kansu realized he was talking too much and began sweating profusely, "I mean no harm, I just returned to the city and overheard your conversation, wanted to give you a heads up."

"A heads up about what?" Irene asked coldly.

Kansu scratched his head, "You probably can't go to Samuel anymore. I just came from there, and this morning he officially declared his alliance with Shaye..."

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 94: When the Roses Bloom (12)

Another S-level

District D88, Shaye.

Before the apocalypse, it was a somewhat famous heavy industrial city, serving as a satellite city of District C55, Mu City, alongside Xiangang, a city developing the marine industry, and Emerald City, which mined rare ores. It played a role in diverting the population and supplying a considerable amount of resources to Mu City.

Due to the excessive development of industries like steel, petroleum, and chemicals, Shaye suffered severe environmental pollution. The sky was constantly hazy, and the streets and buildings were enveloped in darkness, resulting in very low visibility.

Song Ke and the other three quickly moved forward, occasionally encountering zombies along the way, swiftly dispatching them with their blades.

By this time, it was approaching the early hours of the morning. As they moved closer from the outskirts of Shaye, traces of gunfire and residual smoke could be seen along the way. Various houses destroyed by supernatural powers, roads and bridges blown apart, piles of zombies and human bodies formed small mountains, creating a gruesome and heart-wrenching sight.

As they approached the city center of Shaye, the situation slightly improved. The areas destroyed were significantly reduced. Song Ke's ears twitched slightly as she faintly caught sounds of people from an abandoned steel plant. She gestured to her companions, and Zhuang Qingyan and the others immediately understood, proceeding cautiously.

They initially thought they had encountered fleeing refugees, but the situation was vastly different from what they had anticipated.

Approximately twenty or so supernatural individuals gathered together, mainly judged to be C-level and D-level based on their supernatural abilities. They were organized, with a rational division of labor, actively hunting down a group of zombie-like creatures following a coordinated command. Various supernatural abilities shimmered one after another, and with everyone's concerted efforts, the monstrous group was efficiently eliminated. A few ordinary individuals emerged from the group's rear, skillfully clearing the battlefield and collecting the fallen crystals.

"They're organized and disciplined, not ordinary refugees," Zhuang Qingyan analyzed calmly.

After clearing the area, the group of refugees began to head back.

"Let's follow them," Zhuang Qingyan said softly, adjusting the wheelchair to a quieter mode.

Lu Xiaoyu's mechanical arm extended, lifting off the ground and transitioning into a walking mode. Song Ke and Xu Xing held their breath, cautiously trailing behind.

After about half an hour of tracking the refugees, the four of them arrived at a camp. Calling it a camp might not be entirely accurate; while Samuel's type of establishment might occupy a few large buildings and could be called a camp, the scale of this steel forest before them had reached the standards of a stronghold or "base." At the top of the outpost in front of the base, two rows of massive, glaring searchlights rotated, leaving no room for any intruders.

With their stealthy agility, even a spy like Su Cha would be injured here. Song Ke became even more cautious, not daring to take anything lightly.

She tightly gripped the spiritual short sword in her palm and took a few slow steps forward. Suddenly, a strong sense of impending danger descended, causing Song Ke's entire body to bristle with alarm!

Even though she hadn't touched anything around her, it felt as if she had stepped into an invisible restricted area. The flowing psychic energy swept over them like a tidal wave, grazing above their heads.

The two rows of searchlights “click-clicked” accurately towards them, freezing their position in the spotlight.

This was bad; it was a detection-type ability!

Almost simultaneously, a piercing alarm rang out, and over a dozen awakeners leaped down from the outpost, swiftly rushing towards them.

Zhuang Qingyan immediately issued a command: “Xu Xing, take five steps back, and release ice at the ten o’clock position.”

Xu Xing hurriedly ran backward on his short legs, releasing ice shards as directed, slowing down the opponent’s initial assault.

Lu Xiaoyu’s six arms moved in unison, launching a rapid attack with a code wall of 101010, seizing the opportunity to block the opponents’ retreat and attempt to capture them.

Seeing that they could manage, Song Ke cautiously charged into the enemy formation.

Her short sword danced in her hand as she engaged with four or five people in front of her. These awakeners were formidable, and their attacks were ruthless. However, when confronted head-on with Song Ke’s aggressive assault, they found themselves at a disadvantage. She wielded her sword, forcing one of the awakeners to retreat, exerting a dominant awakened energy to suppress them. The opponent hesitated, showing a clear vulnerability, which Song Ke exploited, swiftly toppling them with a kick.

A gust of wind blades came from behind. Song Ke dodged to the side, but just as she avoided it, the ground beneath her began to tremble violently, cracking on both sides. She had to reach out to steady herself. Simultaneously, three other awakeners leaped into the air, hurling numerous dark-colored energy clusters towards her face.

Song Ke’s eyes narrowed. Her spiritual short sword transformed for a second time, extending into a three-foot-long sword, emitting a surging sword aura as she swung it backward.

“Beep-beep—”

Xu Xing’s terminal suddenly lit up. The little guy glanced at it, widened his eyes, and quickly handed it to Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his gaze. The voice message from Lin Youyou was extremely urgent.

“Where are you? Su Cha’s awake. He said there’s an S-level awakener in Shaye. Be careful!!”

Song Ke’s sword aura shattered not only the dark energy clusters but also ended the attack from the three awakeners. As they scrambled to fall from mid-air, she seized the opportunity to counter-attack, aiming to strike the enemy’s throat when—

A sudden change occurred!

Thousands of golden runes descended from the sky, encircling Song Ke. In the thick mist, a deep and ethereal chanting began to echo.

“Heaven and Earth’s Mystical Ancestry, the origin of all energy, honed through countless eons, proving my divine abilities.”

In the blink of an eye, the runes vanished, transforming into innumerable golden sword lights, carrying the might of thunder and storm, all directed at Song Ke to strike her down.

“Multitudes of Gods, pay homage, wield the thunder, instill fear in the evil and banish the supernatural beings.”

This was... the Golden Light Divine Curse! These runes were driven by supernatural abilities!

Song Ke’s mind and spirit shook entirely; the power of the supernatural runes was immense and could obliterate anything it struck. Being hit by them was no laughing matter!

The ground continued to tremble under her feet, and the surrounding awakens were watching her closely. Caught in a pincer attack, Song Ke had no choice but to evasively dodge the omnipresent golden light. She rolled and tumbled into a pile of debris, finding abandoned steel bars. In an instant, she conjured a huge shield to block all those swords. Due to the impact, Song Ke was pushed back for several meters within the debris before managing to halt her steps.

Amidst the dust and debris, a tall man wearing a black Taoist robe, his face obscured within the hood, strolled leisurely.

“Qiong Qi!” the awakens surrounding Song Ke shouted his name. “These people trespassed the restricted zone and attacked first.”

“Ruan Wenjun sure has many dogs, they all come sniffing after the scent.”

The dust filled her lungs, leaving Song Ke coughing uncontrollably, her face covered in ash and dirt.

The man in the hood remained silent for a moment, then suddenly formed hand seals. His middle and ring fingers touched, index, little finger, and thumb extended and aligned, then split upper and lower. He raised the golden seal to his forehead, and behind him, the thunderous roar of the void once again flashed with lightning.

The second round of rune attack was about to descend.

“No, I can’t let him unleash it!”

Certainly, Song Ke wouldn’t just sit and wait for doom. She thrust her long sword forward, decisively interrupting his hand seals.

Unexpectedly, the man was adept at close combat as well. For dozens of rounds, Song Ke sparred with him. Despite his techniques seemingly inferior, he remained composed, patiently seeking opportunities for a counter-attack.

In the midst of their engagement, Song Ke felt a strange familiarity, as if she had fought against this person countless times.

Harnessing her core strength, she abruptly altered her fighting style, launching a swift upward thrust. The man couldn't evade in time, and the fierce sword wind tore through half of his hood, briefly revealing the side of his face.

Black hair, black eyes, sharp eyebrows, a distinctive jawline, lips tightly pursed, making him seem unapproachable.

Song Ke's mind went blank for a moment. "You... are Senior Brother?"

He abruptly stopped, staring at her in silence and vigilance.

Song Ke belatedly realized and hastily used her sleeve to vigorously wipe her face. Just a moment ago, she had fallen into the debris and was utterly filthy. After removing the dirt and grime from her face, she lifted her head, revealing her clean, fair face.

"You are... Song Ke?"

The man stopped drawing symbols mid-air behind his back and slowly called out her name.

Song Ke took a step forward, akin to a nimble swallow, pleasantly calling out again, "Senior Brother!"

Zhang Ci responded, taking off his hood and looking down at her. "It's me."

"Everyone, cease your actions."

He then turned and issued the command, prompting the awakeners to immediately stop.

“It seems Song Ke knows this S-level; we don’t need to fight,” remarked Lu Xiaoyu, retracting his six mechanical arms and calmly returning to his wheelchair.

Zhuang Qingyan lightly tapped the wheelchair with his fingertips and discreetly glanced over.

After Zhang Ci said something, Song Ke began vigorously brushing off the dirt from her body, accidentally choking herself, leading to severe coughing. Zhang Ci reached out to help brush her off.

Zhuang Qingyan’s movement halted abruptly, his dangerous almond-shaped eyes narrowing.

Zhang Ci sensed something keenly, abruptly raising his head to look in the distance, where a man in a wheelchair was staring back.

“Your person?” Zhang Ci asked.

“Huh? Yes, he’s mine, a companion,” Song Ke replied, turning her head to happily wave Zhuang Qingyan and the others over.

Zhang Ci’s gaze returned to her. “Why are you here?”

Song Ke recalled the incident with Su Cha, about to speak, when another group jumped down from the watchtower, emanating a chaotic psychic disturbance. Astonishingly, they were all A or B-level awakeners. The leader among them yelled arrogantly, “Where’s Ruan? Hurry up and die!!”

As they approached, these individuals abruptly hit the brakes, their faces shocked as they looked towards Zhang Ci and Song Ke.

“Oh my, I’m not dreaming, am I? Is this an illusion?”

“You, Junior Sister!” Mo Yan, who was shouting earlier, leaped in front of Song Ke, excitedly pinching her face, only to receive a disdainful punch from Song Ke.



All these people were the elites taken from Yue Mountain Martial Arts School by Zhang Ci at the time, originally headed to participate in the Azure Phoenix assessment. After the apocalypse, they lost contact and unexpectedly encountered each other today.

Song Ke, with a serious expression, brought up the matter at hand, "Senior Brother, why did you injure Su Cha?"

"Who is Su Cha?" Zhang Ci asked in response.

"Su Cha is my companion, skilled in concealment. He returned from Shaye yesterday, heavily injured." Song Ke gestured to the wound on her abdomen.

Several of the first awakeners who had jumped down spoke up, "Qiong Qi, is she talking about the person who appeared simultaneously with Ruan's spy?"

"That guy's quite a fighter; we couldn't stop him. It was you who personally intercepted him," another said.

Song Ke was taken aback. These people referred to Zhang Ci as "Qiong Qi."

Could it be that Zhang Ci, her Senior Brother, was the same Qiong Qi, the leader of the refugees in Shaye, the one who had the three warlords and generals in a bind?

Zhang Ci quickly remembered the awakener he fought against yesterday.

"I'm sorry; it seems it was a mistake. The situation was chaotic at the time, and he almost infiltrated the base. I thought he was sent by Ruan Wenjun."

Realizing his attack might not have been light, even if the other party managed to survive, the situation might not be optimistic. Zhang Ci continued, "There's a B-level healer in the base. Bring him over."

“No need. Su Cha is currently unable to move,” came the cold voice of Zhuang Qingyan from behind the two.

Zhang Ci and Song Ke turned to look, finding Zhuang Qingyan reclining lazily in the wheelchair, his eyes filled with a smiling glint. “Qiong Qi, right? Can I make a suggestion? Since we can’t exactly call each other enemies, there’s no need for this many people to surround us. Let’s discuss matters in a more appropriate setting.”

“Who are you?” Zhang Ci maintained his expression.

“Me? Just an ordinary researcher,” Zhuang Qingyan replied with a smile.

Song Ke shot him a wordless glance, wondering why this person was being theatrical again.

Zhang Ci glanced at Song Ke, recalling her mention of a “companion,” and nodded slightly. “Let’s discuss inside the base.”

After tidying up the area a bit, the group made their way towards the gate of the base.

Mo Yan affectionately draped his arm over Song Ke’s shoulder. Since he couldn’t pinch her face, he settled for ruffling her hair.

“Little Junior Sister, you traveled a thousand miles just to chase your husband here? Determined to become Zhang Ci’s bride?” he teased.

Song Ke’s smile instantly dropped, “No, that’s not it!”

Mo Yan winked at her, “I understand, I understand, shy are we? Look at Zhang Ci, so thick-skinned, never refuting.”

Zhang Ci glanced at Mo Yan, unable to comprehend why these people could keep the same joke going for over a decade.

Behind the group, Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair stopped abruptly without warning.

"What's wrong?" Lu Xiaoyu asked.

"Nothing."

Lu Xiaoyu glanced at Song Ke, who was getting her head ruffled in the crowd, and Zhang Ci, who had an upright back, then turned to look at Zhuang Qingyan. The face that usually bore a false smile was now devoid of expression, faintly exuding a hint of the arrogance and rudeness of youth.

As Lu Xiaoyu observed, a light bulb flickered in his emotionally detached brain.

"Hah," he let out a cold laugh.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 95: When the Roses Bloom (13)

Hurry and bring my sister back!

The exterior of the Shaye base resembled a crouched fierce beast, constructed from reinforced concrete at the base. The active areas primarily concentrated about thirty meters above the ground, seemingly impregnable, like a fortress designed for both battle and defense.

Passing several swaying iron suspension bridges, Song Ke arrived at the giant maw opened by the beast, the main entrance to the base. The steel gates slowly opened, revealing the full view of the Shaye base before her eyes.

Unexpectedly, it was bustling inside, vibrant and full of life, permeated with the atmosphere of everyday living.

Children ran and played on the main streets, young women occasionally glanced around, mostly bowing their heads to focus on sewing and repairing. Under the eaves of adjacent buildings, red chili peppers hung alongside fragrant smoked meats. Various levels of empowered individuals moved through the streets, gathering in groups, preparing to go out hunting.

Seeing Zhang Ci and the others returning, people greeted them warmly.

“It’s Uncle Qiong Qi! Uncle Qiong Qi is so amazing!” The children excitedly gathered around.

“You’re back. Nothing happened outside, right?” a passing awakener casually asked.

“Axiang has prepared breakfast for everyone. Hurry and eat, don’t let your stomachs go hungry,” an elderly lady cautioned worriedly.

Although Zhang Ci was not one to smile or speak much, people in the base, upon seeing him, respectfully nodded to him, exuding a sense of closeness from within. The atmosphere here was completely different from that of Mu City’s. Senior Brothers and Senior Sisters mingled with others comfortably, chatting and laughing, faintly reminding Song Ke of her time in the martial arts school.

This had been the case since the past. Zhang Ci possessed a unique demeanor, and whatever he said or did always seemed to gain people’s trust. Coupled with his mature demeanor and steady actions, despite his young age, he was universally acknowledged as the “Big Senior Brother.”

Several tall observation towers stood atop the base. One of them was half-collapsed, charred by artillery fire, and a huge crane lay fallen on the ground, creating a deep crater. Following Song Ke’s gaze, Zhang Ci explained, “These past few days, I’ve been clashing with Ruan Wenjun, causing mutual injuries.”

Another senior brother, Fan Yiwen, in his thirties, sneered, “Just thinking about it brings bad luck. Recently, Ruan has gone mad, biting at us like a crazed dog, the fighting seems endless.”

Ruan Wenjun has been relentlessly attacking Shaye these past two days?

Song Ke paused in her steps, recalling the reddish-blue crystal from the Hero Banquet.

Suddenly feeling a pang of guilt, she honestly confessed the whole story to them, suspecting that Ruan Wenjun might have put the blame on Shaye for the trouble caused by the stolen Level 3 zombie crystal.

Upon hearing her explanation, everyone fell into a moment of speechlessness. "Well, little junior sister, shall we take the blame for you?" someone joked.

"Who taught you these mischiefs? Return my innocent little junior sister!" Mo Yan covered his mouth, pretending to be deeply distressed. "Junior sister, your actions have brought disaster upon us, causing the loss of an observation tower. Hey, Zhang Ci, aren't you going to intervene?"

Zhang Ci remained unbiased and made a fair judgment. "If I remember correctly, it was you who deviated the tower with your abilities. If you want me to intervene, then you'll be responsible for repairing it."

"Biased! How can our big senior brother be so biased!" Mo Yan was hopping mad.

"Haha, Mo Yan, are you daft? You want Zhang Ci to arbitrate for you?" A senior sister teased.

Knowing each other for over a decade, Song Ke knew they were all just joking, without any ill intentions, joining in their laughter.

The front was lively and bustling, while the rear was quiet and empty.

Xu Xing ruffled his own curly hair into a mess, muttering discontentedly, "Sister was taken away..."

Growing increasingly agitated, he clenched his fists and shouted at the man in the wheelchair, "Hey, she's been taken away by someone. Aren't you the most capable? Hurry and bring my sister back!"

"Did you hear that? Bring her back," mocked Lu Xiaoyu, playfully mimicking pulling actions with the two mechanical arms behind his back.

Zhuang Qingyan: "... Just shut up.

...

It was breakfast time, and Zhang Ci led them to the cafeteria. As they were among their own, there weren't many formalities. Just like in the martial arts school days, everyone casually grabbed their breakfast and found a place to sit, engaging in casual conversation.

"Senior brother, how did you become Qiong Qi?" Song Ke finally found an opportunity to ask.

"It's a long story," Zhang Ci slowly began to explain.

After leaving the Yue Mountain Martial Arts School, Zhang Ci and his group hurried to District B to participate in Azure Phoenix's assessment. Along the way, one after another, team members fell ill with a fever, forcing them to stop and recuperate. Once everyone had passed through the fever and awakened to their miraculous abilities, the existence of awakeners was no longer a secret. The impending doomsday arrived inevitably, with zombies and ferocious beasts everywhere, city transportation paralyzed, societal order collapsing, and every step forward becoming exceptionally difficult.

As the team captain, Zhang Ci had to contemplate future plans: should they continue northwards to the base and follow the original plan to take the Azure Phoenix assessment, or should they turn back and slowly build their strength at Yue Mountain?

Quickly, he made a decision. They wouldn't proceed forward. Zhang Ci had a premonition that the world had changed. The current Alliance was undergoing significant upheaval, and joining Azure Phoenix no longer held any significance. Since they had already awakened their abilities, they should take control of their own destiny.

"After returning to Yue Mountain, we found twenty-three graves. We didn't know what had happened, so we had to open each one to investigate," Zhang Ci recalled the feelings of that time. Dark clouds loomed overhead, everyone's expressions were somber and heavy. Witnessing all the martial arts school students turning into zombies was a hard reality for everyone to swallow.

“Master, Song En, and the others...,” Song Ke choked up. Finally, the day arrived when she told Zhang Ci about what happened at the academy, including having to kill her fellow students.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Zhang Ci assured her. “If he... was still around, he wouldn’t blame you.”

Although it had always been rumored within the school that Zhang Ci was Zhang Ting’s biological son, their relationship was not particularly good. Zhang Ci had always been a role model for all the students. Master had particularly high expectations of him; if anyone made a mistake, he would be the one punished. Zhang Ci, in essence, received the most punishment.

Zhang Ci spoke in a grave tone, “When you arrived at the school, he... had already passed away, right?”

“Yes, there was a hole in his chest,” Song Ke described the scene vividly based on her memory.

Zhang Ci fell silent, deep in thought.

“Senior brother, what happened afterward?” Song Ke couldn’t help but ask.

“Afterward...”

After leaving Yue Mountain for the second time, they continued wandering, passing by numerous shelters and camps established by awakeners but never settling in one. It was during their journey through Shaye that Zhang Ci rescued a group of refugees who had escaped from Mu City. Due to his formidable strength and growing reputation, more and more people gradually pledged their allegiance to him. From leading dozens of individuals, he expanded to hundreds, then thousands, and now as the leader of over tens of thousands of refugees.

In this post-apocalyptic world where strength reigns supreme, Zhang Ci’s reputation with his awakened S-level runic abilities spread far and wide. He remained undefeated. Under his leadership, the Shaye base grew increasingly powerful, to the extent that it began to challenge the foundation of Mu City, causing the despotic ruler Nai Kang and the three warlords to take notice.

Meanwhile, Zhang Ci himself had become the dreaded “Qiong Qi.”

Having finished recounting their group’s experiences, Zhang Ci lowered his head and looked at Song Ke.

“And what about you? How did you end up here?”

“Well...” Song Ke hesitated, rarely finding herself in such a dilemma.

V587’s sole purpose in coming to Mu City was to assassinate the magistrate, Nai Kang. But this matter was too extraordinary. Her senior brothers and sisters were dealing with Ruan Wenjun’s pursuit, protecting the Shaye base and the refugees. Their situation was already dire. Did she really need to burden them with this additional worry?

Song Ke struggled to make a decision. Subconsciously, she turned her head, seeking out Zhuang Qingyan’s position and used her eyes to ask for help: Should she reveal her purpose?

Zhuang Qingyan ignored her, completely unmoved.

Song Ke thought that Zhuang Qingyan didn’t understand her at first, she widened her eyes as she began using her fingers to gesture.

Zhuang Qingyan sighed in his heart, ‘This heartless little thing who couldn’t tell the difference between east and west after a few words of coaxing from others.’ At least she finally thought to ask for his opinion. He nodded slightly.

With his response, Song Ke turned back and honestly said, “Senior brother, I want to kill Nai Kang.”

The others were utterly shocked. “Oh my, little junior sister, you’re even more audacious than Zhang Ci!”

“Your ambition is way too big, isn’t it? Are you planning to become a magistrate on your own?”



“Talk aside, don’t take it seriously, if the magistrate of District C dies, there will definitely be big trouble!”

Zhang Ci didn’t immediately speak up. His gaze shifted from the small actions of the two individuals and he furrowed his brows.

While the senior brothers and sisters were in the midst of advising and persuading Song Ke, Zhang Ci subtly nodded towards Fan Yiwen.

Fan Yiwen immediately stood up, “Hey, little junior sister, Rita doesn’t know you’re here yet. She’s leading a team on patrol outside. Let’s go, I’ll take you to find her.”

Rita, her senior sister, is also in Shaye?

Song Ke’s eyes sparkled, “Okay!”

As Song Ke followed Fan Yiwen out, there was a sudden shift in the atmosphere within the cafeteria. The senior brothers and sisters, who were just laughing moments ago, almost instantly altered their expressions. Each one turned around, some clenched their fists, some folded their arms, quietly encircling the trio of Zhuang Qingyan.

Seated in the center, Zhang Ci adjusted his robe’s sleeve cuffs and abruptly spoke, “May I ask your name?”

Zhuang Qingyan calmly smiled, “I’m Zhuang Qingyan.”

“Where are you from?” Zhang Ci continued to inquire.

“I’m not really from anywhere, I come from the Qinglan Research Institute,” replied Zhuang Qingyan calmly.

‘No records of origin? That would mean he’s a refugee, right?’ Zhang Ci’s brow furrowed even more.

“Although Song Ke mentioned that you are her companions, there are some things I’d like to confirm. If there is any offense, please forgive me,” Zhang Ci said.

“What do you mean?” Zhuang Qingyan raised an eyebrow.

“Just what you’re thinking. Song Ke doesn’t have any family now. I... we have a responsibility to take care of her. We cannot let her be used to do risky things for dubious individuals,” Zhang Ci made a hand gesture, and a serene-faced woman emerged from behind him, “Bai Ruotong, an A-level awakener with the ability to detect lies in the mind.”

“What, are you going to interrogate me?” Zhuang Qingyan smirked.

“Not an interrogation, just a simple inquiry,” Zhang Ci said.

Zhuang Qingyan remained composed, leisurely leaning back in his wheelchair. Despite his physical condition, he still exuded an air of calm and elegance, smiling as if the moon had nestled in his embrace.

“Alright, then come at me,” he replied.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 96: When the Roses Bloom (14)

Officially declaring war

Bai Ruotong took a step forward and sat across from Zhuang Qingyan.

Ripples appeared in her pupils as layers of spiritual energy turned into a gentle stream, carefully sensing the emotional fluctuations of the other party.

“When did you meet Song Ke?”

“Seven months ago.”

“Was assassinating Nai Kang your idea?”

“No.”

“Have you ever used manipulation, suggestion, or instigation to influence her thoughts?”

“Never.”

Bai Ruotong furrowed her brow. Ordinary awakeners, when facing a mind-reading ability, would show signs of nervousness or agitation, but this person seemed like a calm, undisturbed body of water. She couldn't discern any clues.

Was he just exceptionally skilled at lying, deceiving even himself? Or did he secretly construct a mental barrier, blocking her detection?

Determined, Bai Ruotong released her ability to the fullest. The trickles of energy transformed into a surging river, intending to break through and forcibly enter Zhuang Qingyan's mind to extract information. However, as soon as she conceived this idea, she abruptly collided with a cold mental force. “Bang!” Like a giant hammer wildly pounding in her mind, her clear consciousness instantly blurred for two seconds.

“What... What is your purpose in traveling with Song Ke?” Bai Ruotong gritted her teeth.

“No specific purpose. After she saved me, we acted together,” Zhuang Qingyan replied calmly.

“Have you ever lied to her from start to finish?” Bai Ruotong's body swayed.

Zhuang Qingyan smirked, no trace of amusement in his eyes. “How do you define ‘lying’?”

Bai Ruotong’s cold sweat increased. Although she was the one questioning, the man in front of her remained composed. Her psychic ability was completely suppressed, immobilizing her. His mental strength was evidently higher than hers.

Bai Ruotong was suddenly alarmed, and a dreadful speculation surged in her mind: could he be...

“Ruotong, stop it.” Zhang Ci drew a calming symbol in the air, and it flew towards Bai Ruotong. She suddenly snapped back to reality, gasping for breath.

“Are you S-level?” Zhang Ci asked coldly.

“Indeed, I am.” Zhuang Qingyan smiled.

As soon as the words fell, two powerful S-level auras were simultaneously released, colliding head-on.

The expressions of the onlookers changed, and they quickly retreated, distancing themselves from the center of the confrontation. Tables, chairs, bowls, and chopsticks clattered to the ground.

In the midst of the chaos, the only one unaffected, Lu Xiaoyu, sarcastically commented, “If you’re going to fight, can you please consider how others might feel?”

Zhang Ci and Zhuang Qingyan fell silent, both retracting their auras.

Zhang Ci knew he wouldn’t get much from Zhuang Qingyan, so he turned his head to look at the other two. He glanced at Lu Xiaoyu, who was calmly continuing his meal as if nothing happened, and then fixed his composed gaze on Xu Xing.

Xu Xing was at a loss for words. He knew it! In V587, he was considered the weakest, and now he was likely to be taken advantage of again.

At a critical moment, Zhuang Qingyan cleared his throat twice, attracting everyone's attention. "Can I say a few words?" he asked.

Zhang Ci nodded faintly, "Go ahead."

"You deny Song Ke's ideas, probably due to concerns. But why not, in turn, seriously consider the feasibility of this matter?"

"No way, assassinating the magistrate? Tell me, how is that feasible?" Mo Yan exclaimed.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled, "From Song Ke's perspective, it does seem like a fantasy. But what if... we consider it from Shaye's standpoint?"

Mo Yan and others were stunned, and Zhang Ci's eyes flashed.

Zhuang Qingyan's next words seemed to carry some kind of persuasion, "Shaye Base has grown to a scale that has long become a major threat to Nai Kang. There will inevitably be a war between you and Mu City. A passive defense will only lead to constant attacks."

"Qiong Qi, you are an ambitious person, are you willing to succumb to Nai Kang's shadow? Are you willing to wait until he's in a bad mood and comes to attack you?"

"Since we've come to this point, instead of waiting to die, why not take the initiative? As long as we get rid of Nai Kang, the entire District C55 will be yours."

The same thought circled in the minds of others: 'This guy is definitely crazy! But on second thought, although his suggestion was shocking, it seemed to make a bit of twisted sense?!

Zhang Ci remained silent.

He never expected that his deepest secret would be revealed by this person with just a few words.

Why didn't he stay in other people's bases? Why, after awakening his abilities, did he refuse to continue participating in the assessments of the Azure Phoenix? Going further back, why did he and Zhang Ting have such deep conflicts? Ultimately, it was because their ideologies clashed.

Zhang Ci couldn't understand why, with Zhang Ting's abilities, he chose to live in Yue Mountain and open a small martial arts school. Zhang Ting always accused him of having too much ambition, being arrogant, and always wanting to stand out.

Zhuang Qingyan said meaningfully, "So, in the long run, Song Ke is clearing obstacles for Shaye's bright future. Instead of stopping her, you should join forces with her and together eliminate Mu City."

Everyone: 'This guy is terrifying, he's too good at manipulating minds!'

...

In Shaye Base, Fan Yiwen led Song Ke along the usual patrol route to find someone.

After about ten minutes, a figure with a high ponytail and a sleek appearance appeared in front of them.

"Senior Sister!" Song Ke recognized the person and rushed toward her like a little bird.

Rita turned around in surprise, and when she saw Song Ke clearly, her face lit up with joy. "Song Ke? It's really you! How did you find your way here?"

The two held hands and danced in circles, chatting for a while. Song Ke belatedly noticed that the girl next to Rita was curiously staring at her.

She scratched her head awkwardly and asked in a low voice, "Senior Sister, who are they...?"

Rita's expression turned cold. "They escaped from the 'Rose Army.' Hmph, I've never seen such a dirty and sordid place."

'Rose Army? What's that?' Song Ke was stunned.

...

In Mu City's base, a regular apartment.

Lin Youyou sat on the edge of the bed, with no make-up on, her long hair casually tied, supporting her chin as she dozed off. There was a faint shade of dark circles under her eyes.

Su Cha leaned against the head of the bed, fingers curved on his knee, silently observing her. As a popular star in Ferrara, Lin Youyou always paid attention to her image. She rarely appeared so unkempt.

Su Cha, with his first twenty years spent in the rainforest, had never seen Lin Youyou like this. When he first followed Lin Youyou, he was often scolded as "clumsy" and "stupid," and Su Cha's height of 1.9 meters was often berated by her, making him feel at a loss. However, he never thought Lin Youyou was "bad." After all, when he was at his lowest, Lin Youyou was the only one willing to take him in and even paid him a considerable salary. In Su Cha's eyes, Lin Youyou, no matter how bad, was still good.

Although Su Cha was skilled in stealth and infiltration, he had no experience in peeking at girls. Caught off guard, Lin Youyou suddenly opened her eyes and met Su Cha's gaze. Startled, Su Cha paused and awkwardly shifted his gaze away.

Lin Youyou's lips curled slightly. "Oh, peeking at me? Are you stunned? Am I good-looking?"

"No," Su Cha denied immediately, "...you should wash your face."

Lin Youyou almost choked on her breath. "I said you..."

At this moment, a message tone sounded. Lin Youyou lowered her head to check. It was a voice request from Irene.

After accepting the call, the sounds of gunfire rumbled on the other side, followed by Irene's hoarse voice.

"Are you still at the apartment? I need your help."

"Yes, what do you need help with?"

"I have a few friends who currently have nowhere to go. Can they hide out at your place for a while?" Irene's voice came through the communication device.

Lin Youyou quickly thought about it. Song Ke had already informed her about Shaye's situation, and they planned to head to the base as soon as Su Cha's body recovered a bit. By then, they would vacate this apartment.

Lin Youyou reminded Irene, "Sure, but don't forget, the address here has been exposed. Miao Lun's people once tracked Zhang Wanyao downstairs. This apartment is no longer absolutely safe."

Irene replied, "It's okay. We'll just transit here for a couple of days."

Lin Youyou waited at the entrance of the apartment. About an hour later, Irene arrived with four or five girls, swiftly crossing the street and entering the corridor.

Their faces and bodies were covered in injuries, with Irene being the most severe. Blood flowed continuously from her intact left arm, and the hand holding the gun's barrel trembled incessantly.

Lin Youyou quickly brought medicine to bandage their wounds. After a simple treatment, Irene stood up again.

"Wait here for a moment. I need to find a few more sisters."



Among the portraits given to her by Zhang Wanyao, there were still two people who hadn't been rescued.

"Irene, I'm not afraid. I'll go with you!" a young girl with brown skin held onto Irene.

"Marsha, you don't have any abilities. It's too dangerous to go out," Irene refused, shaking her head stubbornly, insisting on going alone.

Lin Youyou sighed helplessly, "Hey, you're injured. Going alone to save people is even more dangerous, isn't it?"

Irene replied, "It's fine. I can still fight."

"Forget it, forget it, I'll go with you," Lin Youyou said.

"You?" Irene raised an eyebrow.

"Looking down on me? No matter what, I'm still A-level, I can assist you. We can cooperate, better than you going alone, right?" Lin Youyou had learned a bit of Song Ke's recklessness from being around her for so long.

If reasoning didn't work, they'd use force to solve problems.

Lin Youyou stepped onto a stool, cleared her throat, and boldly shouted, "Sisters, raise your glasses together, break through the mist, and rise again! Kill the heavens, kill the earth, and become demons! Let me overturn the heavens again!"

A dark mist rose in the apartment, and countless blades flew around. This was Lin Youyou's new combat style, transitioning from pure support to a control style that combined defense and attack. It was effective for both offense and retreat, giving her some combat capabilities.

But these lyrics...

Had nothing to do with romance, a bit too much of a chuunibyou, and a bit vulgar. But as long as it worked.

A slight movement came from behind.

Lin Youyou turned around. Su Cha had put on a coat, with bandages wrapped around his abdomen. He was looking at Lin Youyou with an expression that was hard to put into words. In Lin Youyou's current appearance, even if she were thrown into Ferrara's central square, no one would associate her with the "sweet songstress" of the past.

"..." Lin Youyou awkwardly retracted her legs.

"Okay, then you come with me," Irene agreed after witnessing her strength.

Just as they were about to move, Marsha grabbed Irene again. "Irene, actually, I..."

...

Miao Lun Headquarters.

Zhang Wanyao carried medicine and arrived at the backyard, where the 'pets' here were those whom Miao Lun had not yet tired of. When he lost interest, he would send the recruited 'Rose Army' to various private military camps, euphemistically calling it 'resource sharing.'

What's even more tragic is that only the pets abandoned by Miao Lun could find a faint chance of escape.

Zhang Wanyao opened the courtyard door and quickly counted, finding that several rooms inside had emptied again.

She walked to the right, and there, the girl with bloodstains on her face from a couple of days ago was clumsily bandaging her wounds, gesturing a few times with her single hand but realizing it wasn't enough, she stopped in frustration.

Zhang Wanyao came over to her, took the gauze, and skillfully began to attend to her wounds, saying, "Let me do it."

The girl quietly lowered her head and looked at her. The woman in front of her was beautiful; although there were faint lines at the corners of her eyes, it didn't diminish her beauty. Instead, it added a charming charm. Unfortunately, her shoulders and wrists had dark brands, destroying this perfection.

Zhang Wanyao took some time, bandaging up all her wounds, cutting off the loose ends, and checking to ensure everything was neat and tidy.

"You did a really good job. Are you a doctor?" the girl asked softly.

"No," Zhang Wanyao paused, her eyes momentarily softening, "but my husband is. He's the best surgeon."

Both of them understood that the "husband" she mentioned definitely wasn't referring to Miao Lun.

"I'm called Marie."

"Zhang Wanyao."

"I was captured; I didn't join the Rose Army willingly." Marie clenched her fist, her expression full of resentment.

"Many people here are," Zhang Wanyao sighed lightly.

Marie remained silent for a moment. "But I heard others say that you volunteered."

Zhang Wanyao's back stiffened. "Yes."

Marie looked puzzled. "However, when you talked about your husband, it seemed happy. I don't believe you volunteered. Do you have a purpose?"

Zhang Wanyao didn't answer. "If you want to escape, I can help you..."

Marie interrupted her, "No, I won't escape."

Zhang Wanyao looked surprised and found a certain determination in Marie's eyes.

"My grandfather was a brave freelance mercenary. He taught me that one must avenge oneself. I can't humiliate myself by running away. I want to kill Miao Lun and avenge myself."

"Hush," Zhang Wanyao quickly covered her mouth, silently pointing outside the wall. There were awakeners everywhere, and they had to be cautious when speaking.

Marie lowered her voice, "You have companions, right? You've been in contact with people outside, helping those girls escape."

Zhang Wanyao frowned slightly, "I used to, but now I'm restricted from going out. That route is no longer feasible."

Marie blinked, seemingly assessing her credibility. Then, she unexpectedly said something shocking, "If you can find powerful help, I can connect you with them. I'm an awakener."

Zhang Wanyao was astonished, "Weren't you subjected to awakener detection when you were brought here? Only ordinary people can enter Miao Lun's room."

Marie folded her hands together, and a faint trace of awakened energy emanated, “My level is very low, only E-level, undetectable by machines. But I have a twin sister; our ability is telepathy. Within a certain range, we can understand each other’s thoughts.”

Zhang Wanyao looked worried, “Recently, Western Street has been chaotic. Can you be sure your sister is still in Mu City?”

As they were conversing, a thunderous noise resounded outside. The citywide announcement in District C55 was triggered, and the General declared new laws.

“From now on, a kill order is issued for all refugees fleeing to Shaye. The Guard Unit, Royal Guard, and Iron Eagle Team will collaborate to eliminate them. Mobilize all forces in Mu City, spare no cost, and within three days, eradicate the rebel forces.”

Nai Kang finally couldn’t sit still; they formally declared war on Shaye.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 97: When the Roses Bloom (15)

Missed? Another miss?

On the desolate and barren lifeline, an army of over 3000 awakeners marched towards Shaye in a formidable manner.

Apart from the regular troops stationed in Mu City, this joint army also included over 800 high-level awakeners (C-level and above). Among them, the Guard Unit, under the command of Nai Kang and serving as the personal bodyguards, mobilized a team of nearly 100 people. The Royal Guards, led by Mu Qin, drafted approximately 200 individuals from private forces, while the remaining 500 were all members of Ruan Wenjun’s Iron Eagle Team.

Ironically, among them were also those awakeners recruited during the Hero Banquet. Mu Qin, having collected the expensive ticket of a Level 3 Crystal, wanted to preserve his own strength. He immediately treated them as cannon fodder, sending them out to “resolve the difficulties” for the general.

All residents of Shaye took refuge in the underground air-raid shelters, and Zhang Ci called for an emergency combat meeting.

“How many awakeners do we have in the base?” Zhuang Qingyan asked.

“About 1500 people, but the high-level awakeners are less than 300,” Zhang Ci replied.

Not long ago, the two were at odds with each other, but now they were discussing countermeasures calmly.

Unfortunately, with 300 against 800, the odds didn't look promising no matter how you looked at it.

Zhang Ci and Fan Yiwen, among others, discussed the city's defense layout. Considering Zhuang Qingyan's injured leg, Zhang Ci would lower his head when speaking to him. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and wore a black Taoist robe that highlighted his slim and upright figure.

Zhuang Qingyan remained silent for two seconds, then pulled out a cane from space, stood up by leaning on the ground, and was now at eye level with Zhang Ci.

Lu Xiaoyu glanced at him, “You look like a peacock displaying its feathers.”

This guy never liked tilting his head to talk to others, always demanding that they lower their heads to him. Now, he unexpectedly stood up on his own.

Zhuang Qingyan coldly retorted, “You seem quite idle. If you have nothing to do, go optimize the monitoring.”

The detection awakener Lin Mo behind Zhang Ci stepped forward, “Uh, Brother Lu, I'm familiar with the monitoring. I'll take you there.”

Lu Xiaoyu snorted proudly and followed Lin Mo.

Zhuang Qingyan looked down at the three-dimensional map in the projection and fell into contemplation. Considering the current situation, the outcome of this war did not seem optimistic.

Zhang Ci turned around and asked in a calm tone, "Any suggestions on how to defend?"

As the leader of Shaye, Zhang Ci was mainly trusted because he did not have the faults of being arrogant and dictatorial. Despite being only twenty-five years old, Zhang Ci was calm, humble, and a good listener. As long as others had valid points, he would adopt them.

Zhuang Qingyan pondered for a moment and shook his head slowly, "Can't hold it."

Zhang Ci: "..."

"With Mu City's firepower, we definitely can't defend, but that doesn't mean we can't win," Zhuang Qingyan continued.

"Big brother, isn't what you're saying contradictory? If we can't defend, how can we win?" Mo Yan was confused.

Zhang Ci remained composed, "Share your plan."

Zhuang Qingyan smiled slightly, "Have you read the ancient military strategies? Capture the thief first to capture the king. As long as we take down Nai Kang, the joint army will fall into disarray."

Zhang Ci, with a deep voice, pointed out directly, "Your focus has always been on Nai Kang himself, not on Shaye."

"But that doesn't conflict with making Shaye win," Zhuang Qingyan didn't deny, calmly analyzing, "To win, we need to use unconventional tactics. Our biggest advantage is that Nai Kang doesn't know the true strength of Shaye right now."

Before the war, on the eve of the battle, Song Ke attempted to contact Lin Youyou. Unable to reach her, she called Su Cha.

“How’s your injury?”

“Fang Zhixu just treated me again. It’s almost healed,” Su Cha’s voice sounded normal. “Do you need me to come over and help?”

“Not for now. Just come over when the turmoil in Shaye is over.” With Mu City’s base sealed, the roads out of the city were all controlled by the joint army. It was too dangerous to move at this time.

“My senior brother asked me to apologize to you on his behalf.”

“It’s okay.”

Zhang Ci had explained that if Su Cha had any problems, he could come to the base for proper treatment.

Song Ke asked the three to stay in the apartment and come over after the chaos in Shaye settled. She then inquired, “What about Lin Youyou? I can’t contact her.”

Su Cha, unusually silent for a moment, said, “She and Irene went out to rescue people. Probably didn’t see the message.”

Not long after Song Ke hung up, Lin Youyou’s call request rang.

As soon as she answered, a deafening sound of intense gunfire came from the other end.

Lin Youyou shouted hoarsely, “Irene, they’re coming, retreat! Hey, Song Ke’er?”



‘What’s going on?’ Song Ke wondered.

Lin Youyou briefly explained the situation with the Rose Army, and Song Ke informed her about postponing the move to Shaye temporarily. After exchanging intelligence, Lin Youyou sighed, “I originally wanted to tell you, don’t retreat from the apartment temporarily. I might have to postpone coming over for two days.”

“Take care of yourself,” Song Ke instructed.

“You too,” Lin Youyou replied.

...

Lin Mo led Lu Xiaoyu through the base, and when they passed by the entrance of a factory, Lu Xiaoyu suddenly stopped.

“Where is this?”

“Oh, this used to be where they produced engineering vehicles and cranes, but unfortunately, they’re all broken.”

“Where are they broken?”

“It seems there was a programming issue, so they were all abandoned.” Lin Mo wasn’t too sure about the specific reasons.

Lu Xiaoyu’s wheelchair entered the workshop. After scanning around, his ice-blue eyes gleamed strangely. The control panels of all the mechanical vehicles lit up, and the panel codes rapidly circulated and changed. After a few minutes, the engines roared to life, and all the abandoned vehicles started moving in unison.

“I don’t think they’re broken,” Lu Xiaoyu said matter-of-factly.

Two tiny humans were surrounded by densely packed steel machinery, and Lu Xiaoyu remained nonchalant. Meanwhile, Lin Mo... Lin Mo was shivering, staring in shock.

Song Ke, Zhuang Qingyan, and Zhang Ci stood on the observation deck, and Lu Xiaoyu came over to them. "I reinforced the defense system, but some facilities are too old, and the effect is not ideal. Also, I suggest you take a look at this."

He pointed, and the screen's image was projected in front of them.

On the lifeline several dozen miles away, massive and cumbersome siege machinery was slowly advancing: large battering rams with metal heads, catapults carrying cannons, neatly arranged cloud ladder vehicles, long-range cannons, grenade launchers...

Zombies and ferocious beasts occasionally fled along the way, instantly obliterated as the joint army advanced effortlessly.

Lu Xiaoyu zoomed in on one of the cameras. Ruan Wenjun and Mu Qin, fully armed, stood at the forefront of the team. In the middle of the team, on top of an armored tank, sat a middle-aged man with a dignified appearance. He wore a gold-trimmed general's uniform, with a raised eyebrow, a hawk-like nose, and a fierce and sinister gaze through the camera, as if staring them down.

After seeing his face clearly, Song Ke was very surprised. Nai Kang was personally commanding the battle? Not only that, he was sitting so conspicuously in such a visible place. Was he afraid that no one would come to assassinate him? Did he rely on his own strength, or did he have something to rely on?

"Nai Kang, is he an awakener?" Song Ke asked in confusion.

Zhang Ci shook his head slowly, "Not sure. I've never had a direct confrontation with him, and information about him has never leaked from the Reunification Palace."

Song Ke's expression gradually became serious. Regardless of Nai Kang's plot or reliance in attacking Shaye this time, she was determined to kill him.

The four S-level awakeners sat or stood together, waiting at the high point of the base. The wind carried the distant news of battle, and even the air seemed to exude an inexplicable sense of solemnity.

In the evening, the joint army finally arrived at the outskirts of Shaye Base. A distant missile sounded the trumpet of war with a resounding “boom.”

“We can’t let the siege weapons get close,” Zhang Ci pressed the communication device and issued orders in a deep voice, “Mo Yan, take action.”

Mu City’s weaponry was renowned throughout the Alliance, and no matter how solid Shaye Base was, it couldn’t withstand such intense bombardment.

Mo Yan led a team of high-level awakeners, flanking and taking a detour to stealthily attack the facilities, causing a series of thunderous explosions.

Song Ke and Zhang Ci put on hoods and, under the cover of the vast haze, leaped off the city walls and rushed towards Nai Kang.

Song Ke gripped the spiritual weapon, the Snake Spear, surrounded by her awakened energy, as if entering her own realm, effortlessly defeating the awakeners blocking her way.

“Eight directions, divine wrath, let nature take its course... Disperse the malevolent, let the Dao’s qi endure.”

Zhang Ci supported her from behind, casting the formidable “Purification Divine Curse” into the air. In an instant, dark clouds surged, the earth resonated, and myriad symbols descended, leaving no escape for the awakeners hit by the wide-ranging attack. Those struck suffered burns on their skin, falling to the ground in agony.

Song Ke smoothly broke through to the vicinity of the armored tank, with Nai Kang just within arm’s reach.

Nai Kang's gaze was cold and unfazed. Without dodging, he waved his hand, and the guards around him immediately bombarded Song Ke with cannons.

Song Ke leaped high, gripping the spear with both hands, fiercely thrusting it towards his head!

"Boom!" A cannon shot from an angle, precisely hitting the spear. The powerful recoil force flipped Song Ke backward.

She managed to land with one hand on the ground, knees bent, narrowly stopping her retreat. Once again, she gripped the spear and slashed at Nai Kang. But at that moment, the tank beneath her feet unexpectedly shook, and Song Ke, off balance, fell from the top.

A chill ran through her heart. Why? Every time she was about to kill Nai Kang, she would "just miss by a bit." Did she have such bad luck?

Zhang Ci caught Song Ke's back, and his towering figure went over her. Swiftly forming seals, he sent a seven-star sword, imbued with the "Purification Symbol," flying towards Nai Kang. When it reached him, the sword suddenly shook violently, barely grazing his scalp. Nai Kang emerged unscathed.

Senior brother also made a mistake?

Song Ke and Zhang Ci exchanged a surprised glance. This wasn't right!

Originally planning for a single strike and quick withdrawal, they unexpectedly made consecutive mistakes, lingering in the same spot for too long, and instantly found themselves trapped.

Dozens of high-level awakeners arrived nearby, and a ferocious-looking short man emerged from the crowd. Tiger-like eyes stared directly at the two.

"Captain of the Guard, Juramani, though he's A-level, his true strength is close to S-level awakeners. His ability is spatial distortion," Zhang Ci quickly explained, "Others are easy to handle; focus on taking him down first."

Song Ke, casting a glance at Nai Kang from a distance, shook her spear and confronted Juralamani head-on.

...

Continuously, high-angle artillery struck various parts of the base, causing buildings to collapse and shatter resoundingly. The joint forces' firepower was overwhelming, and the situation on Song Ke's side was worrisome. Shaye's chances of survival were being squeezed.

Ruan Wenjun's expression was bloodthirsty and excited as he commanded the siege vehicles to continue bombarding the high-pressure iron net behind Shaye. As long as the lifeline was broken, thousands of zombies would flood in, and the Shaye residents hiding in underground shelters would be completely slaughtered.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his head to observe the situation. On the other side, Song Ke and Zhang Ci were still fiercely battling, and it seemed unlikely to end anytime soon. With Ruan Wenjun's reckless artillery fire drawing attention, wandering zombies gradually converged towards the iron net, increasing in numbers, including noticeable level-3 zombies.

Frowning, he contemplated for a moment, took out a sealed injection from the space, and glanced at Lu Xiaoyu, who surprisingly refrained from making sarcastic remarks.

Zhuang Qingyan remained composed as he injected his right leg. A slightly tingling liquid flowed into his bloodstream, followed by a piercing pain. Leveraging the effects of radiation, the cells of his remaining leg continuously renewed, reaching their peak activity at that moment.

"I'll handle Ruan Wenjun; you deal with the rest for now."

Zhuang Qingyan pushed himself up with his hands, without relying on any external force—stood up from the wheelchair.

...

Under the relentless destruction, the high-pressure iron net was on the verge of collapse. Ruan Wenjun's expression faintly revealed a hint of madness. Refugees were like bits of straw, and the masses like pigs and dogs; he cared nothing for the life and death of these people. As long as he could win, as long as he could defeat Qiong Qi, he would be happy to massacre the city.

“Swoosh!” An arrow flew from the side, lightly shooting towards him. Ruan Wenjun tilted his head to dodge and looked in that direction. The first thing that caught his eyes was two well-proportioned long legs, moving with a graceful and elegant stride. Gradually emerging from the haze, he raised his gaze and identified the person's appearance—an attractive man in a trench coat.

Where did this idiotic show-off come from? Ruan Wenjun disdainfully glanced at him and ordered his subordinates, “Get rid of him.”

The Iron Eagle team's awakener set up the high-position sniper cannon, ready to fire. Just as they were about to shoot, a sharp pain, like a knife cutting through their minds, struck. They clutched their heads, howling in pain, and the cannon's direction uncontrollably reversed, firing towards the rear where Ruan Wenjun was.

“What the hell are you doing?!” Amidst the thick smoke, teammates angrily shouted.

A magnetic and charismatic laughter echoed in their ears. “Lord Ruan, you're still so impulsive, just like in Xiangang that time.”

Xiangang?

Ruan Wenjun dangerously narrowed his eyes. “How do you know about Xiangang? Are you Qiong Qi?”

Courageous indeed, daring to confront him alone.

Zhuang Qingyan's mouth twitched slightly. Well, let him be Qiong Qi. He responded nonchalantly, “Of course, I know. I must thank Lord Ruan for generously allowing us to obtain a well-preserved level-3 crystal.”

“After selling it to some poor fool, we made a whopping ten million Alliance coins. Lord Ruan is indeed Shaye’s god of wealth. Shouldn’t I thank you in person?”

This person’s cutting words were exceptionally skilled. Ruan Wenjun, stung in a sensitive spot, instantly became furious. “Blast him to pieces!”

The artillery roared. Zhuang Qingyan swiftly ran around the iron net, tumbling to evade, occasionally deliberately pausing at certain points.

In Ruan Wenjun’s team, one awakener after another lost control—either suddenly collapsing unconscious or turning the cannons towards their own people.

Mental-type awakener? Ruan Wenjun gradually sensed something amiss.

So what? He would still die at his hands.

Ruan Wenjun mobilized his awakened energy, not relying on any firearms. With a move of his finger, “bang bang” bullets were fired out.

Zhuang Qingyan evaded awkwardly, and Ruan Wenjun closely pursued, relentlessly spraying him. Gradually distancing himself from the army, he forced the opponent into a dead end against the iron net.

Zhuang Qingyan’s back slammed heavily against the net, and eager zombies outside reached out to grab him.

His face filled with distress, he sighed, “Oh dear, Lord Ruan, after so many days, you’re still so careless.”

“Dying, yet still defiant.” Ruan Wenjun coldly snorted. Numerous bullets were about to turn Zhuang Qingyan into a sieve.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled wryly, “Carelessness can cost you your life.”

The high-pressure iron net finally couldn't bear the strain and collapsed with a loud crash. Over a dozen three-meter-tall evolved zombies roared as they rushed in, facing a barrage of bullets. The zombies, impervious to physical pain, opened their cracked mouths, enraged expressions completely undeterred.

Ruan Wenjun's pupils suddenly contracted. Level 3 zombies always had a territorial awareness. How could so many gather in one place?!

Even more shocking, those zombies, without sparing a glance at Zhuang Qingyan, bypassed him and charged furiously towards Ruan Wenjun.

Ruan Wenjun desperately used bullets to drive them away when suddenly his body froze. A cold and sharp spiritual force pierced through his mental field, rendering his own ability useless.

Before being torn apart by zombies, Ruan Wenjun looked at the man standing calmly in front of him with disbelief.

'How... could this be possible...'

With a relaxed posture, Zhuang Qingyan took two steps forward and finished off Ruan Wenjun with his spiritual crossbow arrow.

Zombies were mindless monsters, but evolved zombies were not.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 98: When the Roses Bloom (16)

Shaye's Counterattack

After Ruan Wenjun was torn apart, Zhuang Qingyan raised a repeating crossbow and aimed it at the remaining Iron Eagle Team.



Level 3 zombies possessed some intelligence. He could control their actions through mental power, such as besieging, feigning surrender, or escaping.

The trench coat swayed with a half-elegant arc. Zhuang Qingyan walked forward with a leisurely pace, standing in the midst of the monsters. With one hand in his pocket, he exuded the demeanor of a Big Boss, followed by a dozen Level 3 zombie henchmen.

A hint of Bking style emerged in the horrifying scene.

Zhuang Qingyan moved his finger in the direction of the Iron Eagle Team, and the zombies immediately rushed fiercely.

The artillery squad near the iron net panicked, abandoning the catapults and scattered in all directions. Among them, the slow ones were bitten by Level 3 zombies on the neck, falling to the ground, making a crunching sound as they were devoured.

“Ruan Wenjun is dead, and the defeat of the Joint Army is inevitable!” Zhuang Qingyan shouted loudly.

In such times, it was necessary to undermine the enemy’s morale. His clear voice spread through mental power, echoing throughout the battlefield.

The formation of the Joint Army was clearly disrupted, but unfortunately, it quickly regained order.

There was more than one warlord on the battlefield. The cunning Mu Qin took over the command, identifying Shaye’s weakness and shifting to a focused attack on the base.

After Zhuang Qingyan finished off the Iron Eagle Team, he looked in the direction of Song Ke and Nai Kang—there were countless siege ladders on the city walls, giant siege engines rolling over the roads, and metal hammers smashing Shaye’s foundation.

Residents hiding in the air-raid shelter had rocks and sand falling on their heads. They endured fear, huddled together silently praying.

“No time, I’ll go take out the catapults first!” Mo Yan shouted while running.

“Kid, come back!” Fan Yiwen couldn’t stop Mo Yan. He flashed and rushed into the heart of the Joint Army.

Mo Yan maneuvered through the haze, accurately throwing his supernatural fireballs at the siege engines. Everywhere he passed, fireworks erupted.

Faster, even faster... Mo Yan urged in his mind, moving swiftly.

Several rows of howitzers suddenly appeared in front of him. Mo Yan’s eyes lit up, he concentrated on accumulating energy. Just as a giant fireball bigger than his body was about to be thrown out—

A cannonball flew in from the side, landing at his feet and exploding thunderously.

...

As Shaye’s base was about to be engulfed in artillery fire, a high bridge suddenly descended from above.

“Creak—clatter—”

A dense array of steel machinery charged out of the base, including construction vehicles, bulldozers, cranes, new-model tractors... At a glance, it seemed endless. What was even more terrifying was that they came equipped with basic AI processing modules, fearlessly colliding with the approaching siege ladders and siege engines.

“Bang—”

The crane, like a ferocious beast, swung its arm forcefully, tearing down the ladders on the city wall. Its hard tracks ruthlessly rolled over, crushing them!

“Boom—”

Hundreds of unmanned bulldozers charged recklessly, carrying large quantities of explosive packs. In suicide attacks, they targeted catapults and missiles. Mercenaries nearby couldn't escape in time and were blown away, while similar highly lethal weapons continued to emerge from Shaye's base.

‘What on earth... are these things?!’

The mercenaries cried out in despair.

The situation on the main battlefield instantly reversed, putting the Joint Army on the defensive, and Shaye gained the upper hand!

In the lookout tower of the base, Lu Xiaoyu, with six mechanical arms standing, had closed his eyes tightly. Silver hair fluttered on his shoulders, and his entire body was surrounded by layers of binary code, like a giant ancient tree composed of data. Each branch executed different commands, simultaneously controlling all the steel vehicles with his supernatural abilities.

Once, in the dark and sunless underwater purgatory, Lu Xiaoyu was the Lord Hades who used Crime Record to govern the life and death of prisoners.

And now, the mechanical barrier he constructed became Shaye's strongest line of defense.

Nai Kang looked towards the high ground with a serious and solemn expression. Unexpectedly, besides Qiong Qi, Shaye had a second S-level awakener!

“Mu Qin, deploy snipers, immediately intercept this person!” Nai Kang's stern command came through the earpiece.

Mu Qin, in charge of commanding the siege, immediately organized a team of high-level esper snipers. Crimson aiming dots flickered on Lu Xiaoyu's face.

Beside Lu Xiaoyu, Lin Mo rushed forward anxiously, biting his lip. He opened his arms, shielding him.

Lin Mo was just a support-type awakener, usually only responsible for monitoring and detecting enemy movements. Now, with all the attacking awakeners from Shaye engaged in the battle, he could only anxiously watch. Lu Xiaoyu's role was crucial, and he must not be in danger.

The sniper, targeting their mark, was about to pull the trigger.

Suddenly, a group of level 3 zombies leaped over, landing precisely on the sniper positions. With the zombies' roars, the flesh of the awakeners in the sniper positions flew in all directions, completely disrupting their attacks.

In the chaotic battlefield, Zhuang Qingyan hurriedly passed by, casually helping out. However, he didn't linger on the main battlefield. After disrupting the snipers with a quick move, he continued to run forward and disappeared into the mist.

In the rear of the Joint Army, Nai Kang sat in the command seat of an armored tank, coldly overseeing the situation.

Song Ke's snake spear fiercely stabbed towards Juralamani's throat. Juralamani seized the spearhead with both palms, forcefully pulled it downward, locked it with his elbow, then wrapped both legs around the spear handle, hanging upside down on the spear. He rendered Song Ke's attack completely immobilized.

Song Ke's eyes flashed, recognizing the opponent's move... it was the Ghost Fist mentioned by her master!

Ghost Fist was an ancient martial art originating from Mu City, known for its strength and agility. During battles, practitioners used the body's fists, legs, elbows, and knees—eight limbs in total—as sharp weapons. The practitioner's limbs moved simultaneously, resembling a spider. Because of this, Ghost Fist was referred to as the "Eight-Arm Fist" by outsiders.

Mastering Ghost Fist made Juralamani extremely formidable in close combat.

“Hum—”

The air around vibrated as Zhang Ci’s Five Thunder Curse flew towards Juralamani. This curse had strong single-target killing power, and being hit by it meant certain death.

Suddenly, invisible fluctuations appeared around Juralamani, and three or four black holes materialized, completely absorbing the Five Thunder Curse.

Juralamani’s awakened ability, “Space Distortion,” inherently countered Zhang Ci, who needed pre-casting time (drawing symbols). Realizing this quickly, Zhang Ci stopped using symbols, drew a long sword from his waist, switched to melee combat, and joined forces with Song Ke.

Just as the three were engaged in a fierce battle, a group of level 3 zombies suddenly jumped out from behind Nai Kang. Their sharp claws reached towards his face!

At such a close distance, the agile evolved zombies missed their attack, and their pitch-black eyes revealed a hint of confusion.

In the misty haze, a pair of long legs slowly walked out.

Zhuang Qingyan looked up at Nai Kang, and a thoughtful expression gradually appeared in his eyes.

Seeing him, Song Ke, despite being surprised at when his right leg had recovered, turned her head and resumed the fight with Juralamani.

Zhuang Qingyan flashed to Zhang Ci’s side, quickly saying, “I’ll take care of this. You go defend the city.”

Zhang Ci glanced back, seeing that Mu Qin was adjusting formations against Lu Xiaoyu. With his limited mobility and the need to control machinery with a significant amount of mental focus, Zhang Ci nodded, swiftly retreating.

Zhuang Qingyan's peach blossom eyes showed no sign of amusement as he stared intently at Nai Kang. He sensed a faint awakened energy from him, undoubtedly confirming Nai Kang as an awakener. Nai Kang appeared on the battlefield without any fear, confident that their group couldn't kill him.

Zhuang Qingyan raised the repeating crossbow and tentatively shot an arrow.

Sure enough, the bolt was knocked down by missile fragments from an unknown source before reaching Nai Kang. Zhuang Qingyan squinted his eyes, rapidly sifting through his thoughts. A power related to mysticism? It was probably one of the most complex causality-based supernatural abilities. If he couldn't find the "cause," he couldn't act on Nai Kang, the "effect."

He abandoned attacking Nai Kang and instead directed level 3 zombies to assault other awakeners, patiently seeking an opportunity to break through.

On the other side, Song Ke abandoned her snake spear, opting for bare-handed combat against Juralamani. When fighting against an opponent proficient in Ghost Fist, weapons could become a hindrance and might be distorted by his awakened ability.

After exchanging hundreds of moves with Juralamani, Song Ke had already identified his weakness. The strength and powerful damage output were the strengths of Ghost Fist, but at the same time, they were its weaknesses. Focusing on strength naturally slowed down his speed, and the forceful punches meant a lack of variation between moves.

Adjusting her breath, Song Ke entered a state of free fighting. She swiftly circled around Juralamani, no longer engaging in direct clashes but instead moving with agility. She seized opportunities to kick, punch, and throw him, targeting various vulnerable joints in his body. In the magnetic field, her awakened energy constantly radiated. Song Ke utilized every inch of her muscles to the fullest, barely touching the ground with the soles of her feet. Her attacks became unpredictable, creating afterimages that made it impossible for Juralamani's "eight arms" to reach her.

Juralamani found himself at a disadvantage. However, he remained calm. Seizing the intervals between Song Ke's two attacks, he lifted his knee, hooking it towards her neck.

'He took the bait!' Song Ke, who deliberately exposing a vulnerability, felt a surge of joy. She mimicked his exact move, raising her knee and forcefully countering Juralamani's attack. The superior force

dispelled Juralamani's assault, disrupting his balance. With angry eyes and a backward fall, he crashed to the ground.

Song Ke rotated her body, leaping up, landing heavily on top of him. Her knees suppressed any attempt he made to rise, then with a twist and a turn, she severed Juralamani's head from his body in an instant.

"Crack—" There seemed to be an invisible something shattering in the wind.

In the moment of Juralamani's death, Nai Kang's expression changed drastically. He opened the top hatch, intending to duck down.

Zhuang Qingyan, who had been closely watching him, sensed a slight looseness in the "cause" on his body and immediately thrust his mental ability! Nai Kang's figure suddenly stiffened, consciousness filled with intense pain, and he couldn't escape into the tank in time.

Simultaneously, Zhuang Qingyan shouted loudly, "Song Ke!"

Song Ke abruptly raised her head, locking eyes with him for 0.0001 seconds. Despite no verbal communication, miraculously, Song Ke understood Zhuang Qingyan's meaning—to seize the opportunity.

She sprinted at full speed, leaping towards the armored tank where Nai Kang was. Her right hand transformed into a snake spear once again, fiercely stabbing toward Nai Kang's back.

Time seemed to slow down. In the terrified expression on Nai Kang's face, the spearhead pierced through his uniform, bulletproof vest, flesh, and muscle... It was about to pierce through his bones and into his heart. However, at that critical moment, the "cause and effect" on Nai Kang's body flowed once again. Suddenly, Song Ke's footing slipped, and she staggered back two steps. The attack of the snake spear abruptly disappeared, allowing Nai Kang to take advantage and slip into the tank.

Song Ke exclaimed, "...Missed?!"

For the third time, for the third time, she missed! She really wanted to curse out loud!

After Nai Kang disappeared from the command post, the armored tank hastily retreated, unexpectedly abandoning the attack and leaving the majority of the Joint Army behind to escape.

Zhuang Qingyan quickly approached Song Ke. She was looking disheartened, lowering her head, and the snake spear tapped on the ground one after another.

Zhuang Qingyan looked at the curls of hair on her head, reaching out to rub them. "It's not your fault."

Song Ke looked up at him, her expression seemingly pitiful.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled inwardly, using his slender fingers to wipe away the dirt from her face. 'This little girl, always getting herself dirty.'

"Nai Kang has a mystic supernatural ability. Without deciphering it, even you wouldn't have been able to kill him."

"Mystic supernatural ability?" Song Ke was puzzled. So, her repeated mistakes, along with Zhang Ci's, weren't due to their own faults but were influenced by supernatural abilities?

"Yeah, I roughly figured it out. Let's finish the war first, and I'll explain it to you when we get back." Zhuang Qingyan said.

...

Zhang Ci rushed to the main battlefield, his black Taoist robe resembling the Grim Reaper harvesting lives. The Pure Heaven and Earth Divine Incantation was unleashed, causing the heavens and earth to change colors. The sniper team, who had barely regrouped after the previous onslaught, was once again overturned by the explosion.



With Zhang Ci and Lu Xiaoyu—one above and one below—two S-level awakeners dominated the field. Combined with the continuous damage caused by waves of surprise attacks and suicide explosions on the siege weapons, the Joint Army was now defeated, like a mountain collapsing.

Mu Qin withdrew his gaze from the rear and made a decisive decision: “Retreat.”

Next to him, Tun Qin exclaimed in disbelief, “Uncle, we were about to win. Why retreat?”

Mu Qin’s face looked grim, “Win? Where did you see a chance of winning? Ruan Wenjun is dead, the general has fled, and if I don’t leave now, should I prepare to take the blame for this failure?”

After saying this coldly, Mu Qin turned away from the battlefield without looking back.

Tun Qin looked angrily toward the front. This Joint Army operation was something he had begged Mu Qin to let him participate in. If he couldn’t seize this opportunity to achieve merit and gain fame, when would he ever get a chance to stand out?!

A figure in a black robe flashed by, killing a large group of mercenaries with a wave of his hand. Under the hood, half of a side profile revealed sharp eyebrows and eyes, full of heroic spirit.

Zhang Ci.

Tun Qin gritted his teeth and shouted the name with resentment.

If there was someone Tun Qin hated most in his life, it was undoubtedly Zhang Ci. This intense hatred, at its root, boiled down to the word “jealousy.” Zhang Ci was about the same age, always the senior brother at Yue Mountain Martial Arts School, with better martial skills and better popularity. Although Zhang Ting often scolded and beat him, in moments of solitude, his gaze always lingered on Zhang Ci.

Family love, friendship, and even love... Zhang Ci effortlessly possessed them all. His future was a hundred times brighter than Tun Qin’s.

Tun Qin would never forget the martial arts competition in the year he first went to Yue Mountain. Zhang Ci effortlessly defeated him, pressing his head against the ground with just one hand. In front of everyone at the martial arts hall, he gave Tun Qin a humiliating lesson.

Driven by anger, Tun Qin lifted a shoulder-mounted cannon, vigorously charging towards Zhang Ci.

He was now an advanced B-level awakener. This time, he was determined to make Zhang Ci kneel and beg for mercy.

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 99.1: When the Roses Bloom (17)

Three Lives

Tun Qin's awakened ability was called "Battle Spirit Fury." As long as he gained the upper hand in a duel, he could ignite his battle spirit, accumulate layers, and thereby fight more smoothly, eventually forming a full suppression of the enemy.

He carried a rocket launcher on his shoulder called "Poison Sting." This was the latest single-person anti-tank weapon from the Mu City arsenal. When the armor-piercing projectiles it fired hit a person, they would cause burning, armor-piercing, and explosive effects, along with blinding intense light and burning effects. Even high-level awakeners would be reduced to pieces if hit.

Tun Qin hid behind a half-slope, activated the scope, aimed at Zhang Ci moving in the field, and without hesitation, pressed the trigger, firing four armor-piercing rounds in rapid succession!

"Boom, boom, boom—" Dazzling flames soared into the sky, and Zhang Ci was instantly engulfed.

The layers of battle spirit were smoothly ignited. Tun Qin smiled coldly, dropped the Poison Sting, and switched to a submachine gun before charging forward.

In the rolling smoke and dust, the place where Zhang Ci was was empty. Tun Qin was greatly surprised and quickly turned around.

Too late! Zhang Ci was surrounded by a protective spell and instantly teleported behind him, delivering a fierce chop with his hand.

Tun Qin had no chance to react and was hit squarely. His firearm fell to the ground.

Zhang Ci transformed his knife into claws, grabbed the back of Tun Qin's neck, and slammed him forcefully to the ground.

Half of Tun Qin's face happened to press against the still-burning flames, and the sizzling smell of burnt flesh filled the air. He writhed in pain with a distorted face, howling continuously, and the bit of battle spirit he had accumulated disappeared instantly.

"It's you," Zhang Ci recognized his voice, loosening his grip slightly. "Good timing. If you didn't come, I would have gone looking for you."

"What's this? The prestigious Senior Brother of Yue Mountain has fallen to become a lackey of the Shaye base?" Tun Qin spoke hoarsely, eyes darting around, constantly aware of the surroundings, attempting to turn the tables. He deliberately provoked, "How does it feel, Senior Brother, to become a lackey of Shaye?"

Zhang Ci clasped his fingers, forming a spell with his left hand, controlling Tun Qin with a Soul Binding Curse.

Then he pulled out a knife and ruthlessly stabbed through Tun Qin's right arm, pinning him to the ground.

"Ah—!" A sharp and miserable scream echoed.

"Ignorant and incompetent. Did you never consider my identity before attacking me as a member of the Shaye base?" Zhang Ci released his awakened energy, and the pressure of an S-level awakener descended like a heavy mountain, leaving Tun Qin breathless.

“You... You’re a Qiong Qi?!”

Tun Qin suddenly realized a terrifying fact, his eyes wide with horror.

The notorious leader of Shaye’s refugees, Qiong Qi, had a widespread reputation. Rumors about him being an S-level awakener circulated among the upper echelons of Mu City, but details about Qiong Qi’s origins, background, and appearance were scarce. Due to his rare appearances and the disdain of the arrogant military leaders to send anyone to infiltrate the refugees, nobody knew anything about him.

Tun Qin’s right hand trembled, veins subtly bulging on his otherwise intact half-face. “Zhang Ci, you insulted me, ruined me, killed me time and time again. What are you pretending to be, a righteous person? You’re just a scoundrel, a hypocrite!”

“From the beginning, I disagreed with your initiation,” Zhang Ci said in a deep voice. “In the matter of martial arts, strength has always been the only language. If you can defeat me fair and square, you can still step on my head. But your character is dark, and every time you lose, you hold resentment.”

To keep Yue Mountain Martial Arts School running, substantial financial support was needed. Zhang Ting, being a worldly person, had a clear reason for accepting Tun Qin – the generous “initiation fee.” However, during their first sparring match, Zhang Ci noticed the distorted psychology of Tun Qin. While winning and losing were common, Tun Qin’s gaze seemed to want to kill everyone who defeated him.

“I ask you, what happened in the martial arts school before and after the apocalypse?” Zhang Ci raised his voice to question.

They had excavated every mound of earth, including Zhang Ting’s. Zhang Ting obviously hadn’t turned into a zombie, and his injuries were clearly inflicted by a person.

Rita had said that she left Yue Mountain two days before the apocalypse, and Tun Qin was among the people left behind. Now that the martial arts school was completely wiped out, if anyone knew the truth, it was probably Tun Qin.

When pressured with questions, Tun Qin was first stunned and then burst into laughter. “Senior Brother, even if you’re S-level, there are things you can’t accomplish. Want to know how your real dad died? Beg me!”

“When Zhang Ting was alive, you adamantly denied him as your father. Now you act like a filial son, mourning for him. Hahaha!”

“No change in your stubbornness. A person like you is not worthy of being a student of Yue Mountain,” Zhang Ci said coldly.

Confident that Zhang Ci wouldn’t dare to kill him, Tun Qin mocked unabashedly, “Senior Brother wants to uphold justice and kick me out? How imposing!”

“Ruotong!” Zhang Ci shouted, “Even if you don’t speak, I have a way to find out.”

With a stern face, Bai Ruotong ran over. She couldn’t deal with an S-level like Zhuang Qingyan, but she could still handle a B-level! Her powerful mind probe emerged forcefully, delving deep into Tun Qin’s mind, searching every nook and cranny. Tun Qin broke into a cold sweat, his scalp feeling like it was about to be lifted, and he couldn’t even scream.

Fragmented memories flowed like a tidal wave, and Bai Ruotong quickly seized the parts she wanted.

On the first day of the apocalypse, Zhang Ting locked the mutated students in the warehouse, silently guarding the door. Shortly after, a group of uniformed people broke into the martial arts academy. After a brief conversation with Zhang Ting, a fierce dispute erupted, leading to a duel. Their methods were mysterious, and their attacks were unheard of. They teamed up to kill Zhang Ting and then ransacked the place.

Tun Qin, who had overslept in the dormitory for a day, woke up to find the martial arts school deserted. He went to the surveillance room and witnessed the entire process of Zhang Ting’s death. He dared not make a sound and only gathered his things to escape, leaving Yue Mountain.

After Bai Ruotong read his memories, tears streamed down her face as she scolded, word by word, “Tun Qin, you are truly the shame of Yue Mountain.”

When Song Ke and Zhuang Qingyan arrived, Zhang Ci, with an emotionless face, pierced Tun Qin's head with a knife.

"Senior Brother?" Song Ke called him softly.

Zhang Ci pulled out the knife and said only four words, "Clean up the mess."

After Nai Kang and Mu Qin left, the joint forces abandoned most of the damaged and impractical siege equipment and hastily withdrew from the battlefield.

As Zhang Ci and Song Ke were cleaning up the aftermath, Fan Yiwen suddenly ran over carrying someone. His face was covered in soot, and the voice of the 1.8-meter tall man was crying, "Zhang Ci, save Xiao Mo quickly!"

Mo Yan, alone, went to destroy the catapults and was caught in the explosion of a cannon. Half of his body was a bloody mess, and his original appearance was unrecognizable. His limbs hung limply, breathing shallow, and it seemed he was about to give up.

Zhang Ci couldn't care less about cleaning up the battlefield and quickly said, "Take him to Lu Qiu."

Lu Qiu was the only healing awakener in the base. Before the apocalypse, she was just an ordinary Shaye candidate. She had barely managed to get into Tongwan Medical College, and hadn't even attended a professional class when the unlucky apocalypse struck. In previous healing attempts, Lu Qiu relied on her level half the time and self-study the other half. When facing a real life-threatening situation, her half-baked skills proved inadequate.

Seeing Mo Yan's miserable condition, Lu Qiu's healing ability immediately covered him. After a while, she looked panicked and said, "No, his awakened energy is draining too quickly. I can only barely sustain it, I can't perform the treatment."

Zhang Ci's body tensed immediately. Fan Yiwen cried with tears streaming down his face. Even a B-level healing awakener couldn't do it. Is Mo Yan really going to die here?

Song Ke quickly spoke up, "Senior Brother, my companion is an A-level healer and a doctor. I'll have him come over right away."

An A-level healer.

In just a few words, hope ignited again among the group. The scarcity of healers was well-known, especially A-level.

Zhang Ci immediately nodded, "I will release all the checkpoints and ask him to come to Shaye as quickly as possible."

Song Ke contacted Su Cha using the communicator, and the response came almost instantly, "Su Cha, quickly bring Fang Zhixu to Shaye, it has to be fast!"

Su Cha was silent for a moment, without any further questions, and responded in a deep voice, "I'm on my way."

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 99.2: When the Roses Bloom (17)

Three Lives

From Mu City to Shaye, even at full speed, it would take four or five hours for awakeners to run. Lu Qiu's psychic power might not hold out.

Rita brought a box of Level 3 crystals, more than a dozen in total, all spontaneously donated by Shaye's awakeners. If Lu Qiu couldn't hold on, they would extract energy from the crystals.

Time passed second by second, and everyone's hearts were tightly suspended.

Lu Qiu's face grew paler, her body trembling uncontrollably, and Mo Yan's breathing became barely audible.

At this critical moment, Lin Mo led Su Cha and Fang Zhixu rushing in, "He's here!"

Fang Zhixu's hair was disheveled, the bun at the back of his head had long lost its shape, and even his stubble was shaved on only one side. After arriving on the scene, he immediately took over, skillfully cutting Mo Yan's clothes, removing the dust and sand from his airway to prevent sudden suffocation during surgery. Then, he restored the organs such as the heart, lungs, and kidneys, with a pale blue healing ability flowing in. Mo Yan's complexion visibly improved.

Song Ke looked back at Su Cha, who, due to the extreme rush, was in bad condition, with a ruptured abdominal wound and blood soaking through his coat.

"Lu Qiu," Zhang Ci also noticed his abnormality and called softly.

Lu Qiu, who had been observing Fang Zhixu's surgery attentively, immediately stood up, "I'll help you with that."

Su Cha nodded, "Thank you."

Fang Zhixu was fully focused, undisturbed by external factors, and his hands were constantly in motion.

The others dared not speak or even breathe loudly, countless pairs of eyes staring fixedly at him.

After more than two hours of emergency treatment, Fang Zhixu put down the surgical knife, nodded wearily, and said, "He's saved. Afterward, try not to move him too much. Rest well for a few months, let his lost awakened energy slowly recover."

Fan Yiwen clenched his fists and couldn't help but cry.



An A-level healer, possessing the ability to compete with the Grim Reaper for lives, and Fang Zhixu was not an ordinary A-level. He was already an outstanding surgeon with rich experience. In a crisis, he remained calm and could maximize the use of his healing abilities.

Zhang Ci bowed slightly to him and thanked him sincerely, "Thank you."

Even Qiong Qi, the leader, personally bowed, and all the high-level awakeners behind him snapped to attention, uniformly bending at a standard 90-degree angle and shouting loudly, "Thank you!!"

Lin Mo was even wiping tears as he shouted.

Their display startled Fang Zhixu. He took steps backward, stumbling, but Song Ke secretly reached out to support him, helping him stand upright.

...

After Mo Yan was out of danger, everyone breathed a sigh of relief and busied themselves arranging the residents, cleaning up the battlefield. Most of the people had left.

Song Ke turned to look at Zhuang Qingyan, pointing his finger and lightly tapping his right leg, poking it once, then again, with a curious expression.

"Your leg, how did it get better?"

"Temporary."

Even temporary was quite miraculous. Thinking of how Zhuang Qingyan had wielded his powers on the battlefield just moments ago, Song Ke's eyes sparkled.

"You can control Level 3 zombies."

“Yeah, after all, I am also an S-level, so I won’t embarrass you.”

“Amazing.” Song Ke applauded.

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head with a faint smile. Song Ke’s praises, whether for him or for Xu Xing, essentially had no difference.

The applause from Song Ke grew quieter. She looked up and down, and up again at Zhuang Qingyan.

After another look, Zhuang Qingyan calmly faced her gaze. A few strands of bangs scattered down his forehead, covering his deep peach blossom eyes. His entire demeanor was sharp yet aloof, creating an indescribable contradiction.

Song Ke was stunned.

It felt like... he had become a different person. No, perhaps the “Qinglan Researcher” in the wheelchair was just another layer of disguise. The man standing before her, running and standing confidently, was the real Zhuang Qingyan.

“Am I good-looking?”

Song Ke nodded dumbly.

“Song Keke, I found out that you are still a face-con.” Zhuang Qingyan clicked his tongue lightly.

Song Ke’s cheeks puffed up angrily, and she punched him in the mouth.

“Uh—” As a result, Zhuang Qingyan made a muffled sound, and his tall figure, unable to maintain balance, fell forward.

Song Ke was alarmed and quickly reached out to catch him. She turned her head to realize that Zhuang Qingyan's complexion was not good.

"The magic time is over," Zhuang Qingyan sighed. Nearly eight hours had passed since the injection, and the sealed side effects were beginning to manifest.

"Th-then, what should we do?" Song Ke anxiously said, "I'll go get a wheelchair."

"Don't move for now, let me rest a bit."

Zhuang Qingyan extended his right hand, gently embracing Song Ke's back, exerting a little force. The distance between the two became even closer.

"Song Keke, who do you think I've been working so hard for?"

Warm breath sprayed on her neck, and Song Ke's toes curled. She stood there like a wooden stick, upright.

"Hmm?" The questioning tone seemed to have a hook, demanding an answer from her.

"...Me, I guess?" Song Ke replied awkwardly.

"You have some conscience." A faint chuckle sounded in her ears.

A faint blush spread from her cheeks to the top of her head. Song Ke, very uncharacteristically, blushed.

...

The cafeteria once again served as a temporary meeting room. All the high-level awakeners in Shaye gathered, regardless of the length of time they had joined. After this battle, they were now comrades worthy of trust.

Song Ke pushed Zhuang Qingyan in. He looked boneless, lazily leaning against the wheelchair. Occasionally, he would weakly cough a couple of times. Song Ke was very cautious, even reminding him with hushed tones when crossing the threshold, as if he were made of glass.

Fang Zhixu glanced at Zhuang Qingyan, not remembering that one of the side effects of the seal was being “delicate.”

“You mentioned having a meeting to discuss Nai Kang’s situation. Did you make any discoveries?” Zhang Ci pointed to a table in the distance. “Song Ke, Rita has saved you some food. Come over and eat first.”

Song Ke responded with a sound, releasing the wheelchair with both hands, and happily ran over to pick up the bowl, eating with gusto.

Zhuang Qingyan: “...”

Zhuang Qingyan lost his desire to perform, sat up straight, and his complexion was no longer pale. The weak coughing also stopped. He spoke with a serious expression.

“Nai Kang is not an awakener.”

This revelation caused a stir among the people present.

“What?”

“How is that possible?”

“He’s not an awakener? Then why couldn’t even an S-level take him down?”

Zhuang Qingyan calmly said, "Nai Kang's awakened energy is extremely weak, definitely not emitted from the body's magnetic field. I speculate that there should be a causality awakener who has applied some kind of protective barrier on him."

"Causality awakener? I know someone," Samuel, the mercenary leader they had met briefly, suddenly spoke up. "That person used to be a mercenary in Western Street. Later, he joined the Guard Unit. His awakened ability is 'Life Puppet,' which can turn people into puppets. He can use their lives instead of his own. As long as the puppet doesn't die, the master won't die."

Such an awakened ability was shocking to hear.

"Damn, making others die in one's place. No wonder Nai Kang is so arrogant."

"Then who is his puppet?"

Zhuang Qingyan continued his analysis. "When Song Ke killed Jularamani, Nai Kang's expression showed clear panic. Within the next few seconds, he exposed a vulnerability that could be attacked, but quickly recovered."

Zhang Ci added, "Are you saying that Jularamani was Nai Kang's first puppet?"

First puppet?

Everyone's hearts sank. The implied meaning in Zhang Ci's words suggested, does Nai Kang have other puppets?

"No way, how many lives does he have? Can't he be killed?"

"Is there no limit to this ability?"

“Of course there are limitations. Every time a causality awakener uses their ability, they pay with their own life. Besides, that person is only B-level, and as far as I know, he died a few months ago,” Samuel said solemnly.

Song Ke’s heart also cast a shadow. According to the information provided by Samuel, the causality awakener likely died from overdrawing on their ability. The puppets he created at the cost of his life were all used on Nai Kang.

“Three puppets,” Zhuang Qingyan said indifferently. “Nai Kang has three puppets.”

“How do you know?” Others looked at him suspiciously.

Zhuang Qingyan waved his hand from a distance. “Song Ke, let me borrow the terminal.”

Song Ke put down the bowl and ran over, passing through the crowd and handing the terminal to him.

Zhuang Qingyan projected a whiteboard and, in front of everyone, listed a series of complex formulas.

“It’s not difficult to calculate the result. Just consider Nai Kang’s awakened energy, magnetic field strength, and radiation fluctuations inside his body. Then perform the calculations... First, set the total amount of his awakened energy when he first appeared as  $Y$ ...”

“Then, after Jularamani’s death, the first layer of causality disappears. Set this variable as  $x$ ...”

Zhuang Qingyan’s fingers moved quickly, and more and more data appeared on the whiteboard. Finally, he drew a straight line gracefully. “The final answer is obvious. After Jularamani’s death, Nai Kang still has two layers of protection.”

“This also corresponds to the strength of a B-level awakener. I’m afraid that person, throughout his life, had a limit of only three puppets.”

When Zhuang Qingyan looked up, the cafeteria fell silent.

The bewildered expressions of the people from Yue Shan Martial Arts School were identical, with eyes revealing a clear stupidity, unaware that their chopsticks and spoons had fallen from their hands.

In the complete silence, only Lu Xiaoyu clapped his hands to give face, "From the calculation process alone, it's entirely correct."

Zhuang Qingyan smiled, put the terminal back on Song Ke, who was still bewildered, and used his slender fingers to pick off the rice grains on her cheek.

"To kill Nai Kang, you must first kill the puppets," Zhuang Qingyan calmly revealed the breakthrough.

"Now the problem is, who are the remaining two puppets of Nai Kang?"

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 100: When the Roses Bloom (18)

Groundhog? Pangolin!

"I have a question," the usually silent Fang Zhixu suddenly spoke, "Does a puppet know it's a puppet?"

He washed his face, shaved his beard, and tidied up neatly. Fang Zhixu had changed a lot these two days. The unexpected reunion with Zhang Wanyao made him completely collapse, but also gave him a new life. Now, the sense of decadence that had been on him completely disappeared, returning him to the mature and rational appearance he once had.

"They may know or may not know it," Zhuang Qingyan answered slowly.

"When the causality ability is implanted, neither the puppet nor the master feels any obvious discomfort. If done discreetly enough, they might not even be aware. All the hardships are borne solely by that causality awakener. So, these individuals are jokingly referred to as 'spring silkworms.'"

In ancient literature, spring silkworms were symbols of selfless dedication. However, in the present context, it's filled with irony. This supernatural ability is too elusive, capable of clandestinely altering someone's life trajectory, becoming a scapegoat for another person.

Zhuang Qingyan paused. "As for whether Nai Kang's puppet knows its own identity, that's debatable."

"I think Juralamani doesn't know," Song Ke affirmed confidently.

When a warrior faces life and death, their eyes and displayed state cannot deceive others. When Song Ke fought Juralamani, the opponent's moves were fierce, their mind resolute, showing no anomalies. If he knew he was a puppet, he'd certainly have some reservations; there would be flaws in his technique, and his emotions would fluctuate slightly when being killed. Yet, Juralamani displayed none of these signs.

Juralamani's strength had reached close to S-level. He was an absolute powerhouse and wouldn't easily die. Nai Kang choosing him as a puppet was an extremely wise decision. There was no need to explicitly inform him.

"Additionally," Zhuang Qingyan's mind was like an unfathomable library, swiftly recalling related information, "this kind of life bond cannot be established in one go. It needs several reinforcing sessions. Also, when making a puppet, both the main host and the puppet must be present."

Zhang Ci further speculated, "So, the puppet's selection leans towards people familiar to Nai Kang, at least those he frequently encounters."

Nai Kang held a prestigious position, allowed entry into the Reunification Palace, and had few people who met him face-to-face, further narrowing down the possibilities.

The awakeners in the cafeteria discussed animatedly.

"I don't understand, can't Nai Kang just randomly snatch someone and lock them up? Wouldn't that be safer?"



“I don’t think so. If a normal person is imprisoned for no reason, their mindset would surely explode. What if they can’t take it and commit suicide? Wouldn’t that waste the puppet opportunity? Is Nai Kang that foolish?”

“Then he could capture several more, rotate them,” the young man who spoke first was unconvinced, turning to Zhuang Qingyan, “Hey, buddy, can the identity of a puppet be transferred?”

“Possible,” Zhuang Qingyan nodded slightly.

The crowd was astonished. The puppet’s identity could be transferred? Wouldn’t that make it as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack?

“But the causality awakener must personally implant it,” Zhuang Qingyan leisurely completed the latter half of the sentence.

That was a real shocker—absolutely terrifying.

Their hearts sank back into their chests, murmuring involuntarily, “Thank goodness he died early; otherwise, it would’ve been troublesome.”

“Fortunately, fortunately. The identities of the remaining two puppets are fixed.”

Samuel, towering in stature, stood up, his voice deep, “I understand Nai Kang better than any of you. He’s known as the ‘tyrant’ because he dislikes anything slipping from his control. In my opinion, he won’t disclose the truth to the puppets.”

In the New Calendar Year 47, it was Nai Kang’s 27th year as the magistrate. Samuel, joining the mercenaries at fifteen, had witnessed Nai Kang’s bloody ascent to power, steadily developing over the past three decades.

Samuel thought for a moment and added, “I’m not sure what his plan was before, but after yesterday’s battle, Nai Kang lost an important puppet. It’s highly likely he’ll keep the remaining two controlled within the Reunification Palace, the safest place in Mu City.”

Zhang Ci nodded in agreement, “To sum up, the puppets are people Nai Kang is familiar with or trusts, frequently encountered by him, probably currently within the Guard Unit or the Reunification Palace, unaware of their identity.”

Who could such individuals be?

Everyone fell into contemplation, the atmosphere in the cafeteria unusually hushed.

“I know someone,” Fang Zhixu gradually clenched his fists.

“He has been living in the Reunification Palace for years, closest to Nai Kang, tightly controlled by him, easily accessible at all times. Most importantly, that person, until today, is still alive and well.”

Dark flames ignited in Fang Zhixu’s eyes, “He’s Nai Kang’s only son—Nai Wen.”

“I used to be Nai Wen’s attending physician, well aware of his condition. His bone disease was congenital, previously considered incurable before the apocalypse, but now, survival is entirely possible with the healing supernatural abilities.”

“Come to think of it, we haven’t heard about Nai Wen for a long time,” murmured a few local mercenaries behind Samuel.

“That little p\*rv\*rt always enjoyed mutil\*ting healthy children. He used to cause trouble frequently, and our neighbor’s daughter was... by him... It seems like he’s vanished from the face of the earth lately.”

“Nai Wen being a puppet, only killing him will reveal the truth,” Zhuang Qingyan sighed, “But to kill him, one must enter the Reunification Palace. It seems that even if it’s a den of dragons and tigers, one inevitably has to make a trip there.”

“I’ll go to the Reunification Palace,” Song Ke was the first to step forward.

Zhuang Qingyan and Zhang Ci glanced at her, almost simultaneously speaking.

“It’s dangerous for you alone, I’ll accompany you.”

“I’ll go with you.”

The scene fell silent for two seconds, the senior brothers and sisters from Yue Mountain Martial Arts School looked at the two, their breaths hitching in disbelief.

Su Cha and Lu Xiaoyu intervened in time:

“I’ll go too.”

“Sounds interesting, count me in.”

Samuel, Fan Yiwen, and others also chimed in, “I’ll join too.”

Most of the high-level awakeners present stood up.

Zhang Ci raised a hand to calm their agitation, raising his voice, “I know everyone came to Shaye for survival. This assassination mission is extremely dangerous, completely voluntary, you don’t have to force yourselves.”

“Qiong Qi, your kindness is understood, but this concerns everyone’s interests. I must go.”

“Nai Kang is practically riding roughshod over us; I have to take him down!”

“Without killing Nai Kang, Shaye will never have peaceful days. Qiong Qi, I’m willing to go with you!”

The name Qiong Qi belonged to the soul of Shaye. His charisma was unmatched. The fervent voices surged higher and higher. Zhang Ci stood amidst the crowd, like a guiding light illuminating the gloom.

Zhuang Qingyan watched coldly for a while before dousing them with a metaphorical bucket of icy water. "Just shouting won't work. It's not about who has the loudest voice."

"What do you mean?"

Zhuang Qingyan casually pointed at Zhang Ci and a few others, "You, you, and you, either you're wanted criminals or unidentified refugees. You can't even enter Mu City, and you're thinking of storming into the Reunification Palace?"

"..."

Why does this man deserve a beating so much?

However, despite Zhuang Qingyan's harsh words, the point was straightforward. For these individuals, getting close to the Reunification Palace was utterly implausible.

Was there any other way they could infiltrate?

Song Ke recalled encountering Liu Zixuan in Hua City. Though he was only a D-rank, his ability was exceptionally unique, capable of opening a door to any plane. If they could find someone similar, wouldn't they have a chance to enter the Reunification Palace?

Sharing her thoughts, Song Ke saw Zhuang Qingyan nod in agreement. "Exactly. It doesn't necessarily have to be door-opening abilities; other supernatural abilities could work too. If utilized properly, seemingly trivial abilities could be remarkably effective."

"I'll have all the awakeners in Shaye re-registered," Zhang Ci concluded.

\*

Mu City.

Irene and Lin Youyou, accompanied by a group of girls, dashed through the smoke.

“Irene, this is the last place!” Lin Youyou shouted.

“Marsha, haven’t you sensed your sister yet?” Irene blasted away the pursuing private soldiers and turned to ask.

Marsha clenched her lips, shaking her head rapidly.

While Nai Kang attacked Shaye, Miao Lun used private soldiers to take over the city’s defenses. Irene and her team raided several private soldier camps, rescuing some girls conscripted as ‘Rose Army,’ but Marsha’s sister, Marie, was still nowhere to be found.

“Could it be that your sister is still in Miao Lun’s mansion?” a wounded girl timidly suggested, “I heard that Miao Lun keeps pets he fancies for a while before getting tired and throwing them to the private soldier camps.”

Miao Lun’s mansion was easy to locate, but it was heavily guarded by high-level awakeners, making it virtually impenetrable. Rescuing anyone from within was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

“Let’s send them back first, then we’ll go check,” Irene and Lin Youyou sent the girls back to the apartment and, with Marsha, approached Miao Lun’s mansion.

They didn’t dare get too close, hiding in streets several kilometers away. Marsha folded her hands and activated her telepathic sense. After a few seconds, she exclaimed in excitement, “I found my sister!”

Indeed, Marie was there, but as Marsha’s smile surfaced, it froze the next moment.

“What’s wrong?” Lin Youyou asked nervously.

Marsha’s expression turned puzzled, “My sister said she’s with a sister named Yao, and they won’t leave for the time being.”

Yao?

Irene and Lin Youyou exchanged astonished looks. Zhang Wanyao? They had lost contact with her since that day in the apartment and hadn’t expected to hear her name this way.

“What else did Marie say?” Irene asked.

Marsha closed her eyes, concentrating on communicating with her sister silently.

“She told me to quickly leave Mu City and seek reinforcements.”

“What reinforcements?”

Suddenly, a commotion arose within Mu City. Generals and the joint forces were returning to the city. The news of Ruan Wenjun’s death spread like wildfire, and within moments, over a hundred fully armed mercenaries streamed out of Miao Lun’s mansion.

“This isn’t good,” Irene frowned. “With Nai Kang returning at this time, Miao Lun must have received news about the Rose Army’s betrayal. He’s free now and finding us is just a matter of time.”

Irene gripped the cannon with her left hand. These girls had barely escaped. Would they now be caught again?

“Irene, let’s go to Shaye,” Lin Youyou said seriously. She had received information from Su Cha and Song Ke about Shaye’s current situation.

“I assure you, Shaye is different from Mu City. The leader there, Qiong Qi, is Song Ke’s senior martial brother. He’s honest and fair. If they go there, at least they won’t suffer abuse and harassment anymore.”

Irene lowered her gaze in silence, fearing her decision would push these girls into another pit.

Lin Youyou earnestly persuaded, “Even Samuel has joined Shaye. If Qiong Qi were like Nai Kang, so many locals wouldn’t willingly follow him.”

“Fine, let’s go to Shaye,” Irene finally relented and nodded slowly.

The three returned to the apartment, gathered the rescued girls, and along with a few dozen people, headed toward the city gates, aiming to leave Mu City before Miao Lun’s search.

As they approached the city gates, Irene abruptly halted—Godanwei and Hu Chao manned the outpost. Their eagle-like eyes scrutinized every person entering or leaving, especially the women, who had to roll up their sleeves for inspection.

“Irene...” a trembling voice came from behind.

Those girls, their faces pale, rolled up their sleeves. Except for Marsha, who hadn’t been caught, every one of them bore a deep red rose-shaped brand on their arms.

This was Miao Lun’s victorious “medal”, the “honor” of joining the Rose Army.

Irene fell into a state of intense, speechless fury.

“Scum!” Lin Youyou turned away, angrily cursing.

“Um, excuse me...” a stranger’s voice interrupted them.

Irene looked wary, swiftly turning around with Lin Youyou, shielding the girls. They recognized the familiar figure—why was it him?

Kansu, who had crossed paths with them before, awkwardly smiled, his face and clothes covered in mud. “It’s me, it’s me. Sorry for eavesdropping again, I swear I didn’t mean to. I always accidentally know too many secrets, and it’s really bothersome...”

Kansu nervously rambled on, noticing the terrified and disoriented looks of the girls. He slapped his mouth belatedly, then finally got to the point, “Are you trying to leave the city? I can take you out.”

“You? What can you do?” Lin Youyou raised her chin, glaring fiercely.

Kansu scratched his head sheepishly, “Uh, well, my ability is ‘digging tunnels.’ Over the years, I’ve secretly made many passages, including a way out of the city. My friends call me Groundhog, though I absolutely deny it. I’m clearly a pangolin...”

Kansu continued with nonsensical chatter, then he realized—

The beautiful lady in front of him had sparkling eyes, looking thrilled as if she wanted to devour him.

Kansu: ...Did I say something extraordinary?