

SORCERER'S HANDBOOK

Chapter 15: You Shall Die in the Public Eye

“Give me some toast, a glass of milk... and what’s that? Braised Lala Fatty? I’ll have that too.”

Ashe settled down with his tray and observed the dining crowd in the restaurant.

Apart from prisoners wearing classic skins, there were quite a few prison guards eating here, too. It seemed that Shattered Lake Prison didn’t foster a hierarchy system; guards and prisoners appeared equal, or rather, guards didn’t bother with prisoners, and prisoners didn’t intentionally provoke the guards, contributing to a harmonious environment.

Ashe could understand why the guards might neglect prisoners – slacking off is only human, after all – but why did the prisoners also keep their distance from the guards?

After all, smart people don’t break the law. Those who end up in prison are sure to be fools who can’t read the times, like a certain cult leader who was caught by several police officers (hunters).

By the same token, the prisoners’ intellects might not be sharp, but why didn’t they taunt or mock the guards?

“Because they’re locked up.”

The Swordsman sat beside him, poking at the braised Lala Fatty with her finger, and said casually, “Your neck chips are all locked. You’re not allowed to attack others, insult others, or harm yourself. That’s why Shattered Lake Prison is so ‘free’ – every bone and every nerve in your body is shackled.”

“Look, there’s a poster on the wall about ‘Creating a Civilized Prison,’ with a photo of death row inmates and students. It seems they have achieved quite some success in cultural development here; there are even students who come for spring and autumn field trips.”

Ashe instinctively touched his own neck and widened his eyes in shock: “This — this is like having a bomb around your neck —”

“Do you really have to talk so loud?” the Swordswoman pointed at the prisoners who had turned their heads toward the sound.

Ashe quickly stuffed his mouth with toast: “So, as long as I wear this chip, escaping from prison is impossible? There must be a tracking feature in the chip, right?”

“More than that, if they want, they can even make the chip emit a strong electrical current, stopping your heart immediately,” she spread her hands, “So you’re right, theoretically, it’s impossible for you to escape this prison. Don’t even talk about escaping; if you think about digging a tunnel with a soup spoon, the chip would prevent you from damaging public property.”

“Theoretically impossible, but what about practically?” Ashe took a sip of milk and found it unexpectedly sweet.

“Practically... it’s also impossible.” The Swordswoman rolled her eyes, “I’m not from around here; how would I know so much?”

“Then where did you get the information you just told me?”

“There’s also a ‘Shattered Lake Prison Encyclopedia’ in your holographic screen folder. I took a look when I had nothing better to do.”

Ashe paused, realizing that made sense. The Swordswoman was just a paper person from a game, how could she possibly know about this world?

But now there was a problem. She could actually look through the other files on my holographic screen; I wanted to see if there were any mysterious websites in this world with hidden, dark content...

"I'm powerless when it comes to escaping prison, but if you want to become stronger, I do know a few ways," the Swordswoman said. "In any case, you should start by finding someone to battle. Nothing helps you understand better than combat, right, Observer?"

"Wait, if prisoners can't attack others as you've mentioned, how can I provoke a fight?" Ashe finally realized that this Prison fundamentally prohibited prisoners from getting into brawls.

"What's with all the questions? Are you trying to escape, or am I?" The Swordswoman scoffed. "What are you going to do next, cry for your mommy when you're hungry?"

"Mom! Grandma!"

"Shut it!"

Ashe rubbed his forehead, feeling the injustice. The Swordswoman was merely a virtual being, yet why did her flick on his forehead hurt so much...

Ashe looked around and noticed that the bald muscleman who had grabbed a glass of milk was still there. He confidently walked over and sat down opposite him—knowing that others couldn't hit him gave Ashe a sudden boost of courage.

"Hi, I'm Ashe. What's your name?"

"Hey, Ashe, I've got a boyfriend," the bald muscleman replied amicably.

Ashe was taken aback. He sensed the Prison Guards and Prisoners nearby looking over, and he quickly clarified, "I didn't mean that; I just have some questions for you!"

“I get it, I really do,” the bald muscleman nodded understandingly. “It’s quite embarrassing to hit on someone who upfront admits they’re taken. But my love for my boyfriend is pure and sincere, without a shred of doubt, so it’s best to be clear from the start. It’s better for everyone, and you seem like a nice guy, Ashe. I’m sure you’ll find love too.”

“I... No... I just...”

“Go ahead and ask,” the bald muscleman encouraged with a supportive look. “No need to be embarrassed. Failing to pick someone up is perfectly normal. If you can’t think of any questions to ask, I can wait. But to be honest, Ashe, the way you tried to get my attention was pretty cliché, like knocking over my milk, just like a little kid...”

Now there was no denying it; Ashe was caught red-handed.

Feeling the change in the surrounding gazes, Ashe opened his mouth but eventually gave up trying to explain: “I wanted to ask, is there a way I can get into a fight?”

The bald muscleman was momentarily puzzled, “Are you new here? Ah, I remember now, you’re that guy from the Four Pillars Cult that’s been all over the news lately?”

“Yeah, I’m actually quite interested in the Four Pillars, it’s a shame I’ve got a boyfriend, otherwise I might have given you a chance...”

Ashe couldn’t stand it any longer and thought about walking away, but what the bald muscleman said next made him stay: “If you’re looking to stretch your legs, you’ve come to the right place—ah, I haven’t introduced myself. My name is Langna, a member of the Deathmatch Society.”

“Deathmatch Society?”

“Because of the Chip, we can’t harm others. But the Deathmatch Society has permission from the Warden. During a Deathmatch, we can temporarily disable the Chip’s Restrictions to fight. That’s an exclusive benefit for members of the Society.”

Ashe was quite surprised: “The Prison agrees to this? That’s very humane?”

Langna shook his head: “But there’s a price to pay for it, and the biggest cost is the very name of our society.”

“Deathmatch?”

“That’s right,” Langna finished his milk, sticking out his big tongue to lick off the milk traces around his mouth and looked at Ashe with a calm gaze.

“If you enter a Deathmatch, it only ends when one party dies. A Deathmatch is fought to the death.”

Ashe blinked, “But... with the Prison using so many means to Restrict us, would they really allow us to kill each other?”

“Just because someone dies doesn’t mean you’ve murdered them,” Langna said with a smile. “Right next to the Deathmatch arena is a medical room. As long as the body is intact and the death doesn’t exceed five minutes, you can drag it to the medical room and bring them back. Of course, what kind of aftereffects they’ll have is unpredictable.”

“Moreover, even if a Prisoner does die, the Prison won’t care. After all, every Prisoner here is meant to die.”

Ashe felt this statement had a ‘people die when they are killed’ vibe and added, “Yeah, after all, everyone dies eventually.”

“Huh? You seem to have misunderstood me,” Langna said, somewhat surprised. “Haven’t you heard of the reputation of Shattered Lake Prison from

outside? Haven't you seen the Blood Moon Tribunal on the first and fifteenth of every month?"

"Ah?"

"Every single Prisoner in Shattered Lake Prison, all of them, are Death row inmates," Langna explained calmly. "There's no appeal, no escape, and political rights are stripped away for life."

"Once Prisoners enter the Prison, they can eat well, sleep well, work out, watch movies, play games, but the one thing that's not allowed is to take life—even their own. Because what awaits us is always the same ending—"

"To participate in the Blood Moon Tribunal, to die a gruesome death under the watchful eyes of many."