

SORCERER'S HANDBOOK

Chapter 5: The Trial

“You have ten seconds of rest.”

Sonya took a long, labored breath, desperately trying to recall every detail of the battle she had just endured. Although she believed she hadn't lost any memories due to the constant deaths, if she actually forgot something, she wouldn't be aware of it. All she could do was try to avoid the worst-case scenario as much as possible.

She had stopped counting the number of times she had died—not out of interest but because her mind was free of any extraneous thoughts. Her mother, classmates, exams, and ambitions in the real world had all been pushed to the most remote corner of her mind. Her entire focus was on the enemy before her, the so-called ‘Apocalypse Observer,’ analyzing his every move in great detail and ingraining his brutal beatings into her body memory!

Sonya realized that the Apocalypse Observer had no supernatural powers to speak of and didn't have a physical advantage over her either.

Compared to her, the Observer was merely an enemy who knew how to wield a sword—albeit very skillfully.

Sonya had witnessed Swordcerers who had honed their swordsmanship to the pinnacle, whose mere sword swings could impose a threatening pressure that felt like needles on one's back; just holding their sword hilts could instill fear and submission in the weak.

Compared to those true towering figures, the Observer was nothing more than an unremarkable stepping stone.

Yes, a stepping stone.

Although she had suffered another death, Sonya had managed to counterattack the Observer in a desperate strike.

But just as a thrown sword returns to its wielder's hand, the Observer, who had just been run through by her blade, now stood as if completely restored, seemingly healed in an instant.

If there had been a recovery time, Sonya would have surely used her own life to trade blows and gradually wear him down with accumulated wounds. Unfortunately, this duel was fair, leaving no such loophole for her.

The fairness of the duel felt somewhat ironic to Sonya.

But she had to admit, all of it was indeed fair.

The unreasonable restrictions made it clear to her that she had only one choice: to defeat the Apocalypse Observer with absolute strength in the duel.

Ten seconds had passed, and time seemed to have solidified into something tangible. The moment the rest period was over, Sonya tensed up, sword in hand, and charged at the Observer!

In the first second of the battle resuming, the Observer would invariably maintain a Sword-drawing stance, then surge forward with a Draw Sword Chop. The further Sonya was from the Observer, the more ferocious the attack she would face, to the point where her weapon could be slashed from her grip!

This move was very similar to the fabled Laido Draw Sword Chop, and the way to counter it was simple: one must not dodge but rather move forward to interrupt his spin!

Clang!

Sonya's arms were almost numbed by the shock, but she finally stopped the Observer's spin, dragging him into a close-quarters battle where it was easiest to fight for one's life!

After dying so many times, Sonya no longer cared about gaining a few more wounds on her body. As long as she could kill the Observer before her own death, that would be her victory!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

In a succession of rapid and impenetrable exchanges, Sonya silently counted the blows. When she reached the count of five, she struck at empty air.

The Observer had dodged in a bizarrely abrupt manner to the complete opposite direction, then stepped forward in stride, swinging his sword towards Sonya's head!

Without warning, the danger was extreme!

Sonya had once thought this was some kind of supernatural ability, but after numerous experiences bought with her life, she realized it was a type of battle footwork.

But even though she had seen through the trick, there was nothing Sonya could do—she simply couldn't predict which direction the Observer would evade to!

Because it was often only after seeing Sonya's attack that the Observer would suddenly Evade and then immediately counter. Therefore, Sonya dubbed this move 'Evade.'

Laido was easy to block, but Evade was hard to defend against.

So Sonya decided not to defend at all. Instead, she raised her hand and used her arm bone to trap the Observer's sword blade, trying to close in and behead him with her longsword!

The greatest weakness of Evade was its lack of power; it wasn't strong enough to cut through her arm!

However, in the moment the Observer's blade struck her arm, his legs abruptly slid across the sandy ground in another direction, narrowly avoiding Sonya's blade and stepping forward to slash at her neck!

A double Evade!

"You have ten seconds of rest."

Sonya patted her cheek, gripped the hilt of her sword and looked at the Observer: "Come on!"

The Observer was unfazed, entering a Sword-drawing stance, launching a Laido Draw Sword Chop—

But there was no clash of metal, as the Observer maintained his spinning chop stance without hitting anything.

Just as the Observer was about to strike Sonya, her feet suddenly slid across the sandy ground, evading in another direction with an extremely strange posture!

At this moment, the Observer was still in the stun of his spinning chop, while Sonya was in a position to counterattack!

However, Sonya instead made a posture of sheathing her sword back into the scabbard!

"Having died so many times, even if I were a pig, I should have learned your moves by now!"

With Sonya's fierce shout, she stepped forward, spinning and thrusting in a Draw Sword Chop!

Evade Laido Draw Sword Chop!

Using Laido as a follow-up move to Evade, to compensate for the lower attack power of the Evade!

Sonya had actually mastered the Laido Draw Sword Chop a long time ago but had held back until she was confident she had grasped Evade. Only then did she unleash it all in an effort to kill the Observer in one strike!

With the violent momentum of the spin, Sonya felt almost no resistance as her sword blade, like a hot knife through butter, smoothly cleaved open the Observer's chest!

It wasn't that she didn't want to strike the Observer's neck, but her height was insufficient, and raising her arms even a little during the spin was a great burden, so she had to settle for the Observer's chest.

Was it really this easy? Sonya couldn't quite believe it and quickly adjusted her balance from the aftermath of the spinning chop, watching the Observer warily: "Does this mean I've defeated you?"

"Yes," the Observer said. "Congratulations."

"You have successfully defeated me with only a sword."

A sword... In Sonya's slight astonishment, the Observer kicked into the sandy ground and then lightly hooked out another longsword with his foot.

"The first half is over, the second half begins." The Observer positioned the two swords in a cross: "By the way, there are no ten seconds of rest time next."

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"Sonya, there's an early class today, aren't you going?"

Sonya clutched her head as she sat up, realizing she was the only one left in the dormitory except for Engulite. Engulite was already dressed and ready to head out.

“What time is it now?”

“It’s 7:30.” Engulite said, “There are required courses this morning, and I remember you usually wake up an hour early to do your skincare and makeup before those... Everyone else has already left... You don’t seem to be looking too well.”

“Is that so?” Sonya touched her neck subconsciously, then quickly snapped back to reality and shook her head: “Maybe I just had a nightmare...”

“A nightmare? You’ll soon forget it.” Engulite said indifferently, “Remember to come to class, don’t miss it, or they’ll deduct points from the dormitory.”

After saying this, Engulite closed the door and left, leaving Sonya alone in the dormitory.

On any other morning when she had slept in, Sonya would have hurried out of bed to wash up and put on makeup, but today she didn’t feel like it and just sat on the bed, lost in thought.

It was strange. It was clearly a dream, yet it felt so real; even stranger was that she had no signs of forgetting it at all, remembering every detail vividly, from her first death to her ninety-ninth, all as clear as day.

She even remembered each pain as if it were fresh in her memory.

When the Apocalypse Observer switched to dual-wielding mode, the intensity of their battle increased manifold in an instant—Sonya had almost no chance to breathe, opening her eyes only to see the Observer pounce, her arms so tired they were nearly numb, and in the end, she practically met the Observer’s relentless barrage out of pure instinct.

Evade, Laido, Evade followed by Laido, Laido followed by Evade, triple Evade, triple Laido... Sonya kept up with the Observer using just these two moves, exhausting all possible variations.

When she defeated the Observer, she didn't feel anything special; it was just a continuous cycle of Evade and Laido, dodging all the Observer's attacks, finding all his weaknesses, and then he fell.

But after defeating the Observer, Sonya felt no joy.

Because the Observer said something.

"This trial is over, but your life has just begun."

Although she couldn't see his face or hear his tone, Sonya was certain—this was definitely not a blessing.

"Apocalypse Observer..." Sonya savored the name as if she was grinding it with her teeth and swallowing it to digest in her stomach.

Meanwhile, in the luxurious suite on the bottom floor of the Shattered Lake Prison in Kaimon City.

Ashe yawned as he sat up, feeling unusually tired, as if he had been beaten up in his sleep.

He turned on the Holographic Screen, opened Aurora's Sorcerer Handbook, and saw a new message:

"After undergoing the trial, the bond with the Death Maniac Swordswoman has deepened."

Ashe scratched his head: "...arranging a trial can deepen a bond? Is there such a good thing?"