

New Era 201

Chapter 201 - 197: Doing Whatever One Wants

Chen Shouyi lit the gasoline lamp, and only when he heard Chen Xingyue's footsteps fade away did he unzip the briefcase.

The Shell Lady was still asleep, but upon hearing the familiar sound of the zipper, she blinked her sleepy eyes open.

By the time Chen Shouyi fished her out of the briefcase and placed her on the bed, she had become lively, displaying an expression of excitement as though she was ready to set off, and asked in a flattering tone, "Dear Giant, are we going to kill the bad mice and bad birds?"

"Not today, but definitely tomorrow!"

Today he had survived a fierce battle by the skin of his teeth, and then got cursed by the Barbarian God, experiencing a terrible nightmare, so he had neither the mood nor energy to practice archery.

Moreover, according to Song Jieying and a few other Martial Artists, the temporary conscription for the Martial Artists hadn't ended, and early tomorrow morning, they had to cooperate with the army in Chengan District to annihilate the remaining Barbarians and finish the war thoroughly.

By then, another brutal battle might be unavoidable.

Tonight, he just wanted to lie in bed, sleep, and recuperate to gather strength.

The Shell Lady initially thought they would definitely go on a rampage today to make the Giant kill every single fierce mouse and bird, but upon hearing his words, she immediately felt disappointed, her once-jubilant mood deflating instantaneously with disappointment:

"Do I have to wait for another sunrise and sunset?"

"Yes, you're the best behaved. You just tidy up your clothes today, then take a nap, and it will be soon." Chen Shouyi looked at her pitiful little face, finding it amusing inside, and offered comfort, then opened the wardrobe drawer, took out the small clothes he had packed away, and placed them before her.

"Then I'll be busy to death today with so many pretty clothes here." The Shell Lady feigned a sigh, and immediately picked up a green dress with excitement, starting her tiresome game of changing clothes again.

Chen Shouyi felt he was too weary to even ridicule.

At this moment, he remembered the changes in the Memory Space, and his heart couldn't help but quietly thrill.

Previously, he had only scratched the surface.

Some bold ideas hadn't been tried yet before he had hastily exited the Book of Knowledge, and now thinking about it, he felt quite eager.

He immediately lay on the bed, closed his eyes, quickly entered the Gray Mist Space, selected the newly generated Memory Leaf among the tens of thousands on the World Tree, and then plunged his mind into it.

...

Chen Shouyi, who had been standing still at the edge of the floor, gazing off into the distance with intense concentration, suddenly stirred.

He twisted his head, twisted his body, and then twisted his feet.

"My own body is exactly the same as the real one, with the same strength, the same feel, the same reality, making one feel as if time has reversed and returned to that prior scene of battle."

If not for many areas still being shrouded in black mist, this world would be indistinguishable from reality.

He looked around at the solemn and tense Martial Artists, but at this moment, he didn't feel a hint of tension, his mentality was incredibly relaxed, with a sense of freedom as if breaking through original constraints.

People living in society are constantly subject to explicit and implicit rules.

Laws, public opinion, others' views, family constraints, secular norms, the position one holds in society, all these act like an invisible net that subconsciously keeps one from overstepping, aligning with one's identity.

But at this moment, all these constraints vanished, and he felt like he was playing a single-player game where everyone else was an NPC. He glanced at Song Jieying beside him whose face was tense, and suddenly conceived a mischievous thought.

Under the puzzled stares, he suddenly extended a hand and pinched her face hard.

So smooth and tender, it felt quite nice.

His heart pounded wildly.

Song Jieying stared in shock, her mouth open, gazing at Chen Shouyi in dumbfounded silence, turning red all of a sudden, but for some reason, remained silent and endured it.

His actions caught the attention of quite a few people nearby.

"What are you looking at? I'm flirting with a good woman; let's see who dares come and hit me!" Chen Shouyi teased, thinking that nothing was real anyway.

However, to his disappointment, everyone hurriedly averted their gaze, avoiding looking further.

"Chen Shouyi, what's wrong with you today, acting so strange." Song Jieying snapped back to reality, looking at him with some suspicion, as if this Chen Shouyi seemed unfamiliar to her.

"Strange, huh? Wait, there's more to come!" Chen Shouyi grinned strangely.

"Brother Chen, get ready! The battle's about to start," Qin Liuyuan also turned back to advise.

"Everyone's a bit too tense, need to lighten the mood." Chen Shouyi also felt he went too far, completely unlike his former self; perhaps without constraints, his darker side had rapidly inflated, making him extraordinarily audacious, doing things he'd never dare before here without pressure.

"The enemy is here, everyone on alert!" A loud shout came from downstairs.

Chen Shouyi immediately got excited; that Barbarian God was finally here.

He stepped to the edge of the floor, and under the stunned gazes of the crowd, leaped off the eighth floor. Many quickly looked downstairs to find him rolling to cushion the impact and landing steadily on the ground.

Everyone's faces changed with amazement; this was a commercial building, and a fall from the eighth floor, at least thirty meters, would be fatal or severely injurious to even an ordinary Martial Artist.

But to Chen Shouyi, it just left his legs slightly numb. In less than a second, the minor negative impact rapidly dissipated.

He sprinted madly toward the direction the Barbarian God was coming from in his memory.

Indeed, he wanted to test the Barbarian God's strength firsthand.

Moreover, the worst outcome was just death.

Was he afraid of dying?

In this Memory Space, was he afraid of dying?

In just a blink, his speed had already reached its limit, with the whistling gale barely brushing against his body before automatically dissipating, advancing rapidly at a hundred meters per second.

In just a few seconds, he saw an enormous silhouette moving toward him at high speed with intense air currents along the avenue.

Imposing and overwhelming!

The air exploded in sounds like thunder, echoing, with windows of the buildings on both sides shattering. Before the giant even approached, the gale surged toward him like immense waves.

Powerful, truly intimidating and terrifying!

Chen Shouyi's speed topped at around a hundred meters per second, whereas this Barbarian God's speed was at least supersonic, though luckily his sight could barely keep up.

Seeing Chen Shouyi's figure, the Giant surprisingly halted, raising the enormous War Axe, looking down at the small figure, and mockingly said, "Mortal King, your pathetic armies have been destroyed by me. Your audacity angers me greatly, yet I mercifully offer you one last chance to surrender to me!"

The Giant's voice rolled like thunder, making Chen Shouyi's ears itch with reverberation.

"Surrender? Ridiculous, I'm here to slay a god today." Chen Shouyi fearlessly retaliated.

"Impudent, blasphemer." The Barbarian God instantly raged, its form blurring out like a sudden thunderclap.

With a booming sound, Chen Shouyi's ears thundered as his mind reeled scarcely, only to find darkness falling overhead as a giant foot aimed to crush him, delivering an attack several times faster than the speed of sound.

Chen Shouyi felt the air grow incredibly sticky, his body like a fly stuck in thick porridge, with a terrifying pressure that rendered him weak, unable to muster much strength.

In this critical moment, he bit down hard, focusing sharply, and let out a low roar. His muscles trembled, veins bulging on his neck, and power surged throughout his body. He kicked the ground forcefully, shattering it, attempting to evade the attack.

However, just as he moved, in the next instant, there came a massive crash as the giant foot landed.

Chen Shouyi got flattened like a mouse, reduced to a muddle of flesh and blood.

He was promptly expelled from the Memory Space.

He lay panting on his bedroom ceiling, his heart pounding wildly.

It was simply too powerful, too terrifying.

Chapter 202 - 198: Steamed Buns

After Chen Shouyi's mind slightly recovered, he once again entered the Memory Space.

This time he was somewhat prepared in his heart. When the opponent attacked, he quickly dodged in the blink of an eye, and then... there was no "and then." Before he could react, he was caught by a big hand, and his body was crushed directly.

The third time, Chen Shouyi was more cautious. Without waiting for the Barbarian God to ramble, he started shooting arrows from afar and moved unpredictably. This time the situation was much better;

he dodged the opponent's thunderous attacks three times. Finally, he was cleaved in mid-air by a War Axe, his upper and lower body separated, innards spilling all over the ground, announcing his death.

Chen Shouyi tried repeatedly over a dozen times, and all battles ended in just fractions of a second, the longest lasting did not even reach 0.5 seconds.

Large creatures, due to the great inertia caused by their large body mass and the problem of longer attack distance, often appear to be sluggish and inflexible compared to smaller creatures. But this didn't apply to this Barbarian God. Or rather, His terrifying reaction ability completely compensated for all that.

Moreover, with His abnormal predictive abilities, facing this Barbarian God, he could neither escape nor hide.

As for attacking, that was simply a joke. The arrows he shot were easily dodged by Him, with one even being batted away by His hand, posing no threat whatsoever.

Even if it hit, it would only cause superficial wounds, having no lethal effect on Him.

A truly terrifying existence.

After leaving the last time, Chen Shouyi felt his head splitting with pain, forcing him to stop this suicidal behavior.

He opened the attribute panel, ready to see how much energy had been consumed, and was stunned at a glance.

The energy originally expected to reach around 5.8 today was now only 4.73, consuming a whole point.

He had long been aware that the Memory Space, like a simulation game, required the energy of the Book of Knowledge, but he hadn't expected the consumption to be so large.

This was an entire point.

Thinking about his usual "frugality," where he couldn't bear to waste even a bit of energy unless necessary, he felt a vague pain in his heart.

With the energy collection rate of the Book of Knowledge, he needed to wait six or seven days to accumulate a point, now he had to postpone optimizing the Thirty-Six Styles of Body Training.

"Right, how long was I there?"

He looked at the watch on his wrist and, accounting for the minutes spent the first time, estimated that it was a total of about an hour and a half, with most of the time wasted on satisfying his curiosity.

But it was too late for regret now, and he didn't dwell on it anymore.

"That means about 0.01 point of energy is consumed every minute! With this calculation, if it's just accumulating combat experience, it doesn't seem to be that much!" He pondered in his heart.

For ordinary people, time is calculated in seconds, but for Chen Shouyi, it's calculated in tenths of a second.

In one second, he could run a hundred meters, swing a sword a dozen times, shoot ten arrows, and complete an intense, evenly matched battle.

A minute is sixty seconds, which is already quite long.

"In the future, when playing this kind of simulation game, I must be frugal; not a second should be wasted," Chen Shouyi silently decided.

He came back to his senses and glanced at the Shell Lady beside him, feeling a bit speechless about her narcissism.

She was wearing a set of white princess dress, twirling in the mirror beside the bed, her little body turning around and around, the dress fluttering, occasionally revealing her bare little butt.

He withdrew his gaze and suddenly remembered that he hadn't fed her yet, rubbing his temples as he got up and walked to the table to pour half a spoon of honey, mixed it with warm water, and knocked on the table.

"Time to eat!"

"Oh!" the Shell Lady responded, immediately jumping off the bed and onto the computer desk like a flea: "Good giant, can I wear this outfit tomorrow?"

"Sure, hurry up and eat." Such a simple request, he certainly wouldn't refuse.

The Shell Lady beamed with joy and quickly began licking the honey.

...

Early the next day, six steam trucks formed a long line, driving out of the new city area.

Song Jieying sat next to Chen Shouyi and asked, "Are you okay now?"

"I'm fine, yesterday was just an accident." Chen Shouyi shook his head, knowing she was referring to when he fainted yesterday.

Looking at Song Jieying, he couldn't help but recall what happened in the Memory Space yesterday, making his memories somewhat confused.

Song Jieying said nothing further after that, picked up a bag of buns, and asked: "Do you want some buns? I bought too many for breakfast."

"Oh, thank you!" Chen Shouyi politely responded, taking the bag full of over a dozen buns, although he had already had breakfast, he could still fit in more.

Song Jieying was dumbfounded watching Chen Shouyi eat the buns two at a time, finishing the bag quickly, opening her mouth as if to say something but then stopping.

I haven't even had one yet!

Chen Shouyi finished the last one and said, "They taste pretty good."

"Uh, they're alright, I bought them just outside my house," Song Jieying replied with an embarrassed laugh.

The vehicle shook slightly. This kind of steam truck for transporting people was quite rudimentary. It was the same model as a freight truck, just with a simple metal frame build on the cargo area, covered with a layer of fabric to shield against the cold wind.

Although it was already early spring, the weather was still cold, often with subzero temperatures, biting to the bone.

Huge craters half a meter to two or three meters in diameter from shells appeared from time to time on the road. Not yet filled in, this was evidently a battlefield area. He could still smell the gunpowder lingering in the air.

"The arrows provided by the military are much better than those we buy ourselves?" Song Jieying checked the arrows, trying to make conversation while looking at Chen Shouyi's handsome side profile.

This battle was not as rushed as the last one, this time there was a relatively abundant time, and adequate preparations were made, at least giving the Martial Artists some ammunition supplies was not an issue.

"It should be stockpiled inventory, now arrows processed by hand can't compare unless made with careful craftsmanship," Chen Shouyi said earnestly, retracting his gaze.

...

After driving for almost an hour, they had entered Cheng'an District.

The atmosphere inside the vehicle instantly became oppressive.

This place had almost become a ghost town, empty of people, with many nearby shops smashed to pieces, a scene of desolation. Abandoned luggage, clothes, and even numerous corpses in tragic states littered the road, a heart-wrenching sight.

Fortunately, the cold weather meant the bodies hadn't rotted yet.

Chen Shouyi's heart was heavy, looking at the scars on the bodies, they clearly weren't all from the Barbarians, chaos breeds crime. When the order of a city collapses, even the cruelest things can happen.

After a dozen minutes more of driving, the truck finally stopped.

Chen Shouyi and all Martial Artists in the vehicle jumped off one by one, the road ahead already blocked by the military.

...

"There are about three thousand Barbarians in total, but they have taken large numbers of hostages, enough to number over ten thousand, preventing us from using heavy weapons for annihilation."

A nearby office building had been temporarily turned into a command post.

Major General Sun, the commander of the garrison district of Hedong City, was briefing all conscripted Martial Artists on the battlefield situation in the war room.

Chen Shouyi noticed that he looked quite haggard, his eye bags drooping, a stark contrast to when they met during the exploratory operation of the ant nest. Apparently, the immense pressure of the past few days had nearly crushed him.

"All snipers are now in position, and all roads have been sealed off. You will cooperate with the Warriors and our military Martial Artists to act, ensuring the complete annihilation of the Barbarians and rescuing as many hostages as possible."

Chapter 203 - 199: Casualties

Inside a newly excavated gigantic cave in Yun Mountain.

Lots of jewelry and ornaments, large and small glass balls, colorful carpets, various impressive yet functionally vague electronic products, and numerous beautiful picture albums have been piled up into a small mountain.

Behind this small mountain, a giant about two and a half meters tall, with a robust physique, pressed a young human woman under him, his expression twisted, and the brittle sound of bones breaking rang continuously, as blood slowly spread across the ground.

Except for the initial weak cries of pain from the woman, soon there was no sound at all.

A few minutes later, two strong Barbarians quickly carried away the mangled and twisted corpse.

"These humans who deserve to go to hell!" the Giant cursed irritably.

After venting his desire, he didn't bother to clean his body, still stained with blood, he only wrapped himself in animal hide and sat on a large bed.

The large bed creaked under the unbearable weight, as if it could fall apart at any moment.

He possesses the bloodline of a Flame Giant, compared to ordinary Barbarians, his physique is taller and more robust, and his strength far exceeds that of ordinary Barbarians, even among all the past Barbarian Kings, he is the strongest.

For over twenty years, no warrior from any tribe has dared to challenge him at the annual Divine Birth festivals.

Although the nation of Barbarians can barely be called a nation, in reality, it is an alliance of various loose tribes, due to low productivity and limited natural resource output, it cannot support a high-density population. Many tribes are separated by dozens or even hundreds of kilometers, with only a common faith and church connecting them, aside from waging external wars and the annual Divine Birth, they rarely contact each other.

For some unknown reason, he was very irritable today, as if something major was about to happen, for this reason, early in the morning, he had already given orders to execute hundreds of lazy slaves.

At this time, an old man burst in quickly.

The Giant was about to get angry, but upon seeing who it was, he immediately stood up and bowed his head in respect.

It was the Sect Leader of the God of Courage Church.

Although he was the Barbarian King and immensely powerful, he still held great reverence for the Sect Leader and dared not show any disrespect. No Barbarian King dared to go against the will of the Church.

Because those who defied it were already dead.

The Church not only effectively controlled the tribes, but it also had a god standing behind it.

However, the always wise and all-seeing Sect Leader was now in a panic, looking terrified, and as soon as he entered the cave, he loudly ordered, "King, you must get ready immediately, war is imminent!"

"Respectable Sect Leader, what exactly happened?"

"Last night, before I went to bed, I received an ominous premonition, I immediately got up to pray, seeking God's guidance, but there was no response at all. I thought it was the barrier of this world, a temporary thing, but when I prayed again this morning, there was still no response..."

He was at a loss, as if the sky had collapsed, swallowing hard, he continued, "Later, many priests reported to me, and the result was the same."

The Giant's expression changed at these words, a trace of panic emerging in his heart, he lowered his voice, "Respected Sect Leader, do you suspect my lord..."

"Silence!"

...

The number of soldiers dispatched was not large, probably only a brigade, without carrying any heavy weapons, the only ones barely considered heavy weapons were rocket launchers and heavy machine guns.

Due to the large number of soldiers splitting up and blending into the entire city, they occasionally ambushed and hunted the invading Barbarians, who were still trapped at the foot of Yun Mountain, not daring to invade the surrounding threatening human buildings at all.

The bullets shot mysteriously from the buildings and the mysterious deaths already gave the Barbarians a strong psychological shadow regarding human structures, no one knew if living inside would bring imminent death.

...

By eight in the morning, thousands of soldiers, organized into companies, began to encircle Yun Mountain.

Chen Shouyi and several Martial Artists followed one of the companies of soldiers, cautiously advancing along an alleyway; the city environment was complex, like a steel forest, and sheltered by the buildings, they smoothly approached within a kilometer.

The mountain's base had already turned into a huge construction site, countless humans in tattered clothes and with dull expressions were carrying stones under the Barbarians' watch, on the other side hundreds of Barbarians meticulously polished these transported stones.

A nearby circular structure with a diameter of thirty to forty meters, entirely stacked with stones, had gradually formed, but it was unclear what kind of building it was.

"These Barbarians really deserve to die," Captain Zhang Chunxiao put down the binoculars, indignant, cursing quietly.

Seven to eight hundred meters was already quite distant, ordinary people couldn't see anything more than a black dot with the naked eye without binoculars.

"When will we act?" asked Chen Shouyi.

"As soon as the snipers take out the Barbarians on the mountaintop lookout, we'll act immediately."

Chen Shouyi glanced at the few Barbarians on the distant mountaintop looking around, nodded and stopped speaking, the Barbarians left at the foot of the mountain were few, most were on the mountain.

There were only three Martial Artists in the team, besides him, there was Song Jieying and another male Martial Artist named Xue Youcheng, who was tall and burly, with a large red scar extending from one side of his face to his chin, making him look quite fierce and intimidating.

However, appearances can be deceiving; in fact, he was kind-hearted, diligent, and pleasant to talk to—yesterday he stayed behind at the hospital.

After waiting for about ten minutes, Chen Shouyi suddenly noticed some commotion among the Barbarians on the mountain, with many Barbarians pouring out of the cave.

"What's going on? Have we been exposed!" he thought to himself.

At that moment, the muffled sound of gunfire suddenly rang out, and several Barbarians on the mountaintop fell in response.

It was the snipers, long lurking nearby, who took action.

"Move!" Captain Zhang Chunxiao shouted immediately upon hearing the gunshot, leaping from behind the hidden building. Simultaneously, large numbers of soldiers poured in from all directions.

The deafening gunfire made the Barbarians at the mountain's base warily look around, some experienced ones began to scatter and hide.

The snipers kept firing, picking off one Barbarian after another among the crowd.

The humans captured by the Barbarians were initially startled by the gunfire, but soon their faces lit up with intense joy.

"Run, hurry!" someone shouted.

The crowd hesitated for a moment, then began to flee in all directions, desperate to escape. One Barbarian, with a vicious expression, raised a whip, attempting to stop the slaves from fleeing, but before he could swing it down, his chest exploded in a mist of blood, and he fell to the ground.

However, these were only a few; more Barbarians were obscured by the running crowd, making it impossible for the snipers to target them. A large number of humans were killed by the Barbarians while fleeing, falling just before rescue at the dawn.

The smell of blood began to permeate, it was entirely a massacre, some Barbarians, driven by fear, slaughtered frantically.

"Damn it!" Chen Shouyi cursed under his breath.

He couldn't stand the team moving so slowly, stomping his foot and suddenly leaping a dozen meters ahead, starting to sprint. A few seconds later, he was swallowed by the crowd; drawing his sword, he advanced swiftly against the tide like a fish swimming upstream.

A Barbarian, covered in blood, had become violent, punching through a middle-aged man's chest and then throwing the corpse forcefully into the crowd, a series of brittle bone-cracking sounds rang out, and people fell in waves.

Soon he charged viciously at Chen Shouyi, but before he could get close, a flash of sword light, and a head soared into the sky.

Chen Shouyi flicked his Long Sword, causing it to buzz, and quickly approached another nearby Barbarian.

Some soldiers were shouting hoarsely, instructing the crowd to get down, not to run around to avoid accidental injury, but at this moment, people's rationality had already been completely drowned by joy or fear, and no one stopped.

Some even ran desperately towards the soldiers upon seeing them.

Chapter 204 - 200: Division

The scene was chaotic; under the stimuli of fear and hatred, many barbarians were completely mad.

If humans were full of hatred towards these barbarians, then the barbarians' hatred for humans was probably even greater.

This expedition into the human world, the barbarians dispatched all able-bodied youths they could muster, gathering nearly fifty thousand for the expeditionary force, leaving behind only the old, weak,

women, and children in the tribes. It could be said they exhausted the entire tribe's strength, yet now this army was reduced to less than one in ten, with some tribes' youths even completely wiped out.

A barbarian saw Chen Shouyi swiftly approaching and was just about to swing a whip when half his arm was sliced off. Before the arm fell from the body, a fierce flash of sword light, as fleeting as a startled swan, cleaved him and his head in two.

Chen Shouyi's swordsmanship level had already reached mastery: 12. This kind of swordsmanship exceeded most martial artists, each move astonishing in power, the sword as quick as lightning.

Against the completely overwhelming strength of the Barbarian God, it was naturally ineffective, but to the ordinary barbarians, in his eyes were no more than immobile wooden stakes, even though these barbarians generally possessed the physique of martial artists.

A nearby woman, barely escaping death and in tattered clothes, saw Chen Shouyi and excitedly wanted to run over, trying to seek protection.

Chen Shouyi shot a cold look at the oblivious woman and barked angrily:

"Get lost!"

The woman was so disoriented by the sound waves that by the time she regained her senses, Chen Shouyi had already vanished, weaving through the crowd like a specter, his sword occasionally felling barbarians to the ground. In just over ten seconds, fifteen barbarians already lay dead at his hands.

His actions finally drew the barbarians' attention.

A barbarian mixed in the crowd attempted to sneak attack from behind; without even looking, Chen Shouyi twisted and side-kicked him heavily in the head.

With a loud "bang," the head exploded like a watermelon, the corpse soaring into the air.

The barbarians were scattered, almost all mixed in the crowd, rendering sight almost useless here because everywhere around were running people. He could only rely on keen hearing to locate those hiding barbarians.

Just then, a shell from several kilometers away struck the hillside, producing a fierce explosion.

Chen Shouyi quickly glanced upward.

...

The shell did not hit the barbarians on the mountain, the explosion center still over a hundred meters from the nearest barbarian, but it induced violent chaos and panic among them.

A flash of terror crossed the Barbarian King's face; the roar of the shell like heavenly thunder triggered memories of that terrifying night of falling heavenly fire, instantly quelling his desire to fight.

"All tribesmen, retreat!" he shouted.

"No, we must fight! How dare you defy my lord's will." The sect leader beside him angrily pointed at the Barbarian King, loudly proclaiming. The God of Courage's fate was still unknown, how could the army possibly retreat?

The divine might made the Barbarian King hesitate for a moment, but the next instant, his face twisted viciously, he seized the sect leader's neck with a giant hand: "God? Where's God? My tribesmen have died enough."

All the barbarians stood stunned, unable to react to the sudden situation before them.

The sect leader's face turned crimson, his body struggled violently, his mouth gaping, trying to say something, but the Barbarian King gave him no chance, squeezing viciously, and with a "crack" sound, like breaking a cucumber, his neck snapped cleanly, severing head from body.

Without a glance, he shouted loudly, his voice booming like thunder: "The God of Courage has fallen. This is a devil's world; those who remain will die. Now all tribesmen, retreat, we're going home."

During this, several more shells fell nearby, underscoring his words perfectly.

The crowd immediately erupted into chaos.

Some were angry, some fearful, some confused...

A number of barbarians hesitated, gradually following the Barbarian King, yet not even a third. The majority remained, refusing to believe the god had fallen.

After all, in their eyes, God was so mighty, great, and immortal. How could he possibly fall?

The more barbaric and backward the civilization, the more blind the faith, and royal power was utterly powerless against divine authority, hardly anyone followed the Barbarian King's escape.

Once the Barbarian King left, the Vice Sect Leader immediately stepped forward, shouting frantically:

"Followers, the King has betrayed my lord, profaned the divine, he is the tribe's sinner, no longer our king.

All my lord's followers, your piousness is being tested, for my lord's great deeds, for eternal life in the divine country after death, slay these vile evil slaves."

The barbarians, from confusion and fear, slowly grew resolute and fearless, even fervent.

With a "boom," a shell finally exploded amidst the crowd, dozens of barbarians blasted apart, limbs flying, yet no hint of fear showed on any barbarian faces. Frenzied or numb, they madly rushed downhill.

Shells sporadically fell among the barbarian crowd, launching numerous barbarian corpses into the air.

...

Chen Shouyi slashed a barbarian in two with one sword, and at last, the scattering crowd gradually disappeared, leaving the ground littered with corpses, captured humans, barbarians, and soldiers alike.

Numerous soldiers, mixed with barbarians, had charged into the formation, resulting in heavy casualties.

If not for the presence of martial artists in the ranks, and considering the barbarians at the foot of the mountain were mostly ordinary, the casualties would likely have been even greater.

Originally, these losses could have been greatly reduced, but in extreme fear, people nearly lost all rationality, like drowning individuals, instinctively grasping at anything to survive.

As the battlefield's captives gradually disappeared, bullets finally began to rain densely.

Machine guns started intense shooting, rocket launchers also began to show their might.

Chen Shouyi dared not charge forward further; on a bullet-rain battlefield, such actions would be suicidal, so he immediately retreated to the original formation.

"Are you hurt?" Song Jieying asked.

"I'm fine!" said Chen Shouyi.

"President Chen yet a grand martial artist, how could he be hurt!" Xue Youcheng's sinister face blossomed into a smile, even the long scar on his face wearing an ingratiating expression.

Chen Shouyi sheathed his sword and switched to the war bow, shooting arrows one after another, the battle by now nearly settled.

A large number of barbarians, running down from the mountain, hadn't even approached before being hit by the rain of bullets.

Only a few powerful barbarian warriors could resist; these barbarians had physiques comparable to Chen Shouyi's, some even stronger. With astonishing speed and keen danger sense, every bullet missed, they even had energy to counterattack, killing many soldiers with primitive bows or short spears.

However, when they caught the soldiers' attention, turning gun muzzles, especially when dozens of heavy machine guns began shooting without blind spots, facing the curtain of bullets, they eventually died with regret.

It wasn't that the barbarians weren't strong enough, but due to their lack of understanding of human weapons, and lack of corresponding combat strategy.

If it were a human grand martial artist, the first response would never be to clash directly with a combat-ready organized army, but to dodge the edge, relying on terrain, speed, and reaction, through ambush or assassination, causing the army grave troubles.

Chapter 205 - 201: Uneasy Heart

The frontal war was over in less than an hour.

There was no thorough mountain search. Once the soldiers and martial artists retreated one or two kilometers away, five giant airships, each about seventy to eighty meters long, flew low at several hundred meters altitude, slowly approaching Yun Mountain and then dropped a large number of napalm bombs.

Currently, Hedong City has few heavy weapons left. The only dozen or so cannons were hastily assembled overnight from a plethora of scattered parts and barrels, but there was no shortage of shells.

The Great Xia Country's nearly twenty-year quasi-war-ready state, preparing for war at any moment, had piled up munitions like mountains in their arsenals.

Chen Shouyi noticed that the bombing accuracy of these airships was not high, with many napalm bombs landing at the foot of the mountain. One even fell on a building, engulfing its upper floors in flames. Fortunately, the surrounding buildings were already empty.

Chen Shouyi thought to himself, no wonder these airships stayed out of combat during the fight.

If they had suddenly dropped a few napalm bombs during the battle and hit the troops, the war might have been unmanageable, and morale would have collapsed.

Fortunately, most of them accurately hit Yun Mountain.

On Yun Mountain, flames and toxic smoke spread rapidly and rose to the sky. Occasionally, Barbarians, engulfed in flames, would scream and dart out of the forest where they were hiding, running in panic, only to collapse after a few hundred meters, rolling violently on the ground.

Clearly, not every Barbarian was a fanatical believer who let go of all secular ties and only kept gods in their hearts. Not all of them were truly fearless of death. Many Barbarians did not charge down with the others, instead opting to hide in the forest during their escape.

Half an hour later, the whole of Yun Mountain was ablaze, thick smoke rolling.

...

On the way back.

The atmosphere was somewhat oppressive.

There were originally eighteen martial artists in the vehicle on the way there, but only sixteen were left on the way back, with two martial artists having been killed in action.

Chen Shouyi sat in the car, pulling aside the curtain on one side and looked out sideways.

Though the war was won, the entire city was still desolate. There were no pedestrians on the streets, and the glass of many buildings on both sides was shattered. Several stray dogs with greenish eyes were fighting over a partially bloody, black-marked arm on the roadside, gnawing all the way down to the exposed bones.

Upon hearing the roar of the steam truck, these stray dogs whimpered, tucked their tails, and quickly fled.

"After this event, the whole of Hedong City is going to decline. There are probably not many people left in the urban area." Song Jieying sighed and said.

Chen Shouyi closed the curtain and said: "The city is too large, and the population is dense, which makes it hard to defend!"

"General Manager Chen is right, what's the point of living in the city? There're hardly any factories, no jobs to be found, and it's just about living off what you have." Xue Youcheng, now feeling comfortable talking in front of Chen Shouyi, interjected.

"The countryside isn't safe either. If anything happens, there is no one to call for help." Chen Shouyi replied.

"But that is for ordinary people. Given your strength, General Manager Chen, I am sure you would be fine," Xue Youcheng flattered.

"Why go to the countryside? I can't farm!" Chen Shouyi smiled, appreciating how pleasant Old Xue's words were.

"How could we let you do that? I come from the countryside. Just as long as you don't mind, I'll farm for you." Xue Youcheng patted his chest, paying no mind to the odd looks from others.

Song Jieying rolled her eyes internally at the shamelessness of this man who, though in his thirties, still acted this way.

After a few idle chats, Chen Shouyi ended the conversation and discreetly opened the attributes panel.

"Willpower has increased by 0.1 points, plus yesterday's increase of 0.3 points, totaling an increase of 0.4 points in two days, reaching 13.4 in willpower, which means an increase of two levels in quantity."

"Sure enough, a real life-or-death battle is the best way to forge willpower." He thought to himself thoughtfully.

He extended his hand, joined his index and middle fingers to form a sword shape, and concentrated his mind. Suddenly, it felt as though an invisible force burst out from his fingertips, causing his skin to itch slightly. Unable to resist, he drew a line on the curtain nearby.

Like a sharp blade, the curtain silently split open, leaving a long fine slit.

He discreetly made another swipe toward a corner of the seat, instantly slicing off a small piece of hard plastic along with a screw as thin as a chopstick.

"It seems sharper, and the consumption of mental energy is also reduced." Chen Shouyi carefully perceived.

He pinched the small piece of cut plastic in his hand, pulled open the curtain, and secretly tossed it out the window.

At this moment, a cold breeze blew by, bringing a few fallen leaves through the gap and into the compartment, one of which headed straight for Chen Shouyi's face, making him frown.

In an instant, the blowing cold wind stilled, yet the leaf that had been blown hung before his eyes, not falling for a long time.

A trace of surprise flashed across his face, and with a mental shift, the leaf then wobbled and fell to the ground.

He glanced around, noticing that nobody witnessed this miraculous scene nor was anyone attempting to prank him.

"What is going on? I only used the Wind Control ability to stop the wind; the leaf shouldn't have stayed suspended. Since acquiring the Wind Control ability, I've never encountered such a phenomenon."

Could he try again?

His curiosity piqued; he picked a less noticeable target—a fragment of paper about the size of a mung bean at his feet.

He covertly used his Wind Control ability.

With a wisp of a breeze blowing by, the fragment soon lifted, wobbling into the air. To avoid detection, once the fragment rose about a foot, he immediately calmed the breeze.

Watching the paper fragment slowly descend under gravity, his heart grew more perplexed.

Not the Wind Control ability?

What, then, was the cause? Could it have been a fluke, or was it a matter of insufficient height?

At this moment, a thought stirred within him as he carefully reflected on his earlier actions:

"Could it have been related to concentrating my mind while testing the Sword Qi?"

The more he contemplated, the more plausible it seemed, and gazing at the small paper piece, he immediately focused his mind, and in the next instant, an unbelievable event occurred.

No sooner had he formed the thought than the piece of paper floated up, not wobbling like before; this time, it rose smoothly, as though his mind was guiding its movement.

Was it willpower or telekinesis?

Or were the two inherently one?

A flicker of excitement passed through Chen Shouyi's mind, but as his thoughts wavered, the paper lost control and began to drift downwards.

Before it hit the ground, he swiftly regained control, and the paper floated back up.

Chen Shouyi seemed to have found a new toy, playing enthusiastically, sometimes guiding the paper in an S-shape between his feet, other times sending it skimming quickly along the ground. He even mischievously directed it into Song Jieying's pant leg, unbeknownst to her.

However, to his slight disappointment, the paper could only be controlled within his perception range, losing its influence beyond two meters. Additionally, the power was pitifully weak, quickly exhausting his mental energy after just a few seconds of controlling a stone the size of a common glass bead.

What use did such a weak ability have?

It was no more than a tiny trick.

After playing for a while, Chen Shouyi grew bored, leaning back in his seat to rest with his eyes closed.

At this moment, one of the martial artists in the vehicle suddenly broached a sensitive topic: "What do you think will happen to those who didn't respond to the draft in two days?"

"Indeed, there weren't many martial artists who showed up this time. I reckon less than 60% of the martial artists in the Safe Zone turned up. Many people I know didn't come."

"I knew General Manager Cui didn't come!"

Bringing up General Manager Cui, everyone fell silent, hesitating to discuss someone so respected, even somewhat fearful, for being a renowned martial artist. After a few seconds, finally, someone spoke up.

"Who knows how they'll handle it. At most, I think they'll deduct the martial artist subsidy."

"If that's all, I wouldn't have come in the first place, nor would I go in the future. Money's nothing compared to one's life."

...

Everyone chattered on, their voices echoing in the vehicle, even though Chen Shouyi felt somewhat distressed.

The saying goes that one shouldn't worry about scarcity but about inequality. He could understand martial artists from other districts not coming due to strained circumstances, being spread out, making timely notifications or arrivals challenging.

But those martial artists from the Safe Zone who did not respond to the draft truly agitated him. If the provincial or city government failed to penalize them correspondingly, the entire martial artist community's morale might collapse.

Chapter 206 - 202: Departure

An hour later, the car arrived at the Safe Zone.

Chen Shouyi and a group of Martial Artists got off one by one, but strangely found that people on the road were all looking up at the sky.

Chen Shouyi instinctively looked up, and just one glance left him frozen like stone.

This was a fleet of three giant airships. Compared to the five airships that had previously entered the battlefield, these were akin to infants facing robust giants. These airships flew at a low altitude of seven

to eight hundred meters, with a streamlined, egg-shaped bluish surface, exuding a strong sense of technological beauty.

Underneath each airship were three large and five small launches, totaling eight launch ports, along with bomb compartments already loaded with bombs. Each side was equipped with five multi-barrel phalanx systems, and the top similarly had many phalanx systems for defense against aerial threats.

Chen Shouyi had seen images of this type of airship online; these were three nuclear-powered strategic armored airships, preliminarily commissioned to strategic forces before the mutation.

It had a length of more than four hundred meters and a maximum width of one hundred meters, with a weight of six thousand five hundred tons and a carrying capacity of up to one thousand tons.

It was undoubtedly a gigantic entity, an aircraft carrier in the sky!

It was a mobile nuclear arsenal, the most powerful force for humanity's deterrence against other worlds today. If he guessed correctly, those three large and five small launch ports were for various models of nuclear missiles using steam high-pressure ejection.

Chen Shouyi was inexplicably shaken in his heart.

Anyone who saw this armed-to-the-teeth giant could feel a severe mental impact. If one considered its world-destroying power, capable of easily eradicating Hedong City if desired, it instilled awe.

Especially the front of the airship, with its massive red and black warning signs, was synonymous with apocalypse in human minds.

Sadly, given today's technological regression, it was likely impossible to manufacture such awe-inspiring giants in short order.

These nuclear-powered strategic armored airships did not land in the Safe Zone, as there was neither the condition nor the space for such giants to land.

Passing over the outside of the Safe Zone, these giant airships flew straight away into the distance.

"Is this the support troops from above?" Song Jieying beside him recovered and asked.

"It should be!" Chen Shouyi said with a bit of fear, "Luckily the Barbarian God was taken care of, otherwise who knows what would have happened?"

Although he knew that even if a nuclear bomb were to be launched, it would probably be a small-yield miniature nuclear bomb with a lethal radius, including radiation, not exceeding one or two kilometers. But the panic it would cause among the populace would likely render all of Hedong City empty, turning it into a ghost town.

...

"Dad, Mom! I'm back. I'll take a shower first." Chen Shouyi returned home, greeted his parents in the living room, and quickly headed towards the stairs.

Father Chen and Mrs. Chen noticed his hunchbacked, sword-bearing, tattered-clothed look, resembling someone who had just emerged from a refugee camp, feeling somewhat strange. But before they could ask, he was already quickly heading upstairs.

Before setting out today, Chen Shouyi hadn't mentioned anything to his parents, so Father Chen and Mrs. Chen were completely unaware he had just returned from a dangerous battlefield.

"This child, hasn't even asked if he's eaten yet?" Mrs. Chen complained as he strode past her.

...

Chen Shouyi returned to his bedroom, removed his weapons, tore his clothes and pants, now mere rags, to pieces, and threw them into the trash can. As for his shoes, he had long since disposed of them on the battlefield.

He walked into the bathroom, turned on the showerhead, and took a good shower, washing away the dust and specks of blood from his body.

He changed into a set of clothes and threw himself onto the bed, letting out a long breath, feeling his whole body relax.

Finally, it was over!

Only by experiencing death and war can one truly understand the preciousness of peace.

As his mind relaxed, his eyelids grew heavier, and soon he fell into a deep sleep, which lasted for three hours until his sister woke him up before dinner.

During dinner, Chen Xingyue excitedly asked, "Brother, did you see those three airships this afternoon?"

"I saw them!" Chen Shouyi replied vaguely as he ate.

"They were huge; I was really afraid they'd drop a nuclear bomb!" Chen Xingyue said.

Mrs. Chen reprimanded at this, "Why would they drop a nuclear bomb for no reason? Stop saying such nonsense, eat your food!"

Chen Xingyue stuck out her tongue, and after a while, she asked again, "I heard the Barbarians in Cheng'an District have been wiped out today, and many people died. Did you go, brother?"

Chen Shouyi quickly glanced at his sister, thinking, Are you trying to get me into trouble?

Seeing their parents look over as well, Chen Shouyi quickly said, "Why would I go? Even a powerful Martial Artist on the battlefield is hardly more effective than a regular soldier."

Fortunately, Chen Xingyue was just asking casually, so she let it go.

...

At night, Chen Shouyi stuffed the excited Shell Lady into his embrace and left the villa.

The night was quiet, like flowing water.

After the mutation, people's life rhythm gradually turned to resting at sunset and working at sunrise. The rich nightlife of the city was already a memory, and by eight o'clock, there were no pedestrians on the road.

Although Chen Shouyi's family was using gasoline lamps, for most people, such lamps were still considered a luxury, with limited monthly production. Most still used candles or oil lamps for night lighting.

Chen Shouyi walked quickly down the street. Just as he reached a community entrance, he saw a figure in black clothing and pants, carrying a sword in one hand and a suitcase in the other, walking out of the community.

The person in black was slightly startled, but upon seeing Chen Shouyi's face clearly, his expression changed instantly, stammering, "Pre... President Chen!"

"You know me?" Chen Shouyi asked in surprise.

"I do, I saw you once from a distance during a recent mayor's meeting!" the person in black said respectfully.

Chen Shouyi's expression turned gentle as he looked at the large suitcase the person in black was carrying, curious, "What are you doing?"

"I don't want to stay in Hedong City. I'm preparing to leave here and go back home!" The person in black found Chen Shouyi's attitude friendly, so he didn't hide it and answered frankly.

Chen Shouyi's mind turned quickly, instantly understanding. This was evidently someone avoiding conscription, having heard something and preparing to leave!

He didn't expose him: "Then leave quickly, and stay safe."

"Thank you, President Chen. I'll leave now," said the person in black gratefully, relieved, and then left quickly.

...

Chen Shouyi stood there watching the person in black disappear into the distance, deep in thought.

Martial Artists, in the end, are not soldiers, and their relationship with the government is akin to mercenaries and employers. Unlike civilians, they possess greater power, more choices, and stronger survival capabilities, able to resist danger and live well wherever they are.

Especially now, with communications cut off and national control extremely weakened, leaving Hedong City doesn't require leaving the province. Even going to nearby cities, local governments welcome new Martial Artists with open arms. Once at this level, it's not the government choosing Martial Artists but Martial Artists choosing the government.

If the punishment for Martial Artists refusing conscription were too harsh, even direct sentencing, it could lead to a mass exodus. Even those who originally complied might leave Hedong City, and stopping this would be impossible.

But if this refusal is brushed aside lightly, other Martial Artists might also feel discontent, making future conscription difficult.

The City Government now faces a difficult choice.

Chapter 207 - 203: Rewards

Several days passed, and the number of refugees stranded in the Safe Zone did not decrease; instead, it gradually increased. The entire Safe Zone was filled with refugees waiting for resettlement and job opportunities.

Although the entire Safe Zone was bustling with construction, with new factories opening every few days, the supply still couldn't meet the demand.

The end of the war did not improve the situation in Hedong City; rather, it continued to deteriorate.

However, for Chen Shouyi, life had completely calmed down.

After several nights of archery practice, he had thoroughly corrected his rough archery techniques. Now, all that remained was repetitive practice to continuously improve his shooting speed.

However, this couldn't be accomplished in a short time.

Today, he planned not to go out and decided to rest for a day.

In the evening, after taking a shower, Chen Shouyi lay half-awake on his bed in thin pajamas, slowly flipping through a book on the basic customs of the Otherworld Barbarian Tribe.

The size and region of the Barbarian Tribes varied, as did their level of civilization.

Some smaller tribes, with their backward civilization, were on par with primates, living by hunting and gathering, having basically not developed any material civilization.

However, larger tribes, especially those that believed in deities, often had a higher level of civilization. To some extent, the existence of gods promoted the development of civilization.

Some civilizations could even be comparable to Great Xia's Shang and Zhou dynasties. They no longer relied primarily on hunting and gathering, but had developed animal husbandry and farming, learned to weave and manufacture tools, and constructed buildings, forming a nascent form of the state.

The Barbarians that previously invaded Hedong City clearly belonged to this kind.

As for whether there were more advanced civilizations, humans had not yet discovered any. However, the author of the book held an optimistic attitude. The existence of the Mysterious Power, although seriously hindering the development of productivity, might lead to the application and development of extraordinary abilities, possibly paving a brighter path different from humanity's own.

...

Next to him, the Shell Lady listlessly played with the Crystal Ball for a while, glanced at the Giant lying next to her, grabbed his clothes, turned over, climbed onto his abdomen, and jumped vigorously to show her dissatisfaction: "Good Giant, are you really not going out today?"

"Not going out, taking a day off!"

"Why take a break? I'm not tired at all!" the Shell Lady said loudly, dissatisfied.

Chen Shouyi glanced at the Shell Lady, who was visibly discontented. You've been sitting on my shoulder, at most shouting a few words—of course, you're not tired. But I am; do you know how strenuous it is to continuously draw a Strong Bow for hours?

If it weren't for my Natural Healing, with every minor muscle injury quickly healing, my arm muscles would have torn by now.

"Be good, we'll go tomorrow!" Chen Shouyi comforted.

"No! I'm not good! I want to go kill bad rats; I want to go kill the vicious big bird." The Shell Lady bounced up and down on his abdomen in dissatisfaction.

"I was the one who killed them! You didn't manage to down a single one," Chen Shouyi corrected her seriously.

The Shell Lady's expression froze, and she quickly said, "But I discovered them all."

"What's the use of discovering them if you can't kill a single rat?" Chen Shouyi gave a sidelong glance at the Shell Lady, who was only fourteen or fifteen centimeters tall, and said disdainfully.

The Shell Lady turned beet red, writhing for a long moment before turning her head in shame and rage: "Bad Giant, I'm ignoring you!"

Saying that, she angrily jumped hard on his belly.

Chen Shouyi glanced at this little thing, gave an evil smile, and as she was about to land from her jump, he mischievously tensed and relaxed his abdomen. The Shell Lady's body was instantly catapulted high into the air, and she screamed in surprise, but soon she became excited.

"So fun, good Giant, do it again!"

Chen Shouyi chuckled. As she was about to land back on his abdomen, he puffed up his belly again, making the Shell Lady bounce high like a trampoline, screaming like a spring.

"Good Giant, I want to go higher, the higher, the better."

"Okay!" Chen Shouyi readily agreed.

This time, he used even more strength, and as his belly inflated, the Shell Lady was catapulted like an arrow off a bowstring, but Chen Shouyi immediately sensed something was wrong.

Sure enough, the next moment, the Shell Lady collided with the ceiling, making a faint thud, cried out in pain, and fell straight down like a shot sparrow.

Chen Shouyi broke out in a cold sweat on his forehead, quickly reached out to catch her, and placed her on his palm.

"Are you okay?" Chen Shouyi asked with a wry smile.

The Shell Lady held her head, tears welled up in her eyes from the pain. Her mouth quivered, and soon she burst into tears:

"Bad... Giant, you made me... it hurts so much, no fun at all."

"Alright, alright, it's my fault!" Knowing he was in the wrong, Chen Shouyi readily apologized.

Sniffing in grievance, the Shell Lady said, "Then... I want... a reward!"

"Sure, no problem!" Chen Shouyi agreed.

"I want a big, big gem!" The Shell Lady immediately wiped her tears, the miracle stopping them, and said loudly with reddened eyes.

"Okay!"

"I want one... one... one!" The Shell Lady repeatedly chanted a long string of 'one'.

Chen Shouyi was too lazy to count, thinking, are you trying to scam me here?

"Only one!" Chen Shouyi decisively refused; opening this door would devalue it.

The Shell Lady's eyes welled up again, threatening to cry.

"Two, I'll give you two!" Chen Shouyi quickly said.

Hearing this, the Shell Lady beamed with joy, now departing from any tears or pain completely, bouncing on his abdomen excitedly, saying loudly, "Good Giant, let's play this game again."

"No more, go play by yourself." Chen Shouyi quickly refused.

I can't afford this. If it happens again, I'll be bankrupt, Chen Shouyi mused internally.

...

The next morning, just after finishing breakfast, Chen Shouyi saw Bai Xiaoling carrying an aluminum alloy briefcase walk into the living room, with four fully armed SWAT officers standing outside the door.

Why such a grand show of force? He glanced around, finally paying attention to the briefcase, a trace of doubt flashing in his mind. He stood up and asked, "Sister Bai, what's going on?"

"General Manager Chen, this is your payroll for this month."

Finally, payment day had arrived. His salary from the last month had long been spent, and he had just over two thousand yuan left on him. These days had been tight, having to retrieve all arrows he shot during archery practice, no longer daring to spend wildly.

Taking it over and glancing at it, he found it was actually five million six hundred and fifty thousand, of which sixty-five thousand was a martial artist's stipend and salary from the national, provincial, and city governments, while the remaining five million was a mission bonus.

He pondered for a moment, "Such a large bonus amount is obviously compensation for the recent conscription."

"The money has been transferred to your account. You can withdraw it at any time at the New City Bank in the Safe Zone using your Martial Artist Certificate!" Bai Xiaoling said, inwardly envious, as her monthly salary wasn't even a fraction of his!

Not even a tenth of a fraction!

Chen Shouyi knew of the New City Bank, the only operating bank recently opened by the City Government serving only the Safe Zone. Unfortunately, citizens were too intimidated to deposit any money.

For his part, Chen Shouyi also didn't trust it, preferring to keep cash safely at home.

"Also, there's something else that requires your confirmation and signature!" Bai Xiaoling continued, handing over an aluminum alloy briefcase and a document and pen.

Slightly puzzled, Chen Shouyi took the briefcase, tore off the top seal, and upon opening it, found twenty thirty-milliliter vials of transparent liquid. Looking at these faintly glowing vials, he had a guess, taking up the product brochure to glance over it.

Sure enough, his suspicions were confirmed!

Inside were ten vials each of Divine Marrow Potion and Divine Blood Potion.

Locking the briefcase, Chen Shouyi glanced over the signature document and asked Bai Xiaoling for confirmation: "Do I have to sign?"

"You must!"

"Such a hassle!" Chen Shouyi muttered under his breath, but ultimately picked up the pen with a helpless expression and carefully signed his name using deliberate muscle control.

Bai Xiaoling took a stealthy glance and discovered his writing looked as if it had been printed.

Chapter 208 - 204: Overbearing

After Bai Xiaoling and a group of special police left, Chen Shouyi took the briefcase back to his bedroom.

He opened it and looked at it for a while. The Divine Blood and Divine Marrow were easy to distinguish. The Divine Blood was clear with a faint golden-red color, while the Divine Marrow was transparent and colorless, both emitting a weak glow.

But compared to those obtained after completing the insect nest mission last time, this batch's glow was noticeably dimmer, clearly of far inferior quality. Fortunately, the quantity was substantial. Compared to the mere three to four milliliters last time, this single tube alone contained thirty milliliters, with a total of twenty tubes.

Of course, compared to the huge body of the Barbarian God, the Divine Blood he received seemed somewhat insignificant, totaling just a bit more than half a liter.

He guessed that most of this Divine Blood and Marrow were probably allocated to the military. However, it wasn't something to mind. It was reasonable, given that the military made the greatest contributions and sacrifices in this war, suffering countless casualties. As for us Martial Artists, aside from holding back the Barbarian God at the last moment, our contributions were limited.

After this war, the number of Martial Artists in the military will probably increase exponentially, surpassing those governed by the City Government, and there might even be a few Grand Martial Artists extra!"

He took out a tube of Divine Blood and removed the beeswax on top.

With a "pop"!

He pulled out the cork and then sat on the bed. After a slight hesitation, thinking it probably wasn't dangerous, he drank it in one gulp.

He quietly waited, and soon a wave of warmth spread from his stomach, rapidly extending to his limbs.

Hmm, it seems to have little effect.

Except for feeling warm all over and a slight sense of pleasure, there was no other unusual reaction, let alone the fragmented consciousness experienced after taking it last time.

Could it be that the amount is still too little?

He stood up, took another tube, pulled out the cork, and poured it into his mouth.

The result was the same.

He consecutively drank three tubes, opened the attribute panel, and found that all attributes were unchanged. However, his whole body was brimming with energy and mentally excited.

It feels like he's drunk several tubes of weird-tasting stimulants.

"Could it be that the amount is still too little? I always feel like this Divine Blood is missing something, the effect is quite weak, worlds apart from the Divine Blood obtained earlier." He felt puzzled.

Feeling that after taking these ten tubes, he would at most increase by 0.1, he decided not to waste the remaining Divine Blood and switched to a bottle of Divine Marrow, planning to see if the extracted cerebrospinal fluid was effective.

He opened the cork and drank it all in one go.

After waiting a bit, he found the effect was still quite similar, so he took three more tubes consecutively. Upon checking the attribute panel, he discovered this time the attributes did increase, with an increase in intelligence by 0.1.

His initial feeling of disappointment was suddenly lifted.

In fact, Chen Shouyi didn't care much about whether other physical attributes increased.

If they did, great; if not, it didn't matter. After all, compared to others whose strength showed no progress, he could still improve through practicing the 36 Body-Refinement Postures, just consuming some time at most.

Moreover, now with the fourth optimization of the 36 Body-Refinement Postures already in sight, at most within a month, his strength will definitely enter another period of rapid growth as before.

Only intelligence cannot be improved through the 36 Body-Refinement Postures, and every 0.1 increase is invaluable.

"Well, my sister's intelligence is already high enough, obviously not needed, as for dad and mom... um, they're better off a bit dull, having a healthy body from taking Divine Blood would be enough."

Thinking quickly and assuring himself, he poured the remaining seven tubes of Divine Marrow into his mouth with a clear conscience.

Finally, after finishing the last tube, his intelligence arduously rose to 14.4 as he hoped.

At this moment, Chen Shouyi's keen ears caught a faint noise from the briefcase, like a cat's paw eagerly scratching.

Hadn't it just fallen asleep?

...

In the afternoon, an assistant office director came to the door on behalf of the City Government.

The two talked in the study for a while, mentioning a special mission to kill a certain dangerous criminal. The words carried a lot of hints, suggesting that once the mission was completed, the City Government would focus on training him, allocate more resources, and even double the Divine Blood share.

But when Chen Shouyi asked about the specific target, the other became vague, saying it was to avoid alerting the target and needed confidentiality. Unless agreed, nothing could be revealed.

At first, Chen Shouyi was bewildered. What kind of criminal required the deployment of a Grand Martial Artist?

But soon he recalled the current handling of Martial Artists refusing recruitment in Hedong City, which hadn't shown any progress, leading to some speculation, and he politely declined.

He watched the disappointed office director leave, feeling a slight chill in his heart.

He was mistaken about one thing; after gaining the Divine Blood, the City Government or military of Hedong had obviously become much more assertive. Even without him and Qin Liuyuan as Grand Martial Artists, Cui Ziweng was already in grave danger this time.

Not quite sympathy, but there was some kind of camaraderie.

He didn't want to play the role of such an executioner.

Perhaps the city wanted to make an example to frighten those civilian Martial Artists evading conscription.

But how many people can truly say they are completely unafraid of death? He wasn't sure he could next time charge in with blood boiling, prepared to die heroically as before.

Since ancient times, the hardest path is simply to die! Maybe in a fleeting instant, he would make a different choice.

...

The next morning.

A long queue formed outside the newsstand—such a scene, once rare before the mutation, had become commonplace.

Chen Shouyi waited several minutes until it was finally his turn.

"Give me a copy of Hedong Daily!"

"One dollar!"

Chen Shouyi handed over the money, took the newspaper, and stood to the side, shaking it open for a look.

The first headline on the front page was about the treatment notifications for Martial Artists violating wartime discipline and refusing recruitment. As he skimmed through, his expression slightly grew serious at one particular line.

"The primary offender, Cui Ziweng, resisted arrest violently and was ultimately killed."

Although he had expected it, seeing it in print still made his heart feel somewhat suffocated.

He read it carefully, then sighed after a long pause.

Besides Cui Ziweng being killed, the other Martial Artists were all let off lightly, mainly subjected to financial penalties and disciplinary warnings.

However, the latter meant little to Martial Artists. They are not state personnel who rise through ranks, receive grades, or get salary increases. Even with levels, they only concern their strength, not individual performance.

The only real pain was the former.

Confiscating the current month's Martial Artist salary and allowance, and withholding the national, provincial, and city Martial Artist stipends for six consecutive months.

This penalty isn't light, yet not heavy either, indicating the provincial and city governments' attitude is mainly about maintaining stability, executing the principal culprit as a deterrent, and avoiding a large-scale struggle.

In the coming days, more Martial Artists might gradually leave Hedong City.

However, Hedong City probably doesn't care. With the Divine Blood, Hedong City will foster more Martial Artists who adhere to discipline, potentially even Grand Martial Artists.

Chapter 209 - 205: Secret Stories

Chen Shouyi crumpled the newspaper and tossed it into the trash can.

He glanced at the fiery red morning glow on the horizon, got on his bicycle, and lightly pedaled toward the distant mall.

There were few shops inside the mall, mostly clothing stores, and after searching for a long time, he finally found a jewelry store.

The shop was deserted, with no customers inside.

It was only seven o'clock now, and it was rare for anyone to be shopping at this time.

"Do you have any crystal balls?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Crystal balls? Of course, we do." The owner, a five-month pregnant, greasy, and pudgy middle-aged man, held his belly with one hand and pointed to three crystal balls on the shelf, saying, "All priced the same, thirty-five yuan each, no bargaining. They're all old stock, and I'm selling them at a loss now."

"Only three?" Chen Shouyi said, somewhat disappointed. It's likely that no one is manufacturing crystal balls anymore, and there will be fewer and fewer in the future. These three crystal balls would scarcely last a month to satisfy the ever-growing appetite of the Shell Lady.

"How many do you want?" The shop owner asked, rubbing his round belly with a smile.

"How many do you have?"

"Uh!" The shop owner was momentarily puzzled, then he realized, patted his belly, causing the fat to jiggle, and quickly said, "I'll go take a look!"

He walked into the back room of the shop, returned with a box, counted the contents, and straightened up: "There are fifteen left, plus the three, for a total of eighteen. You want them all?"

"All of them!" Chen Shouyi said.

Eighteen can probably last a year, roughly!

"Wait a moment, let me calculate the price." The shop owner went to the cash register, ready to take out paper and a pen to solve this elementary school arithmetic problem.

There's no calculator now, and as for the abacus... how many people can use an abacus?

"630, no need to calculate." Chen Shouyi said, taking out his wallet and pulling out seven hundred-yuan bills. With his 14.4 intelligence, this kind of two-digit calculation was just a flash of thought.

The shop owner still wasn't convinced, writing out the equation on paper and carefully calculating it again. Finding it to be accurate, he relaxed, smiled, accepted the money, and made change: "As you get older, the mind just isn't as nimble as when you're young. Back in the day, I often aced math... Little brother, did you discover some business opportunity here?"

"I just want them for decoration at home!"

Seeing the shop owner's disbelief, as if he was trying to fool a ghost, Chen Shouyi expressionlessly carried the box out of the jewelry store.

He got on his bicycle and hurried home.

Putting the bicycle in the garage, he pulled down the roll-up door, and then carried the box into the living room.

"Brother, what are you holding? What did you buy?" Chen Xingyue asked curiously, seemingly trying to peek.

"Why do you need to know?" Chen Shouyi quickly avoided the question and hastily walked up the stairs.

Watching her brother's sneaky demeanor, as if afraid of being discovered, Chen Xingyue's lips curled in disdain. He definitely bought some more bizarre stuff.

...

Near noon, Qin Liuyuan came looking for him, his expression grim.

"Join me for a drink?"

Chen Shouyi nodded, "Sure!"

The Safe Zone was close to the countryside, making vegetable prices cheap, combined with most people having income, these days, the food and beverage industry sprang up like bamboo shoots after rain, rapidly opening one restaurant after another.

The two of them randomly chose a nearby restaurant and got a private room.

Before the dishes arrived, Qin Liuyuan poured a cup of white wine for himself and Chen Shouyi, saying nothing, and drank it dry in one go.

Chen Shouyi also picked up the cup. He seldom drank wine, occasionally having a glass of beer at most, as for white wine, he never touched it. He couldn't handle the stimulating taste, but today he felt like having a drink.

He picked up the cup and drank it all in one go.

After three rounds.

Qin Liuyuan finally spoke, "Did they invite you to go?"

Although Qin Liuyuan's words seemed random, Chen Shouyi understood what he was referring to, "They did, but I refused."

"I went, only told upon close arrival at the destination!" Qin Liuyuan unscrewed another bottle of white wine, pouring for the two of them, "But I didn't act, the ones who acted were the four military martial artists!"

"Four?" Chen Shouyi asked in surprise.

"Yes, including Xiao Changming, totaling four, one of them even participated in the last cooperative exploration of the insect nest, a military martial artist. I estimate there are more military martial artists now." Qin Liuyuan replied.

"The Divine Blood was just distributed yesterday, such a short time, the new martial artists' growth in power might not be adaptable yet, able to exert their strength?" Chen Shouyi questioned.

A martial artist unable to control their power, their might might even be inferior to that of martial artists.

"How do you know they just consumed the Divine Blood not long ago? The Barbarian God's corpse is in military hands." Qin Liuyuan countered.

Chen Shouyi appeared slightly taken aback, said nothing, picked up the cup, and drank the white wine in it in one go.

"The city's actions along with the military went too far this time. Lao Cui is a martial artist of over ten years, the tasks he's completed are no less than a hundred, fifty at least, and each task isn't short of risking life. Can't one mistake be enough to deter others, condemn him to death?" Qin Liuyuan sighed, speaking with slight intoxication.

Qin Liuyuan and Cui Ziweng, these two Hedong City martial artists, naturally had ties over the many years, but more was empathy for those of similar disposition.

At this point, someone knocked on the door outside the private room, and soon the door was opened, the waiter served the dishes, and when the waiter left, closing the door again, Chen Shouyi shifted the topic and asked, "Earlier, I heard you speak about martial artists, what's the standard of martial artists?"

"You don't know?" Qin Liuyuan asked, surprised, then noticed Chen Shouyi's age and understood, "Martial artist, how should I say it, the human body has limits, reaching martial artist, progress is nearly impossible, martial artist is almost human peak.

At this level, battle realm, experience, technique, is honed to perfection, self-cultivation when entering tranquility at least reaches internal refinement of lungs and intestines, sensitivity to danger is extraordinarily keen.

I only know one thing, to apply for martial artist assessment, at least one thousand kilograms of strength are needed in the arms."

Chen Shouyi recalled seeing on the martial artist internal trading network, bows with strength over a thousand pounds, even two thousand pounds, that seemed to be used by martial artists.

Qin Liuyuan took a bite of food and continued, "How strong exactly, I haven't fought head-on, but I guess even if ten military martial artists encircle one martial artist, it's a sure death scenario.

Actually, with your ability, you should already be a martial artist. If yesterday's military martial artists were encircling not Cui Ziweng, but you, it would be a different conclusion."

Chen Shouyi shook his head and said, "I just naturally react quickly, still lacking in other areas.

His own situation understood, his strength was about seven hundred and fifty kilograms, internal refinement upon entering tranquility just began refining muscle, the internal organs were far from it, but truly during life-and-death combat, only experience would get to know.

...

The meal took over an hour, and the bill was fought over by Qin Liuyuan.

Leaving the restaurant, after parting ways with Qin Liuyuan, Chen Shouyi sighed lightly and walked home.

Chapter 210 - 206: The New Director

Chen Shouyi stood on a small hilltop outside the Safe Zone, his hands forming circles, as if an invisible force was being drawn down from the air and merging into himself.

The breeze blew through the nearby leaves, making a rustling sound. From afar, the rhythmic mechanical hum of steam trucks on the highway reached his ears, and dust floated gently before his eyes. He could even hear his own heartbeat and the faint sound of blood flowing through his veins.

A few minutes later, he gradually stopped his movements.

The invisible force instantly dissipated.

He was panting heavily, drenched in sweat, his body swaying slightly as he almost lost his balance.

He opened the attribute panel and glanced at it.

"Strength has finally increased by 0.1 points, reaching 15.1," Chen Shouyi thought to himself. So much time had passed that he almost believed the second optimized version of the Thirty-Six Forms of Body Refinement had no effect on him anymore.

For the past three days, apart from sleeping and eating to replenish his energy, he had spent all his time on high-intensity training.

The intensity of this training was terrifying. At the level of a Martial Artist, every move could mobilize most of the body's muscles to participate in the exercise, leading to extremely explosive force during attacks, which in turn resulted in insufficient endurance.

His fighting style was intense and brief, like a flash of lightning.

If the consumption of stamina were compared to pouring water, an ordinary person's way of exerting force would be like pouring a slow trickle, whereas a Martial Artist would splash the water out directly, and no matter how much water there was, it couldn't withstand such splashing.

Ordinary people could fight for several minutes, even ten minutes.

For a Martial Artist, even one minute is already the limit.

Especially with such high-intensity exertion, akin to the Demonic Path, it caused significant damage to the body. If the fight lasted even a little longer, muscles would suffer various tears and strains, affecting even internal organs.

Very few Martial Artists could advance smoothly to a Grand Martial Artist. Besides talent and diligence, many athletes' bodies were already worn out before reaching this level, like a machine full of patches, appearing strong but rapidly aging once past their prime, often with lifespans shorter than ordinary people.

As for three days of continuous high-intensity training, other Grand Martial Artists, even Martial Artists, would have their muscle fibers torn and their internal organs shattered.

Only Chen Shouyi, with the ability of Natural Healing, could sustain it.

Muscle tears and strains didn't exist for him.

It's like metal fatigue breaking; the breaking of metal isn't caused by the last action, but by the gradual accumulation of damage starting from the first action.

The muscle tears and strains in the human body are no different, and the powerful Natural Healing repaired these minute damages, often undetectable by the human body, before they accumulated to the point of eruption.

Chen Shouyi wiped the sweat from his face, looked at the sky, and noticed the sun was gradually setting, so he prepared to return.

He tore apart his tattered clothes to wipe the sweat from his body and took a new set of clothes from his backpack to change into. Then he dismantled the War Bow, packed it in his backpack, and shouted towards the forest ahead, "Let's go back!"

Soon, a small figure scurried out of a small tree hollow thirty to forty meters away, quickly ran over, and climbed nimbly up Chen Shouyi's pant leg to sit on his shoulder.

He glanced at Shell Lady, whose little face was dirty, and her skirt was full of stains, with bits of dried leaves and rotting wood chips clinging to it. Her hands also held a couple of plump little bugs, whose origin was unknown.

Looks like I need to wash her clothes again, Chen Shouyi thought to himself.

She's been playing wildly these days. Over the past three days, her routine has completely coincided with Chen Shouyi's, sleeping only five to six hours a day without showing any signs of fatigue.

"Throw away those bugs in your hand!"

"Okay!" Shell Lady obediently responded, tossing away the two bugs she had nearly tormented to death.

"These are good bugs; they don't bite!" she explained after throwing them.

Hearing this, Chen Shouyi nearly stumbled.

Are good bugs supposed to be bullied?

...

The sun slowly set, painting the distant sky with a red sunset glow.

Once they reached the foot of the hill, Chen Shouyi grabbed Shell Lady from his shoulder, brushed the dust from her dirty face, flicked the dried leaves and wood chips from her body, and tucked her into the lining pocket of his coat.

The highway had returned to its previous hustle and bustle, with heavily loaded steam trucks flowing continuously. The factories on both sides had become even denser. Hedong City was slowly recovering from the scars of war.

...

After returning home and having dinner, Chen Shouyi was summoned by a City Government employee to attend a meeting.

He parked his bicycle in the parking lot and walked with the staff towards the City Government building.

The glass facade of the building that had been shattered to deal with the Barbarian God had been replaced, and the craters left by two truck explosions had been filled in. The entire square had been repaved with concrete.

Chen Shouyi noticed the place where the Divine Corpse had originally lain was now cordoned off, with warning signs placed to prohibit entry.

The two of them approached quickly.

Perhaps he had been staring too long; suddenly, reality seemed to peel away, and the distant buildings became increasingly blurry. He vaguely saw countless tentacle-like black fogs rising from the ground, clawing towards him as if trying to drag him into Hell. In his stupor, a faint distorted shadow hovered above the black fog, roaring ferociously.

"General Manager Chen, General Manager Chen, please come this way..."

The voice seemed faint, coming from afar. Chen Shouyi shook his head, and the hallucination quickly faded. He realized he had unknowingly stood near the caution line.

"Did you feel something just now?"

"General Manager Chen, what are you talking about?" the staff member asked, puzzled.

"Oh, nothing," Chen Shouyi replied.

He couldn't help but ponder:

"Is it because my senses are sharper than an ordinary person's, so I was affected, or is it the impact of the curse from last time? But since they've cordoned it off, something strange must have happened here recently!"

Before entering the City Government building, he looked back once more, shook his head slightly, and then quickly walked into the building.

When he reached the large conference room, he found many soldiers in military uniforms had already arrived. Judging by their demeanor, they were all Martial Artists, numbering around two to three hundred, far more than the civilian Martial Artists in the Safe Zone. The two groups sat separately, clearly distinct, and the atmosphere seemed somewhat delicate.

He sat in the front row, where Qin Liuyuan had already arrived.

Chen Shouyi quietly inquired, "What's happening?"

"I'm not sure!" Qin Liuyuan shook his head and replied softly.

After nearly a quarter of an hour, all the Martial Artists arrived. Soon after, the number one official in the city and a young man in his thirties dressed in casual clothing took the stage to preside over the meeting.

Chen Shouyi noticed that the young man sat rigidly upright, clearly also a soldier, though his exact role was unknown.

"In this war against the invasion from another world, over twenty-five thousand soldiers in the whole Hedong City sacrificed their lives. Among the military and civilian Martial Artists, over two hundred perished, and the civilian death toll is uncountable. This has dealt serious disaster and great loss to Hedong City..."

The meeting summarized the loss, casualties, and lessons from this war, then shifted the topic to the Martial Artists:

"I will reiterate, this is no longer peacetime. For those Martial Artists who disregard discipline and act recklessly, we will show no leniency in applying severe punishment. Of course, most Martial Artists are still good; some were just impulsive. With the principle of curing illness and saving lives, this time there will only be minor punishments as a warning, hoping everyone learns their lesson."

At the end of the meeting, the city's top official and the young man gestured, then showed a slight smile on their stern faces: "Let me introduce the person next to me. This is Director Lei, Lei Ruiyang, the first in Jiangnan Province to become a Martial Artist, from the Hedong City garrison.

Based on the decision of the Provincial Standing Committee, Lei Ruiyang has been officially appointed as the Director of the Martial Arts Public Affairs and Discipline Supervision Office!"

Lei Ruiyang stood, nodding slightly in acknowledgment, and then sat back down.

The military Martial Artists applauded enthusiastically, soon followed by the civilian Martial Artists, though their applause was noticeably more perfunctory than the thunderous applause from the military side.

Chen Shouyi clapped, his mind churning with thoughts.

He couldn't help but glance at Xiao Changming, also a military Grand Martial Artist seated to his left, who seemed completely unfazed with a slight smile on his lips.

Could it be that he too has been promoted to Martial Artist?

How much Divine Blood have these two consumed?

Or was the reward given to civilian Martial Artists diluted?