

New Era 281

Chapter 281 - Drama Queen (Part 2)

Chen Shouyi had just finished breakfast when Chen Yuwei and Chen Xingyue came downstairs, chattering non-stop.

From their expressions, Chen Shouyi knew...

They hadn't succeeded in their practice.

In a certain sense, a single optimized meditation practice is much more difficult than the optimized version of the Thirty-Six Forms of Body Refining. The latter is straightforward and only changes movements. With enough practice, anyone can learn it, and those with a foundation can easily master it.

The former, however, is abstract and elusive, involving one's mind. It requires achieving a deep state of meditation and controlling one's subconscious to practice.

Without reaching a deep state of meditation, the second optimized Thirty-Six Forms can't be practiced.

Because the prerequisite requires deep meditation.

The system's optimization isn't independent but rather interconnected, complementing each other. Chen Shouyi hadn't taught his sister the second optimized version of the Thirty-Six Forms for this reason.

As for the third optimized version he is practicing now, the Horizontal Training Thirty-Six Forms, it's even more challenging.

...

Since his cousin came over specifically for guidance, Chen Shouyi naturally couldn't just brush her off with a few words. After breakfast, he patiently spent over half an hour instructing her.

After ten o'clock, he packed his bow and a backpack of arrows, along with various seasonings, and rode his bicycle to head out to that interdimensional passage in the lower city.

As for lunch, naturally it would be eaten in the other world.

...

Half an hour later, Chen Shouyi entered the spatial passage.

He released the Shell Lady.

It was just daytime, clear and cloudless.

He took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and felt his mood lift. Compared to the fog-laden Hedong City, the air here was almost entirely natural, without a hint of pollution.

He first opened his bow case, assembled the War Bow, and hung two quivers on himself.

Given his current strength, he couldn't dominate everything. The forest here still held considerable danger, with various fierce Giant Beasts appearing from time to time. Being careless could lead to danger.

...

Swish, swish, swish...

Arrows flew from Chen Shouyi's hand like a storm.

A large tree about eighty to ninety meters ahead was already filled with a circular formation of arrows, densely packed within.

"This bow is too light for me!" Chen Shouyi thought to himself as he shot rapidly.

"With my current strength, the best War Bow should weigh between twelve hundred to fifteen hundred pounds, but this bow is only eight hundred pounds.

Unfortunately, such super powerful Martial Artist bows can no longer be mass-produced by the industry."

Chen Shouyi quickly emptied one quiver and reached for another.

"Still, I should check with the relevant departments. I recall some bows aren't made from high-tech nanocomposites but from materials from powerful creatures in another world.

Although biological bows are less durable, requiring higher maintenance and lacking the stability of nanocomposites, few Martial Artists use these flashy yet impractical weapons.

But at least their attack power isn't bad. Some War Bows, made with extraordinary biological materials, even have special effects."

Chen Shouyi shot both quivers empty in one go.

He estimated internally.

The two quivers, with forty arrows, took him about four seconds.

On Earth, three seconds would suffice.

But under triple gravity, his muscles worked harder, like a machine without lubricant, inevitably slowing him down.

Thankfully, the drop wasn't significant.

Chen Shouyi stepped forward, pulling each arrow out and putting them back into the quivers.

The arrowheads were severely deformed, but it didn't matter as he was only practicing rapid shots.

Once he retrieved the arrows, he returned to his original position.

As he was about to reach for the arrows,

he paused, suddenly recalling Ye Zong's archery technique.

Chen Shouyi immediately changed his mind, grabbing four arrows in one hand, pulling back quickly, and shooting them out.

"Swish, swish, swish, swish"

Chen Shouyi pondered for a moment; it indeed felt much faster.

However, accuracy suffered greatly, but he understood that speed and precision can't coexist. Shooting faster inevitably decreases accuracy, also due to deformed arrowheads disrupting the arrows' balance.

After practicing for a while, he still felt that his original technique suited him better.

Faster shots lacked precision.

He now shot without intentionally aiming.

Everything was based on instinct.

And this rapid shooting almost dulled his instincts.

Only Xia Ji's eight-shot method.

This was also because of Chen Shouyi's short archery practice time and weak foundation. Starting by relying on instincts couldn't compare to other Martial Artists' years or even decades of constant refining practice.

...

The Shell Lady knelt, butt raised, continuously digging through the sandy soil. Soon, her eyes lit up as she picked up a sparkling blue Crystal Stone. She wiped it forcefully with her small hands, removing the sand.

In the sunlight, the crystalline sapphire emitted a deep blue shimmer, like a tranquil pool.

The Shell Lady glanced at Chen Shouyi, then at the irregular sapphire, sighed, reluctantly threw it to the ground, and continued searching.

Eventually, until she unearthed a small white worm, she finally stopped happily.

Playing with the worm in her hand, she boredly watched the clumsy Giant not far away.

"Ah!"

She felt a sudden pain in her finger and cried out. Looking down, she realized she had been fooled; this worm was not a good one but a bad one, biting her hand.

Her eyes quickly welled up with tears.

She shook repeatedly.

But the worm clung tightly to her, unable to be shaken off.

"Good Giant! Good Giant!" she shouted, her voice tinged with tears.

Finding that Chen Shouyi didn't notice.

The Shell Lady became fierce. She squeezed the worm tightly in her hand.

With a squishing sound, the worm was crushed, colorful fluids splattered everywhere.

"Dare to bite me? I'll crush you."

...

After exhausting all the arrows, Chen Shouyi was just about to rest when the Shell Lady approached, aggrievedly complaining, "Good Giant, I almost got eaten by a bad worm, and you didn't see it!"

Startled by her words, Chen Shouyi quickly checked her, and only upon finding no obvious wounds did he relax slightly, asking, "Where is that bad worm? Where did it bite you?"

"Of course, I killed it! But it bit me!"

She extended her tiny hand, no larger than the size of a fingertip.

"Right here, it hurt, but I'm not afraid!" the Shell Lady pointed at the spot where she was bitten.

Upon a closer look, Chen Shouyi found no wound, not even a red mark.

He looked wordlessly at the tearful Shell Lady.

Quite the drama queen.

Chapter 282 - Species Invasion

If you compare the concentration of the original force in the other world with the concentration of the original force on Earth.

It's completely like the difference between the air concentration on the ground and that near space.

After performing the Horizontal Training Thirty-Six Style more than a dozen times, Chen Shouyi felt his whole body heating up, steam pervading, muscles subtly strengthening, skin becoming tighter and more resilient, and even the small cyclone in his dantian seemed to have grown a little.

...

He hunted a small beast.

After going through a series of procedures of skinning, cleaning, and roasting.

He simply finished his lunch.

Taking advantage of the rest time after lunch with nothing else to do, Chen Shouyi entered the Gray Mist Space again, intending to check on his poor believers left in a wild state.

As soon as he entered the space, Chen Shouyi's face showed some surprise.

The Gray Mist Space had become brighter, and the number of stars overhead in the starry sky had increased from four or five to dozens. This was the number of believers in the normal state. During sacrifices, both the number and brightness would increase several times.

Chen Shouyi counted once.

"Thirty-eight stars, how did it increase by so much?" Chen Shouyi felt a hint of doubt in his heart.

These stars that could appear in this normal state undoubtedly represented real believers, unlike those shallow or pseudo believers whose faith temporarily increased due to the fervent atmosphere during sacrifices.

"I don't seem to have done anything!"

"Is spreading faith this easy?"

...

On the small island of the Barbarians.

A violent storm from the sea had just ended a few days ago.

The entire island's forest seemed as if it had been ravaged by a strong man multiple times, leaving trees sprawled and disordered everywhere.

Under the giant tree at the center of the island, the Barbarian Tribe appeared jubilant. The atmosphere of panic and fear due to food shortage had completely dissipated without a trace.

The Barbarians excitedly surrounded a small hill entirely made of fish, skillfully using stone blades to gut the fish, rubbing them with black salt before they could rot and stink (as a tribe living on this small island, salt was naturally not deficient).

Several three to four-year-old Barbarian children ran around excitedly with short spears, playing hunting games.

The air was filled with a joyful atmosphere.

This terrifying storm that ended just two days ago not only did not cause casualties or disaster to the tribe but instead brought them a mountain of fish from the sea, enough for them to comfortably survive this harsh winter.

In the minds of the Barbarians, this was undoubtedly brought by the great God of Calamity.

The God of Calamity saw them endure hunger and graciously endowed the tribe with food.

"The current divine statue is only two people tall, it's not worthy of the God of Calamity's mercy and greatness. We should build a bigger divine statue!" said the newly appointed Clan Leader, a strong young Barbarian, suddenly enthusiastic.

"But we can't find bigger stones!" one Barbarian said.

The Clan Leader was stunned at this, it seemed true.

Most of the small island was covered with forest, and this boulder was found with great difficulty by the sea, brought here arduously using rolling logs.

"I have an idea!" the newly appointed Wizard seized the opportunity to speak, pointing to the giant tree beside them, "We can cut down this tree and carve the divine statue from the large tree stump. Now that we are not worried about food, we have a whole winter to carve the divine statue."

The tree the Wizard pointed at was the Tree God.

As soon as he finished speaking, the atmosphere became quiet immediately; everyone looked at each other with hesitant expressions.

Although not many Barbarians believed in the Tree God anymore, its past majesty was still ingrained in their hearts.

Moreover, after all, the Tree God had protected countless generations of the tribe in the past.

All of the Barbarians had grown up under the Tree God from birth.

It felt inappropriate to just cut it down.

Seeing the hesitation on everyone's face, the Wizard urged again, "This tree is an enemy of the great God of Calamity. Keeping it would anger Him, but if we cut it down, He would be pleased.

The great God of Calamity hasn't responded to our sacrifices, I think it's because we haven't been devout enough."

He paused and then emphasized:

"Think of all these fish!"

"Cut it!" Perhaps thoroughly awakened by the last sentence, the Barbarian Clan Leader immediately said firmly: "Cut it down, the great and merciful God of Calamity will bless us."

"Cut it!"

"Cut it!"

"Cut it!"

...

All the Barbarians shouted together, the atmosphere feverish.

A breeze blew past, and the treetops rustled.

...

Time gradually moved into July.

The weather became increasingly hot.

Early in the morning, the cicadas in the willow trees along the road emitted annoying cries.

Chen Shouyi bought a newspaper at the kiosk.

He skimmed through it quickly.

"After so long, Ningzhou City has finally been completely retaken."

According to the newspaper, Ningzhou is still under military lockdown.

It makes sense; the number of cultists in the city is not small, and if there isn't an anti-cultist investigation and screening, allowing them to spread everywhere, the whole Jiangnan Province may fall into chaos.

"But the information on Dongning City..."

Chen Shouyi went through the newspaper but saw no mention of it.

"Chen Shouyi!"

He snapped back to reality, turned around, and saw it was Song Yingjie, whom he hadn't seen in a long time. She seemed to have gotten darker, had a bit of a military aura, and her unisex attire exuded a dashing feeling.

"Back from military training?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Back for a while, I really envy you. You said no to military training, and that was it. Hasn't Minister Lei troubled you?" Song Yingjie asked concernedly, audaciously examining Chen Shouyi.

She felt that after more than two months apart, he seemed even more handsome.

Chen Shouyi chuckled softly at this. Since Lei Ruiyang's last dirty trick, he hadn't made any further moves, perhaps knowing it's best to retreat.

For martial artists like them, with no parental backing, strength was their status and way of making a living.

He didn't explain and asked, "What have you been busy with recently?"

"You don't know?"

Recently, many of us martial artists have been 'moving to the countryside'. I even saw General Qin go last time. Didn't the higher-ups notify you?" Song Yingjie asked in surprise.

"Moving to the countryside, what does that mean?" Chen Shouyi asked, puzzled.

Lately, he's been training in the other world every day and returning at dusk, seemingly out of touch with society.

However, they wouldn't involve a martial artist like him in an ordinary task.

"Recently, there has been a serious invasion of otherworldly species! We martial artists have been stationed in various towns to ensure safety. I just rotated back a few days ago!" Song Yingjie said.

Chen Shouyi felt his heart sink when he heard this. He couldn't help recalling the otherworldly creature he had discovered on a small mountain near the Safe Zone last time, initially thinking it was a coincidence, but it seemed that was not an isolated case.

"Are there many of these creatures?"

"Not too many, generally not dangerous to martial artists like me, just troublesome. In the town I'm responsible for, I've killed three in a week," Song Yingjie said, her face showing a trace of heaviness.

When she encountered otherworldly creatures, they were mostly small to medium-sized and posed no threat to a martial artist like her, but they did cause severe danger to ordinary people. In the week she was on duty, five people have been bitten to death by otherworldly creatures in the town she was responsible for.

Chapter 283 - An Extra Three Dou of Rice (Part 1)

Chen Shouyi and Song Yingjie exchanged a few more words before each went their separate ways.

He rode his bicycle, leaving the Safe Zone.

Originally, he planned to go to the alternate world for training, but Song Yingjie's words made him change his mind instantly; he decided to visit the countryside to see the situation.

...

Feixia Village.

Located near the Safe Zone, about five or six kilometers away.

Since the population and industry of Hedong City have gradually shifted to the suburbs, the area has quickly become prosperous and bustling.

In less than a year, it has almost turned into a small town.

Trucks flow continuously on the road, factories are densely distributed on both sides, countless chimneys spew white smoke, the air is filled with a strange smell, and more factory buildings are under construction with fervor.

Chen Shouyi gazed at the village from a distance.

Lively and full of life.

Even in the fields, quite a few farmers were busy working. There were no signs indicating an invasion by alternate world creatures.

He left the road, heading toward the path leading to the farmland.

Suddenly, he stomped down.

"Squish!"

A creature, the size of a small mouse, ran in front of him and was instantly squashed into pulp beneath his foot.

He glanced down, frowning.

"There really are some!" Chen Shouyi muttered.

He ground the creature with the tip of his shoe; it was not a mouse but a hairless creature with wrinkled skin, clearly not native to this land.

"However, such weak alternate world creatures, as long as they are non-toxic, pose no direct threat to humans," he thought to himself. "At most, they just damage Earth's ecosystem."

In fact, over the past twenty years, Earth's ecosystem has already been largely destroyed.

The invasion of alternate world species is not a fresh occurrence.

It has never stopped since the appearance of the Spatial Passage on Earth.

Viruses and bacteria need no mention.

It has led to the death of over a billion people globally, and many Earth-native species have gone extinct.

According to a statistical report Chen Shouyi read online, more species have gone extinct in these short 20 years than in the past tens of thousands of years. Fortunately, humanity has developed related vaccines, and surviving organisms have developed antibodies.

Speaking of visible species invasions.

The land is relatively better off. Most dangerous animals were eradicated before they spread; only some alternate world plants or inconspicuous small creatures secretly breed and spread.

But the Ocean has long since become a disaster area.

Now, over 10% of the species in the Ocean come from the alternate world.

In recent years, incidents of sea monster attacks on giant ships or international collaborations to clear maritime routes frequently appear in the news.

Chen Shouyi is long accustomed to such occurrences.

He continued onward and spent a full half hour wandering; apart from an alternate world insect he flicked to death with his finger, he encountered no other alternate world creatures.

He watched for a while before preparing to return and continue to the alternate world.

At that moment, he suddenly heard a rustling disturbance; the rice plants swayed like waves, darting swiftly away, forming a long trail in the paddy fields.

With the rice plants obstructing the view, he could only discern that it was a creature the size of a small cat.

An old farmer in the nearby field evidently noticed it too, shouted in surprise, then ran to the path upon seeing Chen Shouyi, "Scared me! Young man, did you see anything?"

The dialect from Chen Shouyi's hometown is somewhat different from here, but he could roughly understand it. He shook his head, "I didn't see clearly either!"

"It's definitely that alternate world creature. Last time, someone in the village got bitten; a large chunk of flesh was torn from his leg. Several people from the police station accompanied by a Martial Artist Advisor came to handle it, but it was no use; they couldn't find it despite searching. I'm suspecting it's this thing."

The old farmer lamented worriedly:

"Alas, soon it'll be time to harvest the rice. Who dares to do it with such danger around?"

Chen Shouyi didn't respond, placed his bow bag and backpack on the ground, unzipped quickly, and assembled a War Bow, then fetched several Arrows from his backpack.

The old farmer fell silent instantly, embarrassedly asking, "Are you... here to deal with the situation, Martial Artist?"

"No, I'm just passing by!" Chen Shouyi explained, putting a finger to his lips, "Don't make any sound!"

"Okay! Okay! Okay!" The old farmer hurriedly replied, not daring to disturb.

Soon he saw Chen Shouyi quietly and quickly walking along the ridge path in the field; the old farmer, worried, promptly backed away far, holding his breath, not daring to move an inch.

By now, it's July, and the rice is almost mature. The paddy field is impenetrably dense, making it impossible for Chen Shouyi to see the alternate world creature's location; he could only estimate its whereabouts through the traces left from its run and by listening.

He approached rapidly.

Soon, a faint gnawing sound reached his ears.

It's feeding!

He raised an eyebrow, drew out an Arrow, swiftly nocked the bow, and drew it.

He listened intently, aimed for a moment.

Then released the bowstring, the Arrow shot swiftly.

The fierce whistle of air, muddy splashes from the paddy field, a swift silhouette darted out in fear, running less than half a meter, then another Arrow shot from the bowstring, piercing the field.

Bits of flesh and mud exploded outward.

All fell silent.

Chen Shouyi retrieved the bow and headed back.

"Martial... Martial Artist Advisor, did you kill it?" The old farmer was still standing there, nervously asking.

Ordinary people always feel inexplicable awe and tension regarding Martial Artists, which Chen Shouyi is used to, "Yes, it's dealt with. Uncle, is this your field?"

"No, no, it's my second brother's."

"Then you should remind them that there are two Arrows left in the field, keep an eye on them," Chen Shouyi advised.

The soil is loose; the Arrows have likely penetrated a meter into the earth. He didn't feel like handling them.

"Definitely remind them, definitely remind them!" The old farmer smiled, saying quickly.

Chen Shouyi disassembled the bow again, placed it in the bow bag, mounted his bicycle, and quickly left.

Once he was far gone, the old farmer headed toward the paddy field.

Alternate world creatures are truly nourishing, especially since the Martial Artist Advisor didn't want it, it's perfect for him.

He cautiously approached the spot where the Arrow hit.

Only to find the alternate world creature had been blown to bits, completely unrecognizable.

After searching for a while, he found a few scraps resembling torn rags, far from their original form. He decided against working any further and headed home cheerfully.

His grandson at home is diligently practicing martial arts right now.

He should nourish him well.

He wishes that someday, his grandson could become a Martial Artist Advisor, that would be ideal.

Chapter 284 - Three-Minute Enthusiasm

Evening.

The pale gasoline lamps by the roadside flickered slightly, occasionally sparking.

Countless small insects kept crashing against the glass cover, creating a dense sound of impacts.

Chen Shouyi stomped on a mole cricket with his foot and said to Bai Xiaoling, who was following closely, "We're running out of arrows again!"

"I'll apply for a thousand more to be sent over tomorrow," Bai Xiaoling quickly walked a step faster to reach Chen Shouyi's side and said.

As one of the benefits and perks of being a Martial Artist, the Provincial Government could sign off on all weapon-related expenses, and the quality was even superior to what was available in weapon shops.

At this moment, Chen Shouyi remembered something and asked:

"By the way, how's the application for the 1,500-pound War Bow coming along?"

"The Provincial Government office has already placed orders with various manufacturers, but there's no stock yet," Bai Xiaoling said, looking at Chen Shouyi's profile, a flash of admiration and awe crossed her heart. She had almost watched Chen Shouyi grow step by step, from a Martial Artist to a great Martial Artist, and now to a Martial Artist.

It's simply like he's on cheat mode.

And he's getting more and more handsome!

"Even if the weight is slightly lower, it'll still be acceptable," Chen Shouyi sighed, compromising.

As the past half month went by, his strength had become increasingly powerful, and an 800-pound bow had become lighter and lighter.

"I'll explain the situation!" Bai Xiaoling quickly said. She had also risen with the tide, not only had her position elevated to division-level, but as a Martial Artist's liaison and secretary, she could now speak on behalf of both the military and the Provincial Government. Her network and resources were growing wider and wider.

"Pop!"

After Bai Xiaoling finished speaking, she bent down and slapped her thigh, killing a mosquito full of blood: "There are more and more mosquitoes lately."

Chen Shouyi felt nothing, as there were no mosquitoes on Earth that could pierce his skin.

Even in another world, he had not found insects that could bite through his skin.

He glanced at Bai Xiaoling's knee-length skirt, showcasing her long, fair legs, and was about to remind her to wear long pants when out at night.

Then there was a crisp "crash."

The glass cover of a lamp ahead suddenly shattered, and Chen Shouyi saw a bug repeatedly bumping into the flame.

A few seconds later, it burned and fell to the ground, twitching continuously.

Chen Shouyi walked over, pinched the small insect with his fingers, and found its struggling power was not small.

"What's that?" Bai Xiaoling asked curiously, coming over.

"A bad bug!" Chen Shouyi replied.

"A bad bug?"

Seeing Bai Xiaoling looking puzzled, with a bit of a strange expression, Chen Shouyi quickly realized that he'd been unconsciously influenced by Little Shell.

Thankfully, he only talked about a bad bug this time. If he were infected by Shell Lady's quirky way of counting, it would be truly embarrassing.

He averted his gaze, pretending not to see, and said nonchalantly, "Just a bug from another world."

"Oh!" Bai Xiaoling replied in bewilderment.

Feeling slightly embarrassed, Chen Shouyi said, "Go home early and rest. I have nothing else going on over here!"

...

Chen Shouyi returned to his bedroom, greeted by a wave of heat.

The weather was getting increasingly hot, and even at night, the bedroom felt like a steamer.

Without electricity in winter, you could rely on wearing more clothes and facing the cold bravely.

But without electricity in summer, you could only stay calm to cool down naturally.

Chen Shouyi estimated the temperature these days had already soared above forty degrees Celsius, even the asphalt roads outside had started melting under the sun.

He picked up a big basin and went to the bathroom to fill it with water, then called to the Shell Lady playing on the floor: "Come over, time for a bath."

"Oh!" Shell Lady responded, immediately stood up, and stripped off her clothes.

"Splash!"

She jumped into the basin, splashing water everywhere.

She dived underwater for a while, emerged, and leaned on the edge of the basin, spitting a jet of water at Chen Shouyi: "Good Giant, look how far I can spit!"

Chen Shouyi glanced at his soaked pants, grumbling, "Far!"

He picked up Shell Lady's clothes, planning to wash them in the bathroom while she bathed.

"Good Giant, give them to me, give them to me, let me wash!"

Chen Shouyi raised an eyebrow at her: "Do you know how to wash them?"

"I know, I know! I've seen you do it, it's just rubbing with your hands, keep on rubbing," Shell Lady exclaimed.

Fine, if she wants to play, let her play.

Chen Shouyi handed over the clothes: "Here you go!"

Shell Lady took them, soaked them in water, and started to imitate Chen Shouyi, washing them earnestly.

"Good Giant, why aren't there any bubbles?"

Chen Shouyi shrugged and went to the bathroom to get some soap, coating her clothes with it.

Seeing her joyfully washing, covered in soap bubbles.

Chen Shouyi decided not to interfere.

He sat on the bed and checked his attribute panel.

Strength: 16.0

Agility: 15.9

Constitution: 16.4

Intelligence: 14.5

Perception: 13.6

Will: 14.6

Energy Accumulation: 1.2

Over the past half month, his strength and agility had increased by 0.3 points. The strength had already broken the 16-point threshold, equivalent to over 1,100 kilograms in understandable terms.

And agility was only 0.1 point away from 16, with nerve reflexes being more than ten times faster than the average person.

Even the constitution attribute, which was the highest, increased by 0.2 points.

However, the biggest improvement wasn't in these three attributes.

It was in will.

A whole 0.4 points increase.

By frequently entering the memory virtual space to experience the godly battle pressure during the mission to explore the insect nest in another world, his progress was astonishing.

Now his Sword Qi had reached eight centimeters long.

Even without condensing Sword Qi, he could use Telekinesis to control around a pound of matter, suspending it mid-air.

He felt a sense of introspection:

"Last time, five Martial Artists from the Capital City visited, Ye Zong's strength is inscrutable. I'm still far from catching up, but as for the other Martial Artists, Lu Shouhu and Sun Mengyuan, I can now defeat them in one move.

As for Luo Jingwen and Zhang Wenlong, not considering long-range, I can't match them yet, but in close combat... we're already evenly matched, with no absolute difference.

Unfortunately, the virtual space of memory retains the body's condition at that time. It can't update in real-time; otherwise, I'd want to challenge it."

"Good Giant, look at all the bubbles I have!"

Chen Shouyi came back to his senses, shut off the panel, glanced at the Shell Lady who's busy having fun, and said, "Lots!"

As for the clothes, she had long stopped washing them!

Huh, I knew she'd have a three-minute enthusiasm.

He waited for her to keep playing for a while longer.

"Finished washing?" Chen Shouyi stood up from the bed and asked.

"Finished!" Shell Lady said.

Chen Shouyi picked up the basin along with Shell Lady and headed towards the bathroom.

At the same time, the water splashed on the floor rose as if it were alive, trailing behind him without leaving a trace.

He fished Shell Lady out and put her in the sink: "Close your eyes!"

Shell Lady quickly shut her eyes and plugged her ears.

Then Chen Shouyi turned on the faucet, rinsing the soap off her body: "Go play by yourself!"

"Oh," Shell Lady said, "I already finished washing the clothes."

She jumped off the sink, ran away naked out of the bathroom.

Finished washing?

Chen Shouyi suspiciously pulled out the little princess dress from the basin and carefully inspected it, only to find it indeed clean.

And even cleaner than when he washed them.

Chapter 285 Memorial Service

Before leaving in the morning, Chen Shouyi received an invitation to Xiao Changming's memorial service.

Half a month had already passed, and the news of Xiao Changming's death was finally confirmed from above.

When Bai Xiaoling delivered it, he couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness.

Even as a powerful Martial Artist or a prospective one, life was still so fragile, no different from anyone else's.

Though he was now far stronger than Xiao Changming, in the face of true danger, he remained vulnerable.

This time it was Xiao Changming, maybe next time it would be his turn.

Chen Shouyi had originally planned to train in the other world as usual today, but this invitation suddenly brought some reflections; life should have more things worth cherishing besides just becoming stronger.

He immediately changed his mind and went to his parents' restaurant.

"Why are you here?" Mrs. Chen was mopping the floor, and upon seeing Chen Shouyi, she asked in surprise.

"Seeing you guys work so hard, I came to help!" Chen Shouyi said with a smile.

"Help with what, there's no need for you to help here." Mrs. Chen said dismissively, yet there was a hint of comfort on her face.

Chen Dawei heard the commotion and walked out from the back kitchen with a kitchen knife in hand: "Why do you have time to come by today?"

"Nothing much to do today!" Chen Shouyi responded with a dry laugh.

Since his parents opened the restaurant, he had only been there once. He never asked whether it made a profit or loss, as with such a small restaurant, even if it made money, it wouldn't be much.

The annual income probably wasn't even as much as what he used to spend on arrows each month before becoming a Martial Artist.

However, although he intended to help, he wasn't allowed to stay long before being shooed out.

...

Walking on the street, the sunlight had become glaring by the morning.

He suddenly felt at a loss for what to do.

Ever since obtaining the Book of Knowledge, his life had become monotonous and simple, either training or fighting.

Yet Chen Shouyi had long gotten used to it and found joy in it.

The gradual realization of strength was addictive and the only thing that gave him a sense of security in this chaotic world.

He wandered idly on the street for a while.

Still, he decided to go to the other world.

He paused, turned back home to get his bicycle.

...

Early the next morning, Chen Shouyi entered the second floor of the hotel lobby.

The memorial service was conducted by the authorities, with many from the military and provincial and city governments present.

Xiao Changming's wife and daughter, dressed in mourning clothes, greeted the guests. Xiao Changming's wife looked older than him, appearing in her forties with crow's feet at the corners of her eyes, while the daughter seemed to be just a middle school student, with bright eyes and a gentle demeanor.

One of the emcees, after receiving the invitation, whispered an introduction:

"This is the provincial chief security consultant, Chen Shouyi, Mr. Chen, your husband's former colleague."

"Please accept my condolences." Following custom, Chen Shouyi placed a white envelope on the etiquette lady's tray.

Xiao Changming's wife and daughter bowed together.

Chen Shouyi quickly stepped aside slightly.

Entering the hall, a black-and-white photo was placed on the podium, below it a black urn, surrounded by wreaths.

However, Xiao Changming's body was not found; what's inside was probably just some belongings, serving as a symbol.

After an etiquette lady helped pin on a black mourning flower, Chen Shouyi bowed in front of the memorial photo.

"You came too," Qin Liuyuan approached, saying.

"Yes!" Chen Shouyi nodded.

"I didn't expect Xiao Changming to be sacrificed too!" Qin Liuyuan sighed: "He was a Martial Artist."

In just a year, from Fang Shengjie, Cao Zhenhua, Cui Ziwen, to Xiao Changming, all the great Martial Artists of his era were gone. Now only he and Lei Ruiyang, who also became Martial Artists by taking Divine Blood, were left.

He couldn't help but sigh.

"A Martial Artist isn't a god, and even gods have moments of falling," Chen Shouyi said.

"True, life is fragile."

Soon after, Lei Ruiyang came in, standing with a group from the military. The two exchanged glances from a distance and then refocused their attention.

...

The memorial service quickly commenced.

The host first introduced the attending leaders one by one.

The highest ranking present was a deputy governor, followed by the commander of the stationed troops in Hedong City, the deputy mayor of Hedong City, and then Lei Ruiyang and Chen Shouyi.

"...Martial Arts Verification and Discipline Inspection Department Director Lei Ruiyang, Provincial Chief Security Consultant Chen Shouyi..."

Standing beside him, Qin Liuyuan looked at Chen Shouyi with astonishment upon hearing this.

Though both were chief consultants, there was a world of difference between a city and a provincial chief security consultant; the disparity was evident.

Many military martial artists who had previously seen Chen Shouyi glanced at him in shock; if it weren't for the solemn atmosphere of the memorial, there would have been an uproar.

Young, powerful!

It added a layer of mystery to his entire being.

...

After the memorial service ended.

Chen Shouyi briefly exchanged words with the provincial and city leaders who came over before leaving the hall with Qin Liuyuan.

With his current strength, he no longer needed to be cautious.

Whatever opinions others had could not change his status.

"Have you become a Martial Artist?" Qin Liuyuan asked, with a touch of reverence on his face. Perhaps due to psychological reasons, standing next to Chen Shouyi, he felt a strong sense of oppression.

"It was just something recent, hasn't gone through proper certification yet," Chen Shouyi said nonchalantly.

Hearing Chen Shouyi's admission, Qin Liuyuan's feelings were complicated and hard to describe.

How long has it been?

Isn't the other party under twenty?

He considered himself diligent, never slacking in training, but compared to the other, he might as well have lived in vain.

...

At this moment, Xiao Changming's daughter came running out of the hall.

"Uncle Chen... Uncle Chen!"

"Uncle Chen!"

...

When he first heard the voice, Chen Shouyi didn't initially react, it took being called three times for him to realize it was him being addressed. Xiao Changming's daughter, looking around fourteen or fifteen years old, wasn't much younger than him, yet unknowingly he had reached uncle status: "Do you need something from me?"

"My mom wants to discuss something with you!"

Chen Shouyi was a bit confused, he wasn't close to Xiao Changming, what was there to discuss.

Nonetheless, he said to Qin Liuyuan: "You go ahead, we'll talk next time."

"Sure, take care!" Qin Liuyuan instinctively used a respectful tone.

Soon, Chen Shouyi and the girl returned to the memorial venue.

Xiao Changming's wife had red-rimmed eyes:

"Mr. Chen, sorry for bothering you!"

"No problem, what would you like to discuss with me?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Meng Meng, don't listen in!" Before speaking, Xiao Changming's wife sent her daughter away; after she walked off, she wiped her tears and incoherently said: "Actually, I think Old Xiao isn't dead, just missing. He's such a capable person, a Martial Artist, he told me before his mission he'd definitely return...

You're his colleague, please, could you bring him back..."

Chen Shouyi paused in silence: "Sister-in-law, please accept my condolences!"

"I beg you, he's not really dead, just missing, he even came to me in a dream... woo woo woo!"

Chapter 286 - All Bark and No Bite

Chen Shouyi could kill a cultist without a ripple of emotion, but faced with the pleading of a grieving woman who had lost her husband, he found himself somewhat at a loss.

Xiao Changming was definitely dead.

Although his body was not found, both the barbarian's remarks at the time and the military's search over the past half month proved that the possibility of him still being alive was almost nil.

Chen Shouyi awkwardly offered a few words of comfort, and after a gentle refusal, finally extricated himself from Xiao Changming's wife.

Upon walking out of the hotel, he found Qin Liuyuan still waiting outside, squatting on the steps, smoking a cigarette.

"Why haven't you left?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Let's go together!" Qin Liuyuan stubbed out the cigarette with his fingers, flicked it, and the butt flew into a nearby trash can.

"Okay!" Chen Shouyi nodded.

Qin Liuyuan tactfully didn't ask about the conversation with Xiao Changming's wife, but instead brought up another matter: "Including last month, I've completed three tasks this month."

Chen Shouyi said nothing, knowing the other party surely had more to say.

"All were invasions by extraterrestrial species!"

"Were they dangerous?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Not really, they were resolved smoothly," Qin Liuyuan said. "But I feel something is amiss. Lately, too many extraterrestrial creatures have been appearing, they're almost rampant."

Chen Shouyi's expression became serious.

Before the mutations, each passage was tightly guarded, and everywhere was covered with surveillance cameras. Coupled with efficient communication and transportation, even if new passages appeared, they could be discovered quickly and actions taken promptly.

But now, with the power outages, handling efficiency has plummeted by tens or even hundreds of times.

"Last time, during a mission to eradicate snake spiders at White Mist Mountain, I encountered a nest," Qin Liuyuan said.

"Was there a spatial passage?" Chen Shouyi asked curiously.

"No, they're all propagating on Earth, and other extraterrestrial creatures can be seen all over the mountain." Qin Liuyuan instinctively reached for another cigarette but recalled that Chen Shouyi didn't smoke, so he stuffed it back into his pocket and continued:

"In the plains, densely populated areas, most extraterrestrial creatures are eradicated as soon as they appear. But in remotely populated mountainous areas, no one pays attention, and now they're breeding in large numbers."

"That serious!" Chen Shouyi's face changed slightly at the news.

The vast majority of extraterrestrial creatures, upon arriving on Earth, have no natural enemies.

As long as they can adapt to the environment, they can reproduce and proliferate in large numbers.

And Jiangnan Province is mostly mountainous.

This is a huge hidden danger, like a ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

Once it erupts, the consequences would be unimaginable.

The atmosphere became somewhat oppressive. After chatting for a while, the two parted ways.

Chen Shouyi looked up at the sky, which had already turned gloomy, as dense dark clouds obscured most of the sun, and the temperature became more stifling.

"A heavy rain is coming."

He turned on his heel and headed home immediately.

Just as he finished bringing in the clothes, the rain poured down in torrents.

A few pedestrians on the street held their heads and ran quickly.

Smelling the thick earthy scent from outside, Chen Shouyi was slightly lost in thought.

The rain continued to pour through the window, quickly soaking his clothes. He frowned slightly, focusing his will.

Time seemed to suddenly stand still, with every raindrop suspended in mid-air.

Each raindrop entering the "domain" slowed down rapidly.

Soon, more and more raindrops were suspended, increasingly dense.

At a certain moment, they suddenly collapsed.

A mass of water fell with a "crash".

Chen Shouyi closed the window, his mind at ease.

...

Evening!

Chen Shouyi held a long sword, practicing again and again with the force of his body, making the air ripple with delicate vibrations.

An invisible force pulsed in the air.

He leaped lightly, and at the highest point, his body felt a slight suspension.

Whenever his will concentrated, every movement felt as if he were aided by divine power.

For instance, when running, he could run faster,

and when jumping, he could jump higher.

In attack, he was also sharper.

As his will grew stronger, the effects became more pronounced. Now he increasingly sensed the mysterious aspect of this attribute, as if his whole body carried an aura of enhancement.

"Knock knock knock!"

The sound of knocking came.

Chen Shouyi retracted his sword, glanced at the Shell Lady amusing herself on the bed, and walked over to open the door to find Chen Xingyue and Mrs. Chen. He looked puzzled and asked, "Mom, what's the matter?"

"Xing Yue is going to the crematorium tomorrow night to stay overnight. I'm a bit worried, so go with her!" Mrs. Chen said.

Crematorium!

Even Chen Shouyi, who usually remained calm, was taken aback: "Why is she going to the crematorium for no reason?"

"I say it's inauspicious too, especially with so many ghostly things happening recently, but it's an organized courage-training by her class, she must go!" Mrs. Chen complained.

He glanced at Chen Xingyue and found her expressionless, clearly reluctant.

"Since it's organized by the school, wouldn't it be inappropriate for me to go?"

The crematorium is near the safe zone, operating normally, so naturally, there's no danger. And with his sister as a martial artist, her safety was even more assured.

"What's inappropriate, just keep a distant watch," Mrs. Chen said nonchalantly.

"Alright, I understand, don't worry!" Chen Shouyi agreed reluctantly.

After they left, Chen Shouyi closed the door.

He continued practicing for a few more minutes, when again, there was a knock at the door.

This time, it was only Chen Xingyue.

"What is it now?" Chen Shouyi opened the door.

"Brother, please, don't listen to mom. If my classmates know I had my brother accompany me, I'd die of embarrassment!" Chen Xingyue pleaded with her hands together, looking pitiful.

She was not only the top martial artist in her class but also the class monitor. Although the youngest in age, she commanded respect.

If her classmates found out, her persona would collapse.

Chen Shouyi looked at his sister's pitiful demeanor and found it amusing.

He maintained a calm facade but comforted her: "Don't worry, if your classmates find out, I'll explain that mom made me go, not you."

"What's the difference? Didn't you understand my meaning? Either way, you can't go!"

"But mom asked me, I can't lie and not go."

"Haven't you lied enough?" Chen Xingyue gave her brother a disparaging look.

Chen Shouyi flushed with embarrassment: "It's as if I have to go! The crematorium handles countless bodies daily. I've heard it's often haunted, even during the day it's eerily terrifying, I don't want to go either!"

Chen Xingyue's face quickly turned ugly at these words.

She had always been afraid of ghosts. Thinking of Uncle Wang back in Dongning, she couldn't help feeling anxious. This time it wasn't just a simple visit to the crematorium; she had to be a volunteer, even helping with cremating bodies...

Internally, she struggled fiercely between pride and practicality, finally leaving a sentence before running off!

"Hmph, go if you want!"

Chapter 287 - Self-Abandonment

Evening.

The emergency building on the fifth floor of the Safe Zone Hospital was brightly lit.

In recent days, as the invasion of otherworld species intensified, the number of injured patients began to surge, with doctors and nurses bustling about everywhere.

At this moment, a tricycle carrying a dying patient stopped at the entrance, with a female caretaker sitting on it.

"Quick, quick, someone come, my husband is about to die." The woman sitting in the car jumped down and shouted loudly.

The doctors and nurses immediately rushed out with a stretcher upon hearing the cries, and helped the patient onto it.

"What's wrong with my husband? He was fine in the morning." The woman's face was full of panic, and she was anxious.

"Yes, doctor, I'm his older brother, he never had any health issues." The middle-aged man who rode over on the tricycle said.

"It's unclear for now, we need to run some tests to find out." The doctor replied.

After briefly inquiring about the patient's condition on the way, the patient was pushed into the emergency room, and the family members were stopped outside.

...

"The patient's condition is quite serious; his breathing and heartbeat are irregular, and he's somewhat malnourished. Let's first do a blood routine test." A doctor said after checking.

With the power outage, the hospital's examination methods were limited, relying mainly on conventional methods and previous experience to make judgments.

A young nurse took out an alcohol swab to wipe the arm and immediately stepped forward to draw blood.

The patient's skin was sallow and the veins on the surface of the arms were protruding, making it easy to draw blood from such a patient. Even a novice fresh from nursing school could manage it smoothly, unlike with children or obese individuals, where finding a vein might take forever or require several tries.

The nurse picked up a blood-drawing needle and inserted it into a bulging vein.

However, the next moment frightened the young nurse, and she screamed, retreating a step.

The "vein" began to wriggle in an eerie manner, as if in violent struggle.

"Ah!"

"What happened?" Upon hearing the nurse's scream, the doctor quickly asked.

"Dr. Zhao, look, his veins." The nurse said, trembling.

Dr. Zhao was also startled when he saw it, but with his extensive experience, he managed to stay calm. He glanced at the automatic blood-drawing needle and found that no blood was extracted, but rather some turbid pale yellow liquid.

"Damn, it's a parasite, possibly an otherworldly one. Stay here, I'll report to the director."

Since the connection between the other world and Earth,

viruses, bacteria, and parasites have consistently been of utmost concern to humans. Every new discovery is accompanied by large-scale deaths. In terms of the death toll, the number of humans killed by Barbarians is just a fraction.

No amount of caution is excessive.

...

Early in the morning, Chen Shouyi went to the otherworld forest again.

Accompanying his sister to the crematorium was an evening event, not affecting his daytime training at all.

The weather in the other world was getting colder.

Even at noon, there was a chilling sensation on the skin.

The Shell Lady, wearing a thin princess dress, perched on Chen Shouyi's shoulder as if unaware, her wide eyes warily surveying the surroundings, captivated by every sound around.

"Good Giant, a bad Giant is coming," the Shell Lady suddenly shivered, clinging tightly to Chen Shouyi's hair, and urgently whispered by his ear.

Chen Shouyi was somewhat surprised, and with a slight flicker, he immediately hid behind a large tree.

He recalled that when he first came here, there indeed seemed to be a race of gray-skinned dwarves, but he had dealt with them. Could it be that new gray dwarves had migrated here?

Soon, he heard indistinct voices.

"This is the Forbidden Land, full of Fierce Beasts that could eat us. When the time comes, when I shout run, you head into the dense forest, understand?"

"I... I'm not afraid, I will definitely pass the coming of age ceremony and become a warrior of the tribe." A young voice said nervously.

"Impulsiveness is not bravery; it will only lead to your death."

...

Amidst the rustling of leaves, it wasn't long before two figures holding Long Spears passed by him.

"Barbarians!" Chen Shouyi's pupils slightly shrank.

These two Barbarians, one big and one small, the older one was nearing middle age, wielding a white Bone Spear, dressed in animal skins, with a tattered net woven of hemp rope tied at the waist. The youth was stark naked, holding a long spear with a sharpened wooden tip.

From their conversation, it seemed they were undergoing a coming of age trial.

"Unexpectedly, there's a Barbarian Tribe nearby?" he thought to himself, though his actions were not slow in the slightest, his figure nimbly leaping forward.

The middle-aged Barbarian evidently had rich combat experience. At the sound of movement behind him, his hair stood on end. Without even looking back, he rolled forward.

Before his body even moved,

his head had already rolled to the ground, blood spouting forth.

With a thud,

the headless corpse fell to the ground, convulsing.

The young Barbarian was splattered head to toe with blood, standing frozen in place, his face blank with shock, and the next moment, a devilish voice came from beside him, sending shivers down his spine. In fright, he turned around and his hand loosened, causing the Long Spear to fall to the ground.

"Where is your tribe?"

"I... I don't know!" The Barbarian youth retreated repeatedly, his face full of terror, his heart plummeting into a cold abyss.

Chen Shouyi approached step by step, sneering, "If you don't tell me, there's only one path: death!"

"Demon... even if I die, I won't betray the tribe," the Barbarian youth stammered, stepping back a few times, suddenly pulling out a round rod and quickly blowing into it.

"Poof!"

A black poisoned dart shot straight at Chen Shouyi.

With a slight sway, he easily dodged it, his face turning cold, "You still dare to attack? I underestimated you."

Then, he took a quick step forward and slapped him hard to the ground.

With a sharp crack, the youth's neck bent grotesquely.

Chen Shouyi's expression was unexpectedly blank.

"He's dead already."

"I accidentally used too much strength, didn't expect them to be so weak!"

He glanced at his hand, feeling a bit annoyed. Originally, he intended to intimidate and extract the location of the other tribe, but now the clue was cut off again.

In this vast forest, with no sense of direction, finding this tribe is like finding a needle in a haystack.

"Forget it, a barbarian of this level likely belongs to a small tribe, not posing much threat to Hedong City."

He picked up the bone spear used by the middle-aged barbarian, about two meters long, thick at one end and pointed at the other. The thickest part was as wide as a bowl, appearing very straight and smooth, naturally formed. He tried to bend it, but even with all his strength, he couldn't.

"It's probably a spike left over from some large creature that died!" he thought to himself.

"Mighty giant, you're so impressive!" Shell Lady, still shaken, landed back on Chen Shouyi's shoulder.

Hearing Shell Lady's untainted praise, Chen Shouyi felt his mood slightly improve.

Without any attachment, he tossed the bone spear aside and continued towards the cave.

...

Evening, Martial Arts Academy.

The sun began to set in the west.

Chen Shouyi parked his bicycle under the shade of a tree and crouched at the roadside without any concern for appearance, waiting quietly.

School was out by this time, with people coming and going on the road. Occasionally, female students would glance repeatedly at Chen Shouyi.

His expression was indifferent as he played idly with ants on the ground using a stick. Ever since he became more handsome, he had grown accustomed to such attention and was increasingly comfortable with it.

He handled two who asked about the cafeteria, three about the library, and one who tried to investigate his identity before

finally seeing Chen Xingyue and a group of people approaching the entrance.

...

"...I really can't understand why we're arranged to go to the funeral home, might as well go to the other world!"

"Yeah, it's very scary. Now when someone dies, they are immediately sent to the crematorium by the police, you can imagine why."

The only five girls in the class were gathered together, chattering incessantly, their faces a mix of fear and excitement.

"It really won't be haunted, will it?" Chen Xingyue asked, then spotted Chen Shouyi squatting on the ground in the distance and quickly averted her gaze, pretending not to see him.

"Of course it's haunted, otherwise why would they let us go to the funeral home to toughen our spirits? Xing Yue, you're the strongest, you can't chicken out."

"Of course not!" Chen Xingyue said with a stiff face, "I've never been afraid of ghosts since I was a kid!"

Luckily, nobody paid attention to her words as all the girls were immediately distracted.

"Look, there's a handsome guy over there!"

"So handsome!"

"Wow, he's looking over here!"

"Is he from our school? Doesn't seem familiar."

Chen Xingyue looked straight ahead, awkwardly sweating on her forehead.

Can't you have a little restraint?

Is he that handsome?

Why don't I see it at all, just looks average to me!

She wished to pretend not to see, but unfortunately, someone didn't let her off.

"Xing Yue, why aren't you looking?"

"What's there to look at? Just two eyes, a nose, and a mouth." Chen Xingyue said with a blank expression.

Having seen her brother's face enough at home, hasn't she?

"Exactly, not all that handsome." A somewhat good-looking guy nearby quickly echoed.

As soon as he finished speaking, he was met with a wave of ridicule.

"You wish!"

"Look in the mirror!"

"Zhao Youming, stop being disgusting."

...

Shallow, does being handsome help? Society is getting increasingly chaotic; strength is the most important now. Zhao Youming thought cynically to himself, but dared not provoke public anger again.

Compared to the other girls, the little class leader had more depth.

Not only pretty but strong as well.

...

At this moment, the Martial Arts Teacher leading the group also saw Chen Shouyi, shuddered all over, and was about to go over and greet him.

Chen Shouyi noticed the situation and quickly shook his head slightly at him.

The Martial Arts Teacher glanced at Chen Xingyue, understandingly stopped in his tracks.

This terrifying powerhouse, it seems, is here secretly to protect his sister.

Such doting!

...

Of course, there was no special bus for the Martial Arts Academy students to the funeral home; everyone had to bike there.

During the break to get their bicycles,

The Martial Arts Teacher waved Chen Xingyue over.

Chen Xingyue jogged over, "Teacher Zhang, what's up?"

The Martial Arts Teacher affectionately said, "Xing Yue, your brother..."

Chen Xingyue's face turned red at his words, quickly saying, "I didn't want him to come, but he insisted!"

"No, that's not what I meant. I wanted to ask what your brother's personality is like, his interests, whether he's easy to get along with."

Chen Xingyue froze, finally realizing that her brother is a powerful Martial Artist, more powerful than anyone in the entire Martial Arts Academy. She looked at the hopeful teacher, hesitated, then reluctantly said, "My brother... he's okay, quite easy to get along with."

Chapter 288 - Outbreak

Though Chen Shouyi was forty to fifty meters away from the two, his sharp ears picked up on the conversation between his sister and her Martial Arts Teacher.

He couldn't help but smile wryly.

He understood his sister's awkwardness and embarrassment.

At sixteen, she felt she was already an adult, and with the strength to outshine all her classmates, she was naturally more sensitive about her image.

Having her brother accompany her at this time, if her classmates found out, would indeed be an embarrassing matter.

However, he still decided to protect his sister's dignity.

No matter how badly they treated each other at home, after all their quarrels since childhood, he did not want his sister to lose face outside.

...

Soon, his sister and a group of students set off on their bicycles.

Chen Shouyi waited until they were far away before getting on his bicycle, following not too far behind.

The funeral home was located not far from the Safe Zone, just a dozen kilometers away, and it wasn't too remote, being on the edge of a road, though far from the industrial zone, surrounded by farmland and with only one solitary building.

As they neared their destination, dusk was falling. In the distance, the funeral home exuded a sinister aura, and even the sunset seemed to dim slightly as it shone there.

A giant chimney spewed black smoke, and the air was filled with an indescribable, strange smell.

It was already evening but still quite busy here.

From time to time, police could be seen riding flatbed trikes, with bodies wrapped in white cloth on the back, delivered to the entrance of the funeral home. The police didn't enter. Soldiers took over right at the entrance, very strictly.

Since the mutation, the government had swiftly enacted a new funeral system.

As soon as someone died, the body was forcibly sent by the local police station to the funeral home for cremation, even in the middle of the night.

Four armed soldiers stood at the entrance, with a warning sign beside them:

"Family members are prohibited from entering!"

From Chen Shouyi's perspective,

these soldiers were not ordinary people, strong in build, each with a Martial Arts foundation, likely possessing the strength of Martial Artist Apprentices.

As soon as he reached the entrance, he was stopped.

Chen Shouyi got off his bicycle and took out his Martial Arts Instructor Certificate from his pocket.

One of the soldiers took it with a puzzled look, his hand trembling slightly as he almost dropped the certificate: "You... Hello, may I know why you are here?"

"Just here to take a look," Chen Shouyi said blandly.

The Martial Arts Instructor Certificate wielded significant power; unless it was a top-secret place, it allowed him unrestricted access, and the soldiers immediately let him pass.

Chen Shouyi rode his bicycle through the gate, finding that aside from the cement road and buildings, most of the site was still at the foundation stage, and not even a hint of greenery could be seen. The entire ground bore traces of recent burns, a completely charred scene.

He withdrew his gaze and found the parking shed to place his bicycle.

This place felt like another world.

Outside it was scorching hot, yet here was an inexplicable chill, carrying an eerie darkness.

"No wonder the Martial Arts Academy chose this place for courage training," he thought silently. "There are probably quite a lot of spirits here."

And it made sense, with a population of at least five or six hundred thousand in the Safe Zone and surrounding areas. Even in the peaceful past, an estimated two or three dozen people died every day, let alone now!

At this moment, he noticed several officers in the distance, striding towards him with enthusiastic expressions.

...

Inside the funeral home's meeting room.

An officer, a lieutenant, was explaining the precautions to the students.

The funeral home was practically a military camp. The army took over all operations, and each had at least Martial Artist Apprentice strength. In fact, in today's environment, ordinary people couldn't work here.

"Everyone must act together, even when going to the bathroom... At night, you might see some strange things, or hear bizarre noises, or even have hallucinations, but these are normal phenomena, don't be too curious..."

Chen Xingyue sat upright, clenching her fingers until they turned white.

Tap tap tap...

She glanced out of the corner of her eye at a twenty-something boy in the third row next to her, noticing his foot shaking non-stop.

The Martial Arts Academy was different from ordinary schools.

Even in the same class, there was a huge age difference, like in Xingyue's advanced class, the oldest was 27, already married with children, while the youngest was still underage.

"All of you are Martial Artist Apprentices, not ordinary people. With ample energy, generally speaking, nothing will happen."

This time, an older student stood up and asked, "Sir, do you mean that there are times when something does happen?"

The officer was silent for a moment: "Such cases are rare. Additionally, a final reminder, fear neither ghosts nor spirits!"

There was some concealment, in fact, the frequency of incidents recently had been increasing. Just two days ago, a soldier had gone mad in the bathroom and attacked his companion. By the time others arrived, the soldier was dead, and the mad soldier had also bizarrely committed suicide.

The higher-ups had already requested to decommission this funeral home and select another site for construction.

But this couldn't be resolved in the short term.

After the meeting, each student was given a pair of rubber gloves and a mask.

As the last rays of the setting sun faded, the entire sky had darkened, and gasoline lamps in the corridors were lit.

Chen Xingyue walked out of the meeting room, looking around, but didn't see the shadow of her brother.

"Did he not come?"

"Could he have changed his mind?"

Her heart became a bit restless.

A faint smell of corpses lingered in the air, and a gust of eerie cold wind made her skin break into goosebumps.

"Xing Yue, what are you looking at?" a female voice asked.

"No... nothing!" Chen Xingyue quickly replied.

"This place feels so terrifying, I feel a chill in my heart—could we really encounter ghosts?" Wu Huifang said nervously.

Wu Huifang was only a year older than Chen Xingyue, and due to their close age, they had the best relationship.

"It's not that bad!" Chen Xingyue tucked her hair and disguised her fear: "That officer just said, 'Fearless in your heart, ghosts and spirits won't harm you; as long as you're not afraid, it's fine.'"

"Xing Yue, you really have a lot of courage."

...

After chatting for a while, they heard their Martial Arts Teacher clapping his hands and shouting, "Alright, gather up! Now follow me to the morgue."

The students talked and laughed, their faces a mix of fear and inexplicable excitement, as they followed the Martial Arts Teacher toward the nearby morgue.

Once inside, everyone instinctively shut their mouths, and silence fell abruptly.

The room was mostly filled with corpses.

The bodies were covered with white cloths, tied up with ropes, and some of them were still oozing blood, dripping down from the carts with ticking sounds.

The smell of blood, corpse stench, and the scorched odor from the neighboring incineration room blended into an extremely unsettling scent.

Just then, a steam truck marked with a red cross stopped at the door.

Two soldiers quickly got off the truck.

"How many?" a few soldiers inside quickly approached.

"Eighteen," one of them said.

"Are they all due to parasitic worms?" a soldier asked quietly.

"Only one isn't!"

Upon hearing this, the soldiers' faces grew serious. Since last night, when a corpse infected by parasites was brought in, deaths had started to surge. Just today, more than fifty bodies were sent from the hospital, and there were even more that hadn't made it there before being directly sent to the morgue.

The truck's compartment was soon opened, revealing the bodies inside black body bags.

"Put on gloves and masks, hurry over and help." The Martial Arts Teacher instructed.

This was part of the curriculum, helping the students overcome their fear of corpses and become more accustomed to facing them.

These students, fortunately, were much braver than average, and there were no signs of retreat. Even Chen Xingyue, though her skin prickled with goosebumps, managed to suppress her discomfort as she and Wu Huifang carried a corpse onto a cart that still had traces of blood.

Once the bodies were moved, the hospital's truck quickly departed.

Quiet settled once more.

...

Chen Xingyue discreetly smelled the plastic gloves, feeling a wave of nausea; earlier, while moving a corpse, her hand accidentally touched the cart's blood, and the gloves now emitted a faint stench.

She wanted to wash up but didn't want to appear overly squeamish in front of her classmates and teacher. As the class president and the strongest in the class, she felt compelled to set an example and hold herself to high standards.

Corpses continued to be brought in from outside.

The Martial Arts Teacher discussed with the soldiers, and so all the bodies were left for the students to transport in a systematic queue. Many corpses were not placed in body bags, requiring direct contact during transport.

The class consisted of thirty-two students, and in just over an hour, everyone had taken a turn.

There were too many corpses, and they couldn't be incinerated fast enough.

The morgue quickly became overcrowded.

The night grew deeper, and the air became increasingly chilly.

The numerous gas lamps illuminated the morgue with a bright, ghastly white light.

Chen Xingyue sat on a row of hard wooden chairs, looking around with suspicion, feeling as though the room had become darker, filled with shadowy figures.

"Stupid Chen Shouyi said he'd come, yet he didn't show up in the end—always flaking out on me," she cursed silently in her heart.

"Tap! Tap! Tap!"

Suddenly, the clear sound of tapping echoed through the morgue.

"What's that sound?" a student asked.

"I'll go check it out!" remarked a particularly brave male student, standing up and walking through the gaps between the bodies.

Soon, he let out a cry of surprise: "What the heck is that!"

All the students promptly rushed over, and the next moment they saw a fourteen to fifteen-centimeter-long red worm, resembling an earthworm, bouncing powerfully on the floor.

A few soldiers noticed the scene, quickly pushed through the crowd, and one stepped on the worm, grinding it underfoot.

"Don't touch it! Everyone step back!"

Another soldier lifted the white cloth from a corpse, and with just one look, he felt chills run down his spine. Countless parasitic worms were crawling out of its mouth, nose, ears, and even skin.

He quickly covered it back up: "Handle this corpse first; check if there are more problems elsewhere."

With that, the soldier pushed the cart toward the incineration room.

Since the power outage, the chemical industry had shut down, leading to an extreme shortage of plastic materials, and body bags became critically scarce. Besides the hospital, places like police stations had long run out; most corpses were covered simply with white cloths and delivered over.

No one expected this to happen.

Of course, the sheer number of corpses unable to be incinerated contributed to this situation.

The rest of the soldiers immediately started checking each body, discovering several more infected.

All in a single morgue, such things couldn't be concealed.

All the students looked shaken, feeling chills on their scalp.

"Why do corpses have these things?"

"It's surely parasitic worms."

"Parasitic worms? We just handled those corpses, could they be infectious?"

The Martial Arts Teacher coughed, reassured them: "It should be fine. Everyone wore gloves and masks, without direct contact with the bodies. Besides, soldiers process corpses every day, they definitely know what's going on."

Chapter 289 - He's My Brother (Double -)

The atmosphere in the funeral home reception hall was lively.

"It's a pity I can't drink during work hours. President Chen, I'll toast you with tea instead of wine!" said the company commander responsible for the funeral home as he stood up at the dining table.

When they heard the report below that a Martial Artist was coming, the entire senior staff of the funeral home was alarmed. Not only did the company commander accompany him, but even the instructor and deputy company commander also came over.

Even if these people, including the instructor, are military Martial Artists, they are more aware of the formidable strength of a Martial Artist compared to ordinary people. In ancient times, they were real foes of thousands; even now, they are people the government pays significant attention to and fears.

A company-level unit like theirs, if not prepared, might not withstand a sneak attack from someone like that.

"Company Commander Zhou, you're too kind!" Chen Shouyi replied, putting down his chopsticks and clinking his teacup.

Seizing the rare opportunity, several people immediately asked about Martial Art cultivation and some combat experience and skills. Chen Shouyi did not hold back and answered them all thoroughly.

Although he had only truly begun practicing Martial Arts for about a year, less than anyone present, in terms of meticulous control of power and rich combat experience, no ordinary Martial Artist could compare.

After all, no Martial Artist could, like Chen Shouyi, repeatedly experience life-and-death battles in the Virtual Memory World.

These are invaluable resources, insights that others would have to risk their lives to obtain.

Now, whether in strength, experience, or skills, Chen Shouyi is a bona fide Martial Artist.

The meal lasted for over two hours.

Chen Shouyi glanced at the eerie window and said, "The atmosphere here still feels a bit off; nothing has happened, right?"

The few people exchanged glances, and finally, the company commander spoke with a smile, "After all, this is a funeral home, where the dead gather, you know, it's inevitable given the current environment. Fortunately, the problems are not significant and still under control."

Chen Shouyi vaguely felt that the other party seemed to be hiding something, but he didn't care. This was Earth, not another world; no matter how rampant the spirits were, how much trouble could they cause?

After a few more casual conversations, Chen Shouyi mentioned he wanted to see his younger sister.

Company Commander Zhou immediately volunteered to accompany him, but Chen Shouyi politely declined.

...

As soon as Chen Shouyi left.

The reception hall quickly turned cold and gloomy, even the light seemed to dim a bit.

"So powerful! If a Martial Artist were stationed here, they might really suppress those increasingly powerful spirits," the deputy company commander remarked, sensing the obvious change in the environment.

"What kind of person is a Martial Artist to come to a place like this? It's just because his sister is here for some practical class, otherwise he wouldn't bother to check it out," Company Commander Zhou said with a wry smile, shaking his head.

Since Colonel Xiao's death, there were only two Martial Artists left in Jiangnan Province, how could they be placed in a funeral home?

"Let's hope nothing happens tonight. If something happens to his sister, that would be disastrous," the instructor said with some concern. "We can't bear the wrath of a Martial Artist. Even if he doesn't cause trouble for us, those above us will vent their frustrations on us to appease him."

Working in a funeral home, though a bit unlucky and the environment eerie, is still far better compared to being on the front lines.

"Hopefully, nothing will happen. We just had a burn two days ago, so it should be stable for a while," Company Commander Zhou said.

At this moment, a soldier hurried over, looking anxious:

"Report!"

"What's the matter?" Company Commander Zhou asked, subconsciously checking the time—it was only eight o'clock—and thus, he breathed a slight sigh of relief.

Generally, incidents in the funeral home are most likely to occur after midnight; before then, it is usually quite safe.

"There's a parasitic outbreak, and the bodies have filled the morgue!"

Their faces changed drastically upon hearing this, and they stood up with a "bang," the chairs flying.

...

Chen Shouyi walked down the brightly lit corridor.

His gaze fell on the distant darkness, where tendrils of mist clung to the ground like living creatures, swaying slightly. In this eerie fog, countless weak spirits were fighting and devouring each other.

So many!

With just a glance, Chen Shouyi saw no fewer than a dozen.

During the day, nothing seemed unusual here, but once night fell, these spirits emerged from the ground, walls, or other dark corners.

Children, elderly, young adults, women...

For a moment, Chen Shouyi felt as if he had entered Hell.

Fortunately, in the other world, he had seen such scenes many times before. Faced with these terrifying sights, enough to scare an ordinary person to death, his expression remained calm and unwavering.

These spirits were almost mindless, most with indistinct features, quite weak, appearing muddled and mainly operating on instinct. Some were so weak that a single gust of wind seemed to dissolve them, quickly becoming prey to other spirits and being utterly devoured in a frenzy of biting.

Ironically, these spirits were once the same kind in life, but now in death, they devour each other and become each other's food.

In the corridor, an elderly woman with a pale face wandered aimlessly, her blank expression faintly revealing a sinister smile.

The next moment, she shrieked as if her bottom were on fire, screaming madly as she fled.

Unfortunately, she moved too slowly.

As she fled, her speed slowed further, her figure gradually fading as her soul began to evaporate. Accompanied by a chilling scream, she dissolved into a cluster of glimmers imperceptible to most human eyes, and disappeared completely.

"On Earth, my Divine Creatures' abilities are truly too weak!" Chen Shouyi estimated the time and shook his head.

Chapter 290 - He's My Brother (Double -)_2

It took nearly a minute for the spirit to completely dissipate as he approached. In the otherworld, such weak spirits wouldn't require even a tenth of a second from him.

"If I use my willpower, I could kill it instantly."

Then, he lifted his foot and walked toward the mortuary ahead.

...

By now, not only was the mortuary filled with corpses, but over a dozen bodies were also placed at the entrance.

Chen Xingyue and Wu Huifang worked together to lift a corpse off the tricycle, placing it on a waterproof tarp. They felt physically and mentally exhausted, their initial fears long forgotten, as their nerves were completely numb.

Corpses, all corpses.

The entire mortuary, along with those outside, contained no less than five hundred bodies, a number that would take seven to eight days to accumulate under normal circumstances.

The crematorium next door couldn't keep up with the burning.

From time to time, parasites jumped off the bodies onto the ground, hopping about, only to be immediately crushed into pulp.

"This is definitely abnormal!" Wu Huifang said quietly to Chen Xingyue.

"I know!" Chen Xingyue nodded, saying, under normal circumstances, so many people don't die from parasites. Moreover, these parasites are incredibly resilient, not ordinary parasites, but creatures from another world.

She fell silent for a moment before saying, "I'm afraid more people will die tomorrow."

"Any idea about the Safe Zone?" a girl nearby chimed in.

"It shouldn't have spread there yet. The soldiers said these bodies all came from the reservoir area."

Silence fell over them.

Then came the sound of footsteps from afar.

The group suddenly became restless. The Martial Arts Teacher, seeing the figure, quickly walked over, excitedly saying, "Hello, General Manager Chen, hello."

He recognized Chen Shouyi; it was he who had arranged everything when Chen Xingyue enrolled.

"Hello, Teacher Kang."

Upon hearing the familiar voice, Chen Xingyue's face flickered with excitement, and she almost blurted out "Brother" aloud, feeling her brother had never appeared so agreeable.

Chen Shouyi casually scanned his surroundings, discreetly glanced at Chen Xingyue, and then engaged in small talk with the Martial Arts Teacher.

"Wow, it's the handsome guy from earlier today!" Wu Huifang's eyes sparkled.

"His skin is so nice!"

"He seems to be somebody important; why does Teacher Kang call him General Manager Chen?"

A few women clustered together, whispering.

"General Manager means Chief Safety Advisor. According to my dad, becoming a Chief Advisor requires being a Grand Martial Artist. Our city's Chief Safety Advisors number only two: Qin Liuyuan, General Qin, and Chen Shouyi, General Manager Chen. Could it be him?" Wu Huifang said, eyes glowing. Her father was an old-school martial artist, so she was somewhat familiar with the martial artist circles, as her father often shared such matters with her.

Chen Shouyi's promotion to Martial Artist was not publicly known; only those in elite circles were aware.

However, to Martial Artist Apprentices like them, he was still a figure beyond reach.

Listening to her classmates chatter away excitedly, Chen Xingyue felt the previously oppressive atmosphere lift. She kept a neutral expression, not speaking, while her eyes occasionally peeked at her brother.

Since her brother arrived, she felt an unprecedented sense of security, and even the cold and eerie aura here seemed to dissipate considerably.

...

"General Manager Chen, perhaps you could give these students a talk, share some insights on Martial Arts training?" Kang Jiande said ingratiatingly.

Martial artists, in some ways similar to technical personnel, tend to be taciturn, not good with words or socializing, solely focused on their field; however, Kang Jiande, as a Martial Arts Teacher, was an exception, always deftly sycophantic.

Chen Shouyi glanced around; all the students immediately smiled meekly like quails. He shook his head and declined with a smile, "No, let's forget it."

Then he asked, "Why are there so many corpses here?"

After Kang Jiande explained the situation, Chen Shouyi's expression grew grave.

Parasites!?

This was not a trivial issue; if it spread, countless people in Hedong City could perish.

...

As they spoke, Company Commander Zhou briskly approached with a group of soldiers.

With a nod of acknowledgment to Chen Shouyi, he then ordered the soldiers, "Everyone, move the corpses to the clearing for burning."

The students were in turmoil.

Chen Shouyi was also somewhat surprised, but upon reflection, it seemed like the only course of action.

Subsequently, the soldiers and students transported the corpses one by one to the clearing ahead.

Watching Chen Xingyue, like the other students, carry these parasite-ridden bodies, Chen Shouyi several times wanted to speak up, but ultimately remained silent.

"How about calling Chen Xingyue over?" Tang Jiande suggested softly, perceptive of the situation.

"No need, this could be a good exercise for her," Chen Shouyi shook his head.

His sister was someone who cared deeply about appearances; doing such a special thing in front of classmates would probably mortify her.

After half an hour, the corpses formed a heaped mountain on the clearing. Luckily, the funeral parlor was completely under military control; otherwise, if the families of the deceased learned of this disrespect, there would be upheaval.

Nearby, a soldier hoisted a diesel can, opened the lid, and started pouring substantial amounts of diesel.

"Ignite!"

With a command,

the flames began to burn fiercely.

Soon, an embarrassing and mysterious odor filled the air.

Covering his nose lightly, Chen Shouyi felt his stomach churn, and he doubted he could eat roasted meat for a few days.

With keen eyesight, he noticed that as the fire burned the parasites inside the bodies, they seemed agitated by the high temperature, wriggling intensely beneath the skin.

Initially, there were only one or two, but within seconds, they became densely packed, like countless worms crawling inside.

These "worms" ranged from fine needle-sized to as thick as a little finger, and about half a foot long. A few parasites attempted to wriggle out from the bodies' mouths and noses, but upon contact with the flame, they swiftly retracted.

The atmosphere grew quiet.

Only the crackling sound of the fire consuming the bodies could be heard.

The flames roared ever more fiercely, smoke billowed in thick plumes.

However, there were simply too many bodies; it was impossible to burn them all at once, and new bodies kept arriving, added to the blaze. Several times the fire died down, and numerous soldiers came forward with pitchforks and wooden poles, removing the ashes before pouring fresh diesel and reigniting the flames.

It took over three hours before all the corpses were reduced to ashes.

...

The night deepened.

The mortuary became more spacious, with only a dozen or so bodies left inside.

Helping her classmates, Chen Xingyue cleaned the mortuary and then scattered lime on the floors. Once everything was done, she yawned and glanced surreptitiously at Chen Shouyi.

She felt disgruntled; while she was busy toiling, her brother was idling away.

"I want to go to the bathroom; anyone want to come along?" a female classmate said then.

"I'll go with you."

"I'll go too!"

"Xing Yue, are you coming?"

Chen Xingyue hesitated slightly; the bathroom was quite far, and it was already midnight. But being the class president, she nodded.

A few girls set out together, heading to the door.

Tang Jiande, who had been seeking advice from Chen Shouyi, snapped back to attention and asked, "Where are you all going?"

"To the bathroom!"

"Be quick!" Tang Jiande didn't worry too much. Several classes had visited the funeral parlor for experience without any problems.

As for Chen Shouyi, he was even less concerned. He glanced at his sister, observing her feigned calmness and wandering gaze, and found it amusing.

Watching them leave, he continued his conversation with Tang Jiande.

However, after only a few sentences, he heard a scream.

Tang Jiande had just regained his composure when he felt the ground tremble slightly, accompanied by a gust of wind. He quickly looked toward the hallway, but the General Manager Chen was already gone from sight.

"Such speed."

Within half a second, Chen Shouyi had already reached the bathroom.

A few girls stood at the bathroom entrance, faces pale and clearly frightened. Seeing Chen Xingyue safe, Chen Shouyi relaxed.

"What happened?"

"Brother, quick, save Tian Zhenzhen." As soon as Chen Xingyue saw Chen Shouyi, she clung to his arm like he was a lifeline, trembling all over.