

New Era 361

Chapter 361: The Old Witch (Part 1)

The night sky is sparse with stars, a full moon hangs high.

The car drove out of the small town, winding deeper into the wilderness.

On both sides, the rice in the fields hung low, heavy, as the harvest season approached. Ahead, hills rose and dipped, shrouded in a mysterious fog, lending an air of uncertainty.

Jiangnan is mountainous, with hills and peaks scattered everywhere, and many villages and towns are built along the mountains.

Chen Shouyi checked the time; it was only eight in the evening.

"When did you arrive?" Chen Shouyi suddenly asked.

"At five in the afternoon!" Jin Feiyan replied.

Only three hours had passed since then, so it should still be in time.

The car continued along a mountain path, going in a large loop, before heading into a mountain valley. A thin fog began to rise on the road.

He noticed that a village along the way had already been relocated, leaving it dark and empty.

"Is there fog during the day too?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Yes, Mei Family Village is located ahead in the valley, where there's usually more fog, but it used to only appear in the morning and evening. Now, even at midday, it's foggy," said a local town chief, looking uneasy.

Chen Shouyi was surprised at this; it was summer, and the weather was scorching, reaching temperatures of up to forty degrees during the day. The blazing sun should dissipate even the densest fog, so in such conditions, an entire village shrouded in mist likely meant something far from ordinary.

This mission is going to be tricky! Chen Shouyi frowned slightly.

Soon, the truck arrived at the destination.

The area was already cordoned off, with about a battalion of soldiers stationed around, and a helicopter constantly circling in the sky.

Chen Shouyi and the others jumped off the truck and looked ahead.

In front of them, a village cloaked in dense fog loomed in and out of view in the distance.

Chen Shouyi keenly noticed that the soldiers stationed here weren't taking special precautions, indicating that the fog itself was harmless and just regular mist.

The local guide quickly approached upon hearing the news.

Chen Shouyi chatted with him briefly, trying to gather more detailed firsthand intelligence.

The other party answered every question thoroughly.

But not much was gained.

In fact, the army only arrived here at noon today for a mission, having sent a company of soldiers into the village since then, yet none had returned.

It was known only that there were still many people alive inside; occasionally, figures could be seen.

Moreover, the magnetic field was abnormal. Once entering the thick fog, compasses would spin chaotically.

Seeing this, Chen Shouyi stopped asking, opened his bow case, assembled his war bow, filled three quivers with sixty arrows each, and strapped them on his back.

He prepared to enter, and seeing Jin Feiyan wanted to follow, he turned and said, "You don't need to come; you won't be of help."

To him, even a big martial artist level person wouldn't make a difference, let alone a martial artist level person.

Jin Feiyan, who had no desire to enter the strange but dangerous village, was there merely for the mission. Hearing Chen Shouyi's remark as clear permission, she breathed a sigh of relief and cheerily said, "Then be careful!"

Chen Shouyi nodded slightly, stepped over the caution tape, and walked forward.

The distant thick fog churned, resembling countless sinister ghosts with claws extended, sending chills down his spine.

He pressed his sword and advanced, his senses quickly spreading out.

Frowning, he sharply realized his perception was greatly disturbed upon touching the fog; images trembled and jumped, becoming indistinct, as if battling against some force.

Fortunately, the interference wasn't strong enough to fully disrupt his perception.

Taking a deep breath, after a few steps, he found himself deeply ensconced in the mist.

The fog was as thick as milk, evidently unnatural.

Even with his vision, beyond five meters, everything was blurred and shadowy.

He slowly advanced along the village's paths, alert to his surroundings.

Several plastic bags rolled along the road, and perhaps it was an illusion, but countless whispering voices seemed to echo in his ears, like a devil's murmurs.

Bluffing tactics!

Chen Shouyi sneered.

Yet he heightened his alertness to the maximum.

After a while, buildings appeared on both sides.

"Have I entered the village?"

There was no light at all around, everything was dark, deathly quiet as if it were a ghost village.

A strong stench of blood and corpses permeated the air, signaling something ominous here.

Chen Shouyi moved towards a three-story house nearby, the iron gate on the wall was open, and the main door inside seemed ajar, a pitch-black void.

He stepped inside, the smell of carrion grew stronger, he gripped the hilt of his sword, and called out tentatively, "Is anyone there?"

"Is anyone there?"

Then he noticed a shadowy figure sitting in the living room, slightly moving, seemingly doing something?

Amidst the foggy darkness, this scene appeared incredibly eerie.

With heightened skills comes bravery, Chen Shouyi steadied his nerves, gripped his sword, and approached.

Discovering it was an elderly woman, her face etched with wrinkles, her body hunched, sitting at a table, gripping something with her hands, gnawing on it incessantly.

Upon closer inspection, even accustomed as he was to death and corpses, his heart skipped a beat.

Damn, it was an arm.

The arm was severely decayed, dripping with pus and blood, maggots crawling all over it, and the foul stench emanated from it.

The old woman was toothless, gnawing with her gums, mouth full of blood.

Chen Shouyi slowly drew his sword out, hesitated, and sheathed it again.

He could tell this old woman was still alive.

Her heart was beating, the chest was rising and falling.

A living person, albeit acting quite bizarrely.

"Grandma!"

"Grandma!" Chen Shouyi called out several times, testing the waters.

Seemingly hearing the call, she turned her head towards Chen Shouyi, her expression blank, eyes cloudy and hollowed, looking soulless, and after a while, she bowed her head and resumed gnawing on the arm.

Watching for a bit, Chen Shouyi left, reaching the iron gate outside, glancing back. Amidst the thick fog, he vaguely saw the old woman standing up, seemingly looking towards him.

"What the hell is this?"

He cursed under his breath, turned, and continued searching.

The path was silent, occasionally spotting patches of dark, rancid blood.

"Song Yingjie!"

"Song Yingjie!"

"Anyone alive, make a sound."

He shouted as he walked.

But no response came, only countless whispers filled his mind, with occasional jarring, sharp noises, stirring slight agitation in Chen Shouyi, amidst which a shadow appeared vaguely in the fog ahead.

Chen Shouyi felt a glimmer of hope, immediately chasing after it.

Chapter 362: Slap

The whispering sound that was originally around the ear quickly became clear as the figure entered the perception range.

"Squad leader! Zhang Xiaojun, Chen Feiyan... If you hear me, please respond!"

"Is anyone still alive?" A soldier, full of despair, was circling in the thick fog, shouting hoarsely.

Chen Shouyi walked over and shouted, "Wake up!"

However, the other party seemed oblivious and continued shouting to himself.

"Is something interfering with judgment?" he thought to himself, his expression grave. No wonder he kept hearing whispering; it was the sound of speech, just blurred by interference.

His expression grave, he bypassed the figure and continued forward.

Sure enough, as the distance increased, the soldier's shout quickly faded. Just a few meters away, another soldier squatted in a corner, rifle set aside, seemingly having given up, with a look of despondency and despair.

He walked another dozen meters.

"Ratatat!"

A soldier, mentally collapsed, was holding a gun and constantly firing into the sky.

Nearby, several soldiers were already lying on the ground, with blood pooling beneath them, clearly killed by mistake.

Chen Shouyi walked past him and lightly knocked him out with one palm.

Not long after, he saw the figure of a martial artist; he was hunched, cautiously walking along the wall, checking left and right, appearing quite alert, yet completely oblivious to the close presence of Chen Shouyi.

Chen Shouyi reached out and patted his shoulder.

The martial artist was immediately startled, and without thinking, thrust a sword towards Chen Shouyi.

However, just as he moved, the long sword was caught by Chen Shouyi's hand.

The martial artist, frightened, immediately abandoned the sword and kicked at Chen Shouyi.

Facing this level of attack, Chen Shouyi couldn't even be bothered to dodge, the kick landed on him with a dull sound.

His body didn't move an inch, but the opponent was jolted backward, landing on his backside.

Chen Shouyi took a step forward and slapped him lightly. He didn't dare use force, fearing he'd break his neck, and shouted, "Calm down."

The other seemed to become a bit more aware: "Who... who are you?"

"Where are the others?" Chen Shouyi asked heavily.

"I don't... I don't know, we've dispersed. Are you here to rescue us, buddy? What's your name?" The martial artist, after being slapped, was neither angry nor upset but rather full of excitement and joy.

He had been groping his way here for four or five hours, but it felt like he was stuck in a maze, going in circles and unable to find a way out.

"Name's Chen, Chen Shouyi!"

"That name rings a bell, sounds familiar, right, I'm Qian Wei!" the martial artist said excitedly and quickly:

"This place is damn weird. If I'd known, I would've found an excuse not to come. By the way, how many people came with you, did General Qin come?"

"No, just me," Chen Shouyi said flatly.

Qian Wei was stunned, then squatted on the ground in disappointment: "Sigh, what's up there, sending martial artists. It's no use! No offense, brother, but no matter how many martial artists come here, it's useless. Before long, it feels like entering an illusion realm, too terrifying."

Chen Shouyi couldn't be bothered listening to his chatter and turned to leave.

Qian Wei quickly followed: "Where are you going?"

"Going to take a look around."

"I think it's best not to search. I've been going around for hours, you should escape quickly while you're unaffected, this place is really creepy," Qian Wei rambled on.

"I still have to rescue people; you should go on your own!" Chen Shouyi said.

Qian Wei was tempted but looked at the surrounding pitch-black fog, as if a monster could jump out at any moment, and immediately retreated: "Then forget it, I can't be so disloyal, but don't blame me for not warning you, you better hurry up, based on my experience, after being here for about ten to twenty minutes, you'll be completely trapped."

Seeing Chen Shouyi remain silent, he asked again: "Which zone did you come from?"

"Safe Zone!"

"Ah, me too, but I've never seen you!"

At this moment, Chen Shouyi spotted another martial artist, walked over, and slapped him. Seeing he wasn't conscious yet, he slapped him again.

With two slaps, he finally regained consciousness.

"Thank heavens, finally seeing people again, I thought everyone had disappeared?" The martial artist, whose face was puffy from being slapped like a bun, said excitedly, nearly tearing up: "Qian Wei, who is this?"

"Chen Shouyi, newly arrived, he's the one who saved you," Qian Wei said, though the method was a bit rough, he couldn't help touching his face, which still stung.

"Hello, hello, I'm Zhao Jiankai," Zhao Jiankai quickly said.

"Did you find anything earlier?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"No, just found quite a few villagers still alive, but their behavior was strange, not like normal people, felt like they were controlled by something. We felt a bit creeped out and didn't go in further," Zhao Jiankai said.

"Did any of you die?"

"No!"

"Didn't see any!"

Both shook their heads.

Chen Shouyi couldn't help but breathe a slight sigh of relief; at least so far, no dangers were discovered.

The three continued searching. Including Song Yingjie, there were five martial artists trapped here, but after searching the entire village, the other three martial artists were not found.

During this time, Qian Wei and Zhao Jiankai were again influenced by the mysterious force here and were again awakened by a few slaps from Chen Shouyi.

...

"I say, brother, can you slap a bit lighter next time?" Qian Wei said, his face swollen an entire circle, only able to complain slightly. Now he's a bit intimidated by Chen Shouyi, too rough. He'd go up with a couple of slaps at the first sign of something amiss.

"Do you think they might be hiding inside the houses?" Zhao Jiankai said, his face equally battered, entirely purple.

"It's possible!" Chen Shouyi said.

He felt a bit anxious; he noticed a lot of soldiers on the road already had blank, hollow eyes, like they were sleepwalking, wandering the road. It seemed as night deepened, the interference got stronger.

The three quickly searched through the houses one by one. Many were inhabited by villagers, each behaving oddly. To Chen Shouyi and others' unauthorized entry, they were either unaware or stared blankly, exceptionally creepy.

Fortunately, throughout, there was no attack behavior.

A few minutes later, inside a house, Chen Shouyi finally found Song Jieying.

She was hiding in a corner, holding a long sword, eyes shut tight, motionless, clearly her mind had also fallen into illusion.

However, she was more cautious than the previous two martial artists, not running around randomly but finding a corner to hide in.

Chen Shouyi approached, raising his hand for a slap.

When dealing with male martial artists, he hesitated not at all. But facing a beautiful lady, he momentarily hesitated.

This is for your own good!

Thinking this, hardening his heart, he slapped down.

With a "pa" sound.

Chen Shouyi leaned aside to avoid her attack!

Not awake?

Then continued with both hands slapping.

Pa! Pa! Pa!

After four consecutive slaps, Song Yingjie finally woke up, saw Chen Shouyi, and said with surprise, "General Manager Chen, why are you here?"

"On a mission," Chen Shouyi said, avoiding looking at her slightly swollen face, the only consolation being the swelling was even, symmetrically on both sides, only looking slightly chubbier, then continued, "It's too dangerous here, I'll take you all away first."

General Manager Chen!

Qian Wei and Zhao Jiankai glanced at each other in shock; Qian Wei finally remembered why Chen Shouyi's name sounded familiar, as if heard somewhere before.

So it was the Great God.

He's a martial master.

Always elusive, dragon-seen and not seen, seldom anyone had met.

He didn't recognize it earlier and thought the other was a martial artist like him, even calling him brother.

He looked remorseful.

"General... General Advisor, I..." Qian Wei began to explain.

Chen Shouyi put his finger to his lips and said softly, "Don't talk!"

He sensed a clear anomaly and quickly walked to the door.

The scene in front of him startled him.

A large number of soldiers, armed with rifles, had already surrounded the area.

Chapter 363: Peering (Part 1)

The rest of the group quickly arrived as well.

The atmosphere immediately became tense.

Twelve soldiers walked into the courtyard, each crouching on the ground, aiming their rifles at the group.

These soldiers had vacant and numb expressions, clearly under the control of some mysterious creature.

Chen Shouyi's face was cold and stern, his hand on the sword hilt, and his perception rapidly spread out. Despite the interference from surrounding Spiritual Power, his mind's image shook violently, but it didn't have much effect.

He noticed more soldiers standing outside, surrounding the entire building.

"Wake up, you've got it wrong; we're civilian martial artists, we're all on the same side," Qian Wei shouted loudly, cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

Martial artists could also be injured or killed by bullets, not much better than ordinary people. Facing so many soldiers, even though he was a martial artist, he didn't dare trust he could escape unharmed.

"Stop shouting, it's useless. They're completely controlled," Song Yingjie said with a grim expression.

Meanwhile, four more soldiers entered the courtyard, one of them carrying a rocket launcher.

"Chief Consultant, what should we do?" Zhao Jiankai asked nervously, his eyelids twitching.

"Follow me and break out!" Chen Shouyi said solemnly.

As he unsheathed his sword, the sound of gunfire erupted.

In an instant, the group behind him saw Chen Shouyi's figure blur, countless arms flashing like phantoms in mid-air, transforming him into the Thousand-Handed Guanyin.

"Clang clang clang clang..."

The dense sound of metal clashes rang out, sparks flying everywhere, illuminating the group's faces alternatively bright and dark, their breaths quickened, nerves taut.

Countless bullets either deflected or dropped from the air,

Half a hot bullet splattered onto Qian Wei's face, jolting him awake. He looked at Chen Shouyi, already two meters ahead, and snapped back to reality, loudly exclaiming:

"Quick, follow the Chief Consultant."

Chen Shouyi's expression remained calm; his sword cut, stabbed, swept, or chopped... The sword light was swift as a galloping horse, flowing without a trace. To these weak martial artists, no one could see the trajectory of his sword.

And no bullet could escape his attack range.

He pushed forward against the barrage of bullets, leaving deep footprints in the ground with each step.

"Boom!"

A soldier hidden in the fog, carrying a rocket launcher, finally fired.

The intense firelight lit up the pitch-black night all of a sudden.

Chen Shouyi felt a sinking feeling in his heart.

The maximum speed of a rocket is only about three hundred meters per second; under normal circumstances, he could easily dodge it. However, at this moment, if he evaded, the people behind him would inevitably suffer casualties.

He didn't have many friends!

On the one hand, he had been introverted since childhood, somewhat socially anxious with strangers. Though later improved, he still didn't enjoy socializing.

On the other hand, as his strength increased, finding people who could converse equally became rarer; many became intimidated upon learning his identity.

Song Jieying was one of his relatively few familiar friends.

Seeing the rocket flying rapidly towards him, Chen Shouyi's thoughts raced, his will focused.

The rocket, spewing flames as it approached, suddenly arced at nearly ninety degrees and soared into the sky before reaching him.

His current maximum control strength was about thirty kilograms; he couldn't yet fly, but maneuvering a rocket head weighing less than three kilograms was effortless.

He quickly took two steps forward, arriving in front of a soldier.

A flash of cold light, the soldier's rifle split into two, then the soldier was knocked out by Chen Shouyi.

Next was the second, then the third...

A soldier in the distance took out a grenade, attempting to throw it at Chen Shouyi, but before he could pull the safety pin, the grenade was forcibly tugged by an invisible force into the air.

In just three or four seconds,

The soldiers in the courtyard were already lying on the ground.

Only after this, the rocket that flew into the sky reached its natural detonation time, resulting in a muffled explosion.

"Quick, let's go," Chen Shouyi said solemnly.

As he spoke, he took a step forward, his body seemingly shrinking the ground and shot out the courtyard's gate.

Two approaching soldiers were knocked to the ground before they could react.

Song Yingjie and others were watching in shock, hurriedly following along.

More soldiers swarmed this way, even villagers from both sides of the house with vacant expressions stepped out into the eerie atmosphere.

But here, even the weakest martial artist was far stronger than the soldiers; their movements were agile and swift, even capable of running on walls. Under Chen Shouyi's lead, they successfully broke through the encirclement in no time.

Except for Zhao Jiankai's shoulder, which was grazed by a bullet, everyone escaped unharmed.

...

"Have you heard that sharp, noisy sound?" Qian Wei panted, slapping his face repeatedly, his eyes bloodshot.

"I did too!" Zhao Jiankai said uneasily.

Only Song Yingjie remained silent.

Chen Shouyi glanced back, his expression darkened. He noticed that over time, the three were starting to act strangely.

"Hurry, as soon as we get out of the fog, it'll be fine," Chen Shouyi said.

A group quickly accelerated, moving swiftly.

The surrounding fog rolled, Chen Shouyi felt increasingly strong interference with his perceptions; things were blurry two meters away, and even holding the sword for perception amplification, it only extended seven or eight meters, whereas normally he could reach fifteen meters.

A sword swiftly pierced through the air, towards Chen Shouyi's back.

His body seemed to know in advance, slightly dodging, the longsword grazing past his shoulder, tearing the short sleeve of his T-shirt.

Before he could continue, the sword was gripped by a large iron-like hand, then shifted sideways, causing the attacker behind to lose balance and stumble forward, before Chen Shouyi seized the sword, trapping the attacker under his arm, lifting them up.

As casually as lifting a chick.

It was Song Jieying.

The other two, seeing this, felt a chill in their hearts. Their muddled heads cleared, they quickly sped up.

Who knows if this control would still affect them outside the fog, if it's irreversible, they'd be doomed.

The two pushed their limits, desperately running behind Chen Shouyi.

Song Jieying struggled intensely like a fish out of water, punching and kicking, even trying to bite Chen Shouyi's waist, completely frenzied, but to him, it felt like mere scratching.

He glanced down.

"A woman going crazy does seem terrifying!"

"But now as a Martial Artist level, even with all her might, she can't hurt me anymore. Wonder how a Grand Martial Artist would fare!" Chen Shouyi thought to himself while running.

As they were about to leave the fog, his peripheral vision suddenly caught a tall shadow quietly watching from afar.

Chapter 364: Soul-Devouring Monster

When Chen Shouyi turned his head, the shadow had already disappeared without a trace.

"Can't hold back anymore?"

He had the mind to chase after it.

But he was still carrying Song Yingjie, and was about a hundred meters away from escaping the dense fog. He hesitated for a moment and could only temporarily suppress the impulse in his heart.

Everything would be discussed after delivering Song Jieying safely.

Chen Shouyi quickened his pace, and in a moment, they broke through the dense fog one after another.

Qian Wei and Zhao Jiankai were drenched in sweat, their chests heaving violently, only feeling like they've survived a disaster. Even the moonlight tonight seemed bright.

Song Yingjie, who had been struggling all along, suddenly quieted down, her eyes clearing: "What...what happened to me just now?"

"You were controlled." Chen Shouyi stopped, seeing that she had returned to normal, he breathed a sigh of relief and said:

"Your will seems a bit weak!"

Song Yingjie blushed slightly.

At this time, she felt her chest pressed firmly against the other's waist, causing a burning pain, a blush appearing on her face: "Chen... General Manager Chen, you can put me down now."

Only then did Chen Shouyi realize that he had been holding her by the waist all along.

She was just too light, only about a hundred pounds, so holding her didn't feel like anything.

He immediately put her down.

Song Jieying, feeling her slightly burning face, avoided eye contact, and concealed her embarrassment by brushing her bob haircut: "Thank you this time!"

"Just a matter of convenience!" Chen Shouyi said.

Fortunately, at this moment, the company commander and instructor of the troops quickly came over, rescuing both of them from the awkward conversation: "General Advisor, how's the situation?"

"It's okay, I see that most are still alive, just temporarily controlled." Chen Shouyi said: "In a while, let me see if I can kill that mysterious creature."

For someone used to witnessing death, as long as bodies aren't strewn everywhere, it's not considered serious.

"Then I'll leave it to you, General Advisor!"

"It's my duty!" Chen Shouyi said.

After taking a tour through the fog this time, he basically had a grasp in his heart. That mysterious presence didn't bother to attack openly, but lurked in the fog, already indicating its caution.

If that's the case, then what was there to fear?

Afterwards, Chen Shouyi rested for a few minutes, waiting for his exhausted mind to recover, then re-entered the dense fog.

...

Once Chen Shouyi left.

The atmosphere here lightened up.

"Who would have thought we'd encounter the legendary Provincial General Advisor today? If I go back and tell others that I've carried out a mission with a Martial Artist, would anyone believe it?" Qian Wei said with excitement.

"What do you mean by carrying out a mission together? He's just in a good mood and conveniently saved a few of us." Zhao Jiankai said.

He's not stupid; he naturally understood that the main purpose was to save Song Jieying, and they were just incidental.

One sheep or a flock, they're still just sheep.

Would a Martial Artist really waste time on a round trip just to save a few unfamiliar Martial Artists in advance, delaying the mission?

If it weren't for his acquaintance with Song Jieying, they wouldn't have bothered with them at all.

"I even called him buddy earlier!" Qian Wei said with pride.

He was well aware of this, but it didn't dampen his excitement in the slightest.

This was a Martial Artist, the pinnacle of Martial Artists!

A god-like figure, revered by all in the martial world.

Just seeing him from afar would be enough to boast for days, let alone having a few face-to-face conversations.

"You really have guts. If it were me, my legs would have gone weak."

Qian Wei was about to speak when he suddenly noticed something, exclaiming: "Look, is the dense fog shrinking?"

...

Once inside the fog, Chen Shouyi began searching for the silhouette of the mysterious presence.

Unfortunately, the mist was thick, coupled with the darkness of the night, visibility was less than five meters. Beyond that, only vague shadows could be discerned, but even so, he couldn't see more than ten meters away.

As for the amplification provided by this Divine Sword, it was even less than that distance.

He wandered for a long time but never saw the previous towering shadow that flashed past.

He realized that if the other party genuinely intended to hide, he truly wouldn't be able to locate it.

He hated enemies like this the most.

Always hiding, never straightforward.

Why not have a direct confrontation?

"The dense fog is an obstacle to me, but perhaps not to it!" Chen Shouyi mused in his heart: "The enemy is in the open, and I am in the dark! The only way now is to force it to reveal itself."

He didn't rush to search anymore, instead pondering strategies while moving around.

With a "bang!"

Chen Shouyi's head tilted slightly, a bullet skimming past his ear, bringing a trace of heat, the smell of gunpowder in the air.

At this moment, he thought of the old woman he saw for the first time.

He wondered what the monster's intention was.

Leaving the young and soldiers alive, Chen Shouyi understood.

After all, they had a certain combat capability and could serve as minions.

But why did the mysterious creature not kill the old lady, who was so weak she could fall with a gust of wind, and instead, even made her gnaw on corpses to prevent starvation?

Could it be of benefit to it?

This can be easily tested!

He lifted his head towards where the bullet came from, and with a tap of his toes, his silhouette vanished into the mist.

Within seconds, he was running towards the village outskirts, carrying two soldiers under his arm.

...

In the mist.

A shadow, three meters tall, was irritably waving its tendrils.

It had a terrifying appearance, seemingly like a creature that had emerged from Hell.

Its upper body was humanoid with black, sharp fingernails; the lower part was entirely made of slippery tendrils. It had no eyes, no mouth, and none of the usual facial features, with snake-like hair, giving it a deeply unsettling look.

As one of the most terrifying creatures from the Tamu World.

The Soul-Devouring Monster remained the deepest nightmare for all living beings.

It was a natural Soul Master.

It could control the thoughts of creatures and form a link with them, amplifying its Spiritual Power, thereby releasing Spiritual Mist.

As long as creatures stayed in the Spiritual Mist long enough, even if it didn't actively control, they would be subtly assimilated, becoming part of its mental network.

And most terrifying is, the more creatures it controlled, the stronger the Spiritual Mist it could release.

Generally speaking, such creatures have a fixed territory, they don't wander around aimlessly.

After all, if it left its long-established territory, its power would greatly diminish, making it vulnerable to even slightly stronger creatures.

In fact, had it not been too arrogant, recklessly expanding its territory, offending a deity, and eventually being defeated badly, it wouldn't have been forced to abandon everything and flee here hastily.

This mountain village was the foundation it painstakingly built in this alien world, and the power it accumulated was less than a thousandth of its prime, now at its weakest.

And Chen Shouyi's actions were no less than pulling out the firewood under the cauldron, continuously sapping its strength.

Chapter 365: Senior

The four soldiers only weighed two or three hundred kilograms, which was completely insignificant compared to his seventeen hundred kilograms of Divine Power.

In just a few minutes, Chen Shouyi ran back and forth five times, escorting twenty soldiers.

He noticed the thick fog was shrinking without needing anyone to remind him.

Compared to the beginning, the range of the fog retreated by more than five meters.

This powerfully validated his judgment.

The source of this monster's power was undoubtedly related to the people it controlled.

Chen Shouyi felt that if all the people controlled within the fog were brought out, the monster would have no choice but to reveal itself even if it wanted to hide.

Just like fish in the water.

No matter how well they hide or how fast they swim.

If you drain the water, the fish will be powerless to jump.

Chen Shouyi rested for half a minute before venturing into the mist again.

This time, as soon as he entered, he sharply sensed a strong sense of unease; he was being targeted.

"The enemy finally couldn't hold back any longer!"

As Chen Shouyi continued forward, he glanced at his watch and discovered it was already ten o'clock.

He had wasted two hours.

By the time he returned, it would likely be eleven.

The fog churned around him, and the disturbance to his perception was getting increasingly severe. Vaguely, there seemed to be piercing and noisy sounds, as if a force was attempting to infiltrate his mind. Only when he gripped the sword hilt did these noises get blocked, and his mind instantly regained clarity.

This is a formidable enemy!

He took it seriously in his heart, gathering his will with concentration.

He looked ahead; although the front was a thick fog and he couldn't see anything, he instinctively felt the monster was right there.

And it was slowly approaching!

The interfering force was growing stronger, his mind's sense, which radiated like waves, had already completely disintegrated and shredded.

Moreover, countless strands of Spiritual Power were desperately trying to burrow into his brain.

"Foolish human, here lies my domain—the great King of Dreams, the source of all fear, Di Luoluo's territory. Leave now, or stay here forever." A grand and ethereal voice resonated in his heart.

Step by step, Chen Shouyi moved forward, his expression solemn, his gathered will like a rock immovable in a rushing current, blocking all invading Spiritual Power completely outside, his mind unwavering.

"There are always deluded creatures attempting to challenge the great King of Dreams, but the outcome is always becoming my slaves, unable to escape even in death, forever sinking." The voice sounded again, loudly in a threatening tone.

Chen Shouyi threw the War Bow to the ground and slowly drew out the sword, holding it casually at his side.

He breathed deeply, feeling his blood flow gradually accelerating and boiling, yet the expression on his face became increasingly calm and peaceful, his steps slowing as if before the short tranquility of a storm, all murderous intent gathered within.

"My patience has worn thin..."

A hazy yet towering shadow finally manifested in the dense fog.

"I see you!"

He erupted instantly, tearing through the mist like a blurred phantom, taking two consecutive steps to close in on the monster's tall and menacing figure.

He stomped heavily, causing the concrete floor to crack suddenly, his figure leaping into the air. His cold eyes fixed unwaveringly on the creature's eerie faceless head, the Long Sword slicing through the air like lightning.

The sword slices, and the neck is severed.

The head rolled onto the ground with a lurch.

"Something's wrong!" As soon as Chen Shouyi landed, he sensed something amiss.

He quickly turned around to see the three-meter high headless corpse collapsing with a thud, blood gushing forth.

Everything seemed quite normal; even the surrounding fog was slowly thinning and retreating, yet quickly, the corpse slowly began to blur and dissipate.

"No good, it's trying to escape!"

He picked up the War Bow and followed his intuition, chasing swiftly.

He noticed along the way, one soldier after another, villagers alike, falling to the ground unconscious.

The fog was getting thinner.

Soon, Chen Shouyi caught sight of the monster's shadow in the distance.

Perhaps, it wasn't attempting to escape.

At this moment, the air around it distorted into a blur, with auroras dancing nearby, occasionally streaking with currents of electricity, its immense Spiritual Power now beginning to affect reality.

It looked up at the helicopter circling in the sky.

The next moment, the helicopter spun out of control and plummeted straight down.

Chen Shouyi hurried along the street, drawing closer like a nimble panther in the night, the closer he got to the monster, the stronger the anxiety he felt, his sixth sense warning him.

Danger!

Chen Shouyi dared not go further, abruptly halting and hiding behind a wall corner, silently and smoothly drawing an arrow.

No sooner had he moved than the monster withdrew its gaze and turned towards Chen Shouyi.

Utterly disregarding physical obstacles, hidden behind the wall corner, Chen Shouyi trembled all over, feeling a pressure akin to the collapse of heaven and earth crushing down on him, concurrently a piercing scream erupted in his mind.

His consciousness started to blur, blood trickling from his nose and mouth, eyes bloodshot, his mental defenses gradually crumbling.

His mind began to swarm with illusions, his awareness becoming hazy.

"Damn it."

He gritted his teeth fiercely, relying on his remaining rationality, and stepped out from the corner of the wall. Struggling, he drew the bow without seeing the target clearly and shot an arrow.

"Boom!"

The arrow grazed the monster's body in an instant, tearing open a blood streak but missing its target.

However, this also startled the monster, immediately interrupting its attack.

Chen Shouyi's mind cleared slightly, without caring about his splitting headache, he immediately seized the rare opportunity.

In the blink of an eye, his hand turned into a blur.

"Boom boom boom boom!"

The first arrow hit the arm, severing it.

The second arrow struck the chest, piercing through a large hole.

The third arrow hit the chest again, breaking its spine.

The fourth arrow hit the neck, and the entire head was shot into the air.

Before the head could land, it was hit by an arrow, exploding midair, with blood and flesh splattering everywhere.

Chen Shouyi discovered that although this monster was terrifying, its physical strength was negligible. Facing such high-speed arrows, it had no power to dodge; it was shot into a beehive in just a brief moment.

As the oppressive low pressure before the storm gradually dissipated.

Chen Shouyi's mind relaxed, and he quickly reached out to support the wall, panting heavily.

Damn, it's finally dead.

Originally thought to be a minor character, unexpectedly it was a big shark, nearly capsizing the boat.

At this moment, a sound of dense footsteps came from the ears.

Chen Shouyi regained his senses, withdrew his hand, carefully wiped his nosebleed, and turned around.

A large number of soldiers had already entered the village, checking the conditions of their fallen comrades and villagers.

Among them, a group of people walked quickly toward this side.

"General Manager, are you injured?" The battalion commander of the troops asked with concern, showing respect.

Although Chen Shouyi's head still hurt as if it were being torn apart, his spirit was languid, and he wished to lay down immediately, but seeing everyone's eyes filled with respect and admiration, Chen Shouyi forced himself to perk up, calmly saying, "I'm fine!"

Is there anything wrong?

No matter what happens, as a dignified martial artist, he cannot show it in front of a group of martial artists and officers.

It would be too embarrassing.

...

Thanks to Chen Shouyi's fortune.

All martial artists returned by helicopter.

Qian Wei touched here and there, face full of curiosity, respectfully glanced at Chen Shouyi resting with eyes closed, and whispered to Zhao Jiankai, "This is my first time on a helicopter. I wonder when we will have this kind of treatment?"

"In your dreams!" Zhao Jiankai replied with a cold witticism.

Qian Wei paid no mind and then said with a heavy expression, "I wonder how Sun Jin and Dong Siyang are doing? Sun Jin, when mentioned, was in the same batch as me."

Sun Jin and Dong Siyang were two other martial artists who came along with them. Like the soldiers and villagers, they all fell into a coma. Until they left, they still hadn't woken up and were directly sent to the town's hospital.

"They should be fine. I'm not also well as before!" Song Jieying said.

Upon hearing this, Chen Shouyi opened his eyes and looked out the window.

Actually, the two are not the same.

In the final battle, when the monster gathered all its power and made a desperate gamble, all controlled people's spiritual power was drained and exhausted, possibly even their souls had disappeared.

If lucky, they would wake up in a few days.

If unlucky, they might be vegetative for a lifetime.

Such things naturally cannot be said.

After closing his eyes for a while, he felt the headache had improved considerably, and his exhausted mind was slowly recovering.

"General Manager, you woke up. Did we wake you up?" Song Jieying said. She now followed others in calling him this, no longer addressed as General Manager Chen, to avoid confusion with the great martial artist President Qin. Today, she discovered from others in shock that Chen Shouyi was already a martial artist.

"I'm just resting my mind, you guys keep chatting, it's alright!" Chen Shouyi said with a smile.

"General Manager is really approachable, not putting on airs at all." Qian Wei quickly flattered.

"General Manager is easy to talk to, often supporting the younger generation." Jin Feiyan also said cautiously.

Chen Shouyi smiled and didn't speak, inwardly sighing slightly.

Thinking about it, he was only eighteen.

A youth blooming like a flower!

Though younger than those here, yet seemingly he was a senior.

Could no longer chat well with people in the martial artist circle.

Blame it on his quick progress in strength.

So tiring!

...

After more than ten minutes, the helicopter landed on the lawn of the villa area. After bidding farewell to Song Yingjie and others, he was the first to step out of the helicopter and walked toward home.

Chapter 366: Southeast Asia

Chen Shouyi opened the door. Although he didn't intentionally make a big noise, he still woke his parents.

Perhaps they weren't asleep at all.

"Are you hurt?"

"No!"

"Then go to bed early!"

"Got it."

...

Chen Shouyi opened the door, dragging his exhausted body into the bedroom. The Shell Lady was still playing.

The bed was covered with all sorts of messy trinkets, and the Shell Lady was sitting atop the red crystal orb, as if seated on a supreme throne, looking smug: "Good Giant, does it look nice?"

"Nice!" Chen Shouyi said with a smirk, placing his bow and sword on the desk, then reasserted ownership: "But that ruby is mine, you'll have to give it back to me later."

"Stingy, petty Bad Giant, Little One knows." The Shell Lady said dejectedly, secretly plotting how to snatch the gem.

Chen Shouyi snorted coldly at this: "Then I won't let you play with this glowing ruby anymore."

As he spoke, he tore off the clothes already ripped into strips on his body and threw them into the trash can.

"Little One spoke wrongly just now, you're a great and benevolent Generous Giant." The Shell Lady immediately said with a serious face.

Chen Shouyi felt emotionally drained and didn't want to speak, so he got up and went to the bathroom!

...

Cold water gushed down from the showerhead.

Chen Shouyi closed his eyes, unable to stop recalling the monster from earlier battles.

He suddenly opened his eyes: "Such a powerful creature, I wonder if it might be a Divine Creature."

Thinking of the innate abilities brought to him by the two previous Divine Creatures, he felt a rush of excitement, quickly washed himself casually, put on underwear, and walked out of the bathroom half-naked, lying down on the bed.

He closed his eyes and quickly entered the Book of Knowledge Space.

Unfortunately, to his disappointment, the World Tree remained the same, nothing different could be seen!

"Is it because the monster was too far from me when it died, or is it because it simply wasn't a Divine Creature?" he thought, slightly greedy.

Recalling the opponent's evil and terrifying innate abilities.

Chen Shouyi couldn't help but feel a deep regret.

If he could obtain them, he had several bold and exciting ideas.

"What a pity... huh!"

At this moment, Chen Shouyi suddenly noticed that the once moonlight-like dense Power of Faith in the space also disappeared, making the entire Book of Knowledge Space much dimmer.

Chen Shouyi looked at the sky that had turned gray again:

"Could it be that the Power of Faith was consumed when resisting the opponent's Mental Attack?"

"It should be so. Power of Faith is a form of common will, inherently related to spirit, similar to the power of will in some sense. It also belongs to oneself, being part of one's power, and will naturally resist when encountering external attacks."

Thinking of this, Chen Shouyi couldn't help but feel a chill down his spine.

"This time was too close. If it weren't for the Power of Faith, which dispersed part of the monster's Mental Attack, I could have almost not come back."

Thinking of himself being controlled by that monster, he felt a bit of trepidation.

"The Power of Faith seems more useful than I thought, and now there's not a drop left, which is really unsafe!" Chen Shouyi thought: "If I encounter such a powerful Spiritual Power creature again, there won't be the same luck this time."

As a pragmatist, Chen Shouyi immediately decided that he must have the Barbarian Tribe on the small island quickly organize believers to conduct large-scale worship to replenish the Power of Faith. Anyway, it's winter now, and those barbarians are idle too.

The only problem now is how to convey the message?

"However, if believers can pass the message, I should be able to transmit information to them as well!" Chen Shouyi pondered.

He immediately looked at the faint star representing the priest of the Barbarian Tribe, trying to establish a mental link, but as soon as he sensed it, it immediately broke off.

"The Original Force of Earth is too low, and the line of faith cannot support information transmission; it's better to wait for tomorrow to return to the alien world."

...

Late at night.

A man and a woman walked out of Hedong Railway Station.

"Hedong City is much better than when I last came." A burly middle-aged man said: "Back then, it was in ruins."

"Elder Luo, you've been to Hedong City?" a young woman asked.

"I had a mission there, almost half a year ago. Let's find a place to stay first!" The middle-aged man said: "Tomorrow we contact Hedong City to see if they can provide some aid. This operation is quite dangerous, it would be best to have a Martial Artist as support!"

"Does Hedong also have Martial Artists?" the young woman asked: "They won't be fake Martial Artists, right?"

Nowadays, each province acts independently, and many new Martial Artists haven't been formally assessed before being crowned with the Martial Artist name, most of them don't live up to it.

"Counting those with a little embellishment, maybe three. I just don't know how many are left now. Having all three sent over seems unlikely. Having one should be no problem!" the middle-aged man chuckled.

He didn't know that Jiangnan Province had only one Martial Artist left, as Xiao Changming and Lei Ruiyang had both died.

"I think it's unlikely, there's heavy local protection now. They treat Martial Artists as precious treasures and probably won't send them for support." The young woman said, a bit indignantly.

As a Martial Artist from the Capital City, she's seen this phenomenon often. Local governments always only care about their own little patch and would shirk responsibilities regarding matters outside their provinces.

"But this time they surely won't sit idly by. East Sea Province is right next to Jiangnan Province. If East Sea Province falls, Jiangnan Province would be next!" the middle-aged man said, his complexion slightly serious.

The situation in East Sea Province is quite severe; the spreading cult is uncontrollable, affecting not only the public but possibly even the higher-ups might be dragged in, or something might have happened**

Since the mutation, communication has been severed, transportation is hindered, coupled with deliberate destruction and blockades.

East Sea Province has become like a black hole of information, with not a single piece of information coming through. It wasn't until about a month and a half ago when the dispatched federal investigation team vanished without a trace that it finally caught the upper echelons' attention.

According to the existing intelligence, the situation in East Sea Province involves not only the Barbarian God but also a large number of Southeast Asians.

And Southeast Asian countries, based on domestic judgment, have mostly likely fallen, possibly even under Barbarian God control.

These countries are mostly militarily backward and are not nuclear-armed nations.

Originally, to appease and stop non-nuclear countries from researching nuclear weapons, the nuclear club countries signed a nuclear protection agreement with non-nuclear countries, providing unconditional nuclear protection and military aid in the event of a major incident, like a Barbarian God invasion.

Because of this, since discovering the alien world, for a full twenty years, nuclear club member countries remain under ten.

But no one expected the sudden mutation, and with the dramatic change in circumstances, that nuclear protection agreement became just a piece of worthless paper. This time they went to East Sea Province to investigate more detailed information.

Chapter 367: Primordial Divine Marrow

Chen Shouyi slowly stretched out his hand and applied a little force. Countless fibers of muscle, as fine as steel wires, bulged on his arm, filled with immense strength.

"Finally, my strength has reached 17 points."

"It looks much better than 16.9!" he thought to himself.

With this level of strength, the War Bow, which used to feel heavy at 2000 pounds, now felt manageable and effortless.

At this moment, his mind stirred slightly. He closed his eyes to sense it, and a slight smile appeared at the corner of his mouth.

A grand sacrificial ceremony was being held on a distant island. Now the number of Barbarians on the island was not just two or three hundred, but over a thousand, and the converted believers were close to six hundred.

Although the number of believers has not broken through four digits and is still pitifully small, the Power of Faith generated during the fervent sacrificial ceremony was already quite considerable. As this "massive" Power of Faith continuously surged into his body, Chen Shouyi felt a pleasant light intoxication.

The Power of Faith can slowly strengthen the power of Divine Creatures, change its essence, and gradually make it closer to a deity.

However, this speed was really too slow, and for Chen Shouyi, its main function was still to protect the soul.

...

By evening.

Chen Shouyi returned home to find that there were guests at home. Besides Chen Xingyue and Bai Xiaoling, there were Luo Jingwen and an unfamiliar woman.

She looked about twenty years old, with fair skin and a beautiful appearance, exuding a competent demeanor. Seeing Chen Shouyi, a glimmer of excitement flashed in her eyes, and she couldn't help but glance a few more times.

Chen Shouyi couldn't help but feel a little surprised.

A Martial Artist from the Capital City, what are they doing looking for me?

Chen Xingyue was bored, accompanying them by the side. Seeing her brother return, she couldn't wait to say, "Brother, you're back. They're all here for you."

Looking at Chen Xingyue's bored expression, Chen Shouyi knew that Luo Jingwen hadn't revealed his identity as a Martial Artist. Otherwise, his sister wouldn't have had this expression. He felt slightly relieved and said to his sister, "We have some things to discuss. You go and cook."

Bai Xiaoling was just about to speak when Luo Jingwen stood up, extended his hand with a smile, and said,

"Brother Chen, long time no see. You won't blame us for coming uninvited, will you?"

Chen Shouyi shook hands with him out of courtesy: "You're welcome. What brings you here?"

He only knew these Martial Artists from the Capital City from the previous mission to retrieve the nuclear bomb. There was no real relationship, and he had barely spoken a few words to this one.

Luo Jingwen, in that group of five Martial Artists who came to execute the mission, was at the peak of the second tier in power, only second to Ye Zong.

And back then, Chen Shouyi had just recently become a Martial Artist. Xiao Changming and Lei Ruiyang were merely quasi-Martial Artists. The people from Hedong City were in stark contrast in status to them. Apart from Lu Shouhu and Ye Zong being relatively approachable, others rarely interacted.

Bai Xiaoling was afraid that the inexperienced General Manager Chen would be deceived and spoke out hastily. "General Manager Chen, they are here to request your support. The government has given a preliminary agreement, but whether you agree is entirely up to you. If you find it inconvenient, you can completely refuse."

Luo Jingwen's expression didn't change in the slightest, still full of smiles, but that young woman looked a bit displeased.

"Miss Bai is right. That's indeed the case. This task is to go to East Sea Province, and there might be some danger, but in general, safety can still be assured." Luo Jingwen said confidently.

As a peak Martial Artist, he was confident in this aspect. As long as they didn't encounter extraordinarily powerful forces, he could basically guarantee the safety of the team members.

Chen Shouyi frowned slightly.

Going to East Sea Province!

Did something happen in East Sea Province?

"Since there's no danger, the two of you should be enough," Chen Shouyi said sternly, with a hint of refusal in his words.

Tasks within his province were fine. As the province's chief security consultant, he enjoyed a huge allowance and superior status, so he couldn't shirk those responsibilities. But for tasks outside the province, he'd rather abstain.

Plus, this place was far away. It wasn't something you could come back from in a day or two; it might even take ten days or half a month.

At that time, he wouldn't be able to take care of things at home.

If something happened in Hedong City, he wouldn't be able to get back in time.

Luo Jingwen sighed and said, "I'll be honest with you; the situation in East Sea Province is very complicated. The entire area might have already fallen. We must investigate clearly the specific situation

there and how much of our forces remain. The strength of just the two of us seems inadequate; if you can assist, we can complete the task much more quickly."

"It's not that I don't want to help, but if you had come a few days ago, I definitely wouldn't decline. However, it's really unfortunate that last night I just fought a terrifying creature. Although I barely won, my spirit was severely injured. I might seem fine now, but I'm actually still recuperating. Sorry, there's nothing I can do." Chen Shouyi rubbed his temples, trying to put on a pained expression as he fabricated the story.

Luo Jingwen was a hundred times skeptical. How could there be such a coincidence? Furthermore, the other party seemed full of energy, and the expression was too fake. It didn't seem like someone with problems, but he didn't say much and instead responded, "I know this is not a task from your province. I'm not trying to lecture you, and ** will not ask local Martial Artists to help for nothing. This mission's reward is the Divine Marrow."

Martial Artists from the Capital City had many, but there were also many considerations. It was already stretched thin, and every time they carried out missions outside the Capital, they were tasks the local authorities couldn't handle, which were extremely dangerous. Therefore, they had certain authority to recruit team members, albeit no more than two, whose identity needed to be recognized by local Martial Artists.

Hearing this, Chen Shouyi asked in confusion, "Divine Marrow?"

"Primordial Divine Marrow, derived from a weak-level deity killed in Jiqing Province. You should know that Divine Marrow's main effect is enhancing intelligence. It's more precious than Divine Blood, and Primordial Divine Marrow is even more so," Luo Jingwen explained.

Chen Shouyi was surprised at heart.

He knew the other party wasn't lying.

Primordial Divine Marrow came from the spinal cord and brain of a deity.

Before the mutation, the Martial Artists' internal network also provided Divine Marrow, priced the same as Divine Blood, but those had regressed through countless generations during cultivation and could be extracted in large quantities.

Genuine Divine Marrow was much rarer than Divine Blood.

Although Divine Blood could also improve intelligence to some extent, its primary role was enhancing strength, agility, and physique, with intelligence being secondary.

The reason Chen Shouyi's intelligence improved significantly last time was that intelligence was the lowest of all his attributes, and he used raw Divine Blood that hadn't been separated.

On the other hand, Divine Marrow primarily enhances intelligence, making it even more valuable.

Such items were hard for Martial Artists to obtain and were basically reserved for important scientific researchers. A genius like Einstein meant more to human civilization than any Martial Artist. Like when the God of Courage fell, he never even saw a trace of Divine Marrow.

Unexpectedly, the reward for a national mission is so generous!

Much more generous than the monetary rewards in the province.

Chen Shouyi initially wanted to refuse again but found no resistance in his heart. Torn for a while, he finally asked, "When do we leave?"

The young woman sitting beside secretly sneered.

Weren't you spiritually wounded and had no way?

How come you're not mentioning that now!

Chapter 368: Stingy

In the evening, Chen Shouyi told his parents that he would be going out for a while the next day.

Then he returned to his bedroom.

Sigh!

Still couldn't resist the temptation!

So impulsive!

His attribute imbalance is severe right now, with intelligence being his biggest shortcoming.

Strength: 17.0

Agility: 17.6

Constitution: 17.0

Intelligence: 16.3

Perception: 14.7

Willpower: 16.0

Energy Accumulation: 1.92

Compared to the highest agility, intelligence is 1.3 points lower.

If you count the Divine Sword's blessing, perception even reaches 17.8, creating a gap of 1.5 points between the two.

This severely hinders his strength's potential.

In fact, this kind of attribute imbalance is not unique to Chen Shouyi; every Martial Artist has it, sometimes even more severe. It's just that not everyone can intuitively see their attribute values, so they don't perceive it.

"I don't know how much Divine Marrow this mission will reward?" Chen Shouyi wasn't greedy. He would feel satisfied if his intelligence could reach seventeen.

That way, strength, agility, constitution, and intelligence can all reach seventeen points.

It would look much more pleasing all at once.

And with the last remaining shortcoming addressed, his strength would see a monumental increase.

Now he increasingly feels that the thinking speed represented by intelligence is the most important among all attributes.

No matter how strong your agility and strength are, if your thinking is slow, you're still a target.

After all, the brain is the information processing center. If it can't process information, no matter how strong the other hardware is, it's useless; it cannot be driven.

"Big mouse, big rooster, big cricket!" The Shell Lady was reading loudly from a new children's picture book Chen Shouyi bought, using awkward Chinese: "Big prepared... no, big white pig, big white rabbit."

"Good giant, what is this bad guy?" the Shell Lady pointed at a picture of a turtle.

"Turtle!" Chen Shouyi took a glance and said.

"Big turtle! Big mountain goat..." the Shell Lady continued reading.

Actually, the Shell Lady has a high IQ. She remembers many things after being taught once, which is quite convenient. It's just that she has a quirk; she likes to add the word 'big' to every animal.

"Good giant, what about this chubby bad guy?"

"Elephant!"

"Big elephant..."

Perhaps finding it awkward to read, the Shell Lady paused, looking a bit puzzled: "Good giant, is it really called a big elephant?"

"Just called an elephant, the largest land animal in the world," Chen Shouyi explained patiently for once, glancing at it.

The Shell Lady was instantly awed by Chen Shouyi's words and looked at the picture of the elephant with reverence, loudly saying: "Big elephant..."

...

At midnight.

Chen Shouyi left a note in the living room and quietly slipped out of the house.

He didn't look like someone about to go far.

Besides a briefcase and a sword, he didn't carry much luggage.

This time, diving into the East Sea Province to investigate required discretion and caution, traveling light and simple.

A sword was fine, as almost every Martial Artist Apprentice carried a sword; it's quite common.

But a war bow and luggage were too conspicuous; he couldn't bring them.

The moonlight was hazy on the streets, and apart from the patrolling soldiers, there was no one else. After several inspections, Chen Shouyi finally reached the helicopter pad.

Two others had already been waiting there.

"Sorry for being late!"

"We arrived early," Luo Jingwen said. "Oh, and we haven't introduced you yet, Zhu Xueqing, a genius Martial Artist; you two should have much in common!"

"Hello, Sister Zhu! I'm Chen Shouyi," Chen Shouyi politely greeted.

"I already know, just call me by my name!" Zhu Xueqing said, looking at Chen Shouyi, who appeared heroic in the moonlight, a hint of redness on her face.

"Alright, Vermilion Blood Essence!" Chen Shouyi readily corrected himself.

Why does this name sound a bit odd?

"Let's chat on the way, get on the helicopter first!" Luo Jingwen interrupted.

Once the three boarded the helicopter, it immediately took off.

Luo Jingwen took out a military map, spread it out, and said, "The helicopter won't fly directly to East Sea Province but will stop at Nanshan City, bordering East Sea Province, and return!"

He drew a line on the map with his finger and continued, "There's a mountain range here. We'll cross this at night to enter Qujiang City in East Sea Province."

"Is the situation over there already that bad?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Safety first, being cautious is never wrong. We're only going to investigate the situation; we won't stir up trouble if avoidable," Luo Jingwen cautioned. His approach was always safety first, rarely taking risks.

"Indeed!" Chen Shouyi nodded.

"Once we reach Qujiang City, we'll assess the situation and then decide our next move," Luo Jingwen collected the map as he spoke.

Sitting in the helicopter was boring. After chatting for a while, the initial unfamiliarity faded, and everyone started talking more.

"Do Martial Artists in the Capital City always get such high rewards for tasks?"

"How is that possible!" Zhu Xueqing said, "Only when going on missions that are relatively dangerous do you get such rewards. Otherwise, it's only bonuses."

Chen Shouyi felt balanced inside.

However, compared to local Martial Artists, the Capital City does offer a lot more resources.

Nowadays, most Barbarian Gods are eliminated by the nuclear strategic unit, directly under the central government. Divine Corpses aren't always entirely vaporized; many times, there's some left.

Chen Shouyi didn't know how the central and local governments share these spoils, but they probably get at least half.

At this point, Zhu Xueqing asked curiously, "I heard from Elder Luo that you have a Thumbelina?"

"His girlfriend!" Luo Jingwen couldn't help but laugh.

Chen Shouyi felt a bit embarrassed, glancing at Luo Jingwen. How could someone so mature still be so silly? He made a hasty reply: "Just keeping her for fun."

"Did you bring her?" Zhu Xueqing asked.

Luo Jingwen teased, "He brought her last time. His girlfriend is always with him."

Chen Shouyi flushed slightly, trying to explain: "She's quite timid, afraid of strangers, and likes to stick close to me..."

"Come on, show me quickly!" Zhu Xueqing's eyes sparkled, urging him eagerly.

"She's asleep, you can't see her."

"Just a peek, don't be so stingy!" Zhu Xueqing tugged at Chen Shouyi's arm, acting spoiled.

Are we that close?

Chen Shouyi felt a bit frustrated, setting some ground rules: "You can only look, no touching, and don't scare her."

Zhu Xueqing rolled her eyes at Chen Shouyi, thinking he's really stingy, as if she would snatch it: "Alright, alright, hurry up."

Chen Shouyi had no choice but to pick up the briefcase at his side and unzip it.

He found that the Shell Lady was already awake.

Chen Shouyi simply scooped her out and placed her on his palm.

"Wow! She's so cute." Zhu Xueqing gazed at the little one, only a few inches tall, her eyes sparkling: "Did you dress her?"

"She dressed herself!" Chen Shouyi quickly said.

Of course, he used to dress her before, but he wouldn't admit that.

"Is she easy to raise? What does she usually eat?" Zhu Xueqing asked excitedly.

Chen Shouyi gave her a wary glance. Why is she asking so many questions?

He replied reluctantly:

"Honey!"

"So easy to take care of!"

The Shell Lady trembled slightly at the surrounding bad giants watching her: "Good giant, quickly drive away these bad giants. They want to eat little one."

Next to him, Luo Jingwen laughed at what he heard: "Good giant, bad giant, what on earth have you been teaching her?"

As a Martial Artist, everyone had mastered the common language.

Chen Shouyi looked a bit awkward, swiftly changing the subject: "Alright, alright, stop watching, you're scaring her!"

Then he put the Shell Lady back into the briefcase.

Chapter 369: Peaceful and Harmonious East Sea Province

"Stingy!" Zhu Xueqing watched as the Shell Lady was placed into a briefcase, looking frustrated, then her eyes twinkled as she said:

"A big man like you raising a little girl, people will laugh to death. How about giving her to me? Don't worry, I'll take good care of her."

Wishful thinking.

I won't even give my sister away, let alone to you?

Shell Lady really shouldn't be seen by women.

Such a thumb-sized girl is most lethal to women.

Fortunately, I was wise enough not to let my sister know about the existence of Shell Lady.

Otherwise, I'd be annoyed to death.

"This is my daughter; can I just give her away so casually?" Chen Shouyi said seriously.

"You said you were raising her for fun!"

"You must have heard wrong!"

At this moment, Luo Jingwen interjected, "Alright, let's be serious. Will bringing along this little one affect your combat?"

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing. Last time when I encountered the Barbarian God in another world, I managed to escape with her," Chen Shouyi said.

There will definitely be some impact, but I can't just leave Shell Lady at home.

Fortunately, the impact isn't significant, and in a real life-and-death battle, I would naturally toss Shell Lady aside.

"You encountered the Barbarian God in another world?" Luo Jingwen exclaimed in surprise.

Zhu Xueqing also looked over, shocked.

"Some martial artists were captured by the Barbarian Tribe, and I went to rescue them. I accidentally killed too many barbarians, which alarmed the Barbarian God. Fortunately, it was just a fright," Chen Shouyi roughly explained.

Luo Jingwen breathed a sigh of relief. He had thought facing the Barbarian God, even if it were a Demigod, would not be something a Martial Artist could handle, especially in another world. Even the strongest existence in the Great Xia Country, Ye Zong, would likely face defeat.

"You're really lucky!"

...

The helicopter flew for over an hour in the darkness, landing on a flat area at the foot of a mountain. The group quickly exited the helicopter.

"This is Nanshan City, let's go!"

Chen Shouyi walked out of the helicopter and looked up at the rolling mountains ahead.

Then he followed the team, heading up the mountain.

This wasn't a scenic spot; there were no rock-paved steps, only a rugged path leading into the wooded depths.

A two-meter long, horned strange lizard with a fierce glint in its eyes rushed towards the group, only to be cut in half by Luo Jingwen's sword:

"There are quite a few otherworldly creatures here, everyone be careful."

"I've always heard that the forest teems with otherworldly creatures, and it seems it's true," Chen Shouyi said, gently flicking away a spiky flying insect.

"This is relatively mild. The real infestation is in sparsely populated areas," Zhu Xueqing said.

The group moved swiftly, traversing the steep mountain path as if it were flat ground.

In less than two hours, they had crossed several summits.

Luo Jingwen stood on a massive rock on the mountain peak, looking into the distance and said in a deep voice, "Cross one more small mountain, and we'll be there!"

Chen Shouyi and Zhu Xueqing also jumped onto the rock. In the distance, the city was pitch black, with not a glimmer of light, like a giant beast lying in the darkness.

"Could it be an empty city?" Zhu Xueqing asked.

"We won't know until we check it out," Luo Jingwen said, jumping off the rock.

The group remained silent, focusing on their journey.

In just over ten minutes, they descended the mountain.

Passing by a village, Chen Shouyi keenly sensed a familiar presence.

The Domain of Faith.

However, it was much fainter compared to the other world, barely perceptible and easily overlooked.

The night was dim, silent, with a thick smell of incense in the air.

The group exchanged heavy looks.

It was certain that this place had completely fallen.

"This place has indeed been infiltrated by the cult," Luo Jingwen said gravely.

"Why don't they flee to the neighboring Jiangnan Province? There is no defense here!" Zhu Xueqing asked in confusion.

Chen Shouyi remained silent, not speaking.

Actually, the war between humans and the Barbarian God wasn't a war of species survival.

The Barbarian God fights for faith, while humans defend their dignity as a species.

However, the common people are often the most pragmatic. As long as the Barbarian God they believe in isn't too evil or harsh, and the government doesn't crack down hard, along with tangible benefits from the faith, they'll quickly flock to it and spread it rapidly.

Even the ethereal earthly religions can attract masses of followers, let alone real gods.

As long as life is bearable, who would risk danger to flee to an unfamiliar place?

"Let's head into the city and have a look," Luo Jingwen sighed after a long time.

...

In the darkness, a patrol of soldiers strolled through the streets, laughing and chatting.

A breeze blew, and several trash bags danced on the wind.

The group hid in the corner, quietly observing.

Chen Shouyi noticed that these soldiers were undisciplined, and many faces didn't resemble those of the Great Xia Country, with quite peculiar accents,

Sensing Chen Shouyi's confusion, Luo Jingwen whispered, "According to reports, the East Sea Province has seen an influx of Southeast Asians and Chinese. The swift fall of the East Sea Province is likely related to these people."

"Southeast Asians!"

His brows furrowed. Right now, humanity's enemy was the barbarians, the creatures from the other world.

They weren't guarded against fellow humans from other countries, so if many sneaked in with malicious intent, it was truly possible!

Typically, lower-tier towns and counties had limited defenses.

Usually, there was just a garrison of a regiment, with only a few Martial Artists.

With communications and electricity cut, just one supreme Martial Artist attacking could turn an entire county upside down. If enough infiltrated and were well-organized, they could even control the entire county.

"It's only two-thirty, let's find a place first and wait until daylight," Luo Jingwen said, checking his watch.

...

This place seemed to have experienced some chaos, but empty houses weren't hard to find.

Chen Shouyi pressed his ear against the door, listening for a while: "No one's here!"

Luo Jingwen said, "I'll open the door."

After Chen Shouyi stepped aside, he took out a piece of wire, inserted it into the keyhole, and skillfully jiggled it a few times, opening the door.

"You can do that!" Chen Shouyi exclaimed in surprise.

Zhu Xueqing also looked over, surprised.

"Do you want to learn? It's sometimes quite handy!" Luo Jingwen said with a smile.

"I'll pass!" Chen Shouyi declined courteously, "I'd rather climb through a window."

This suburban self-built house had open windows on the second floor, and he thought it would be easier to just climb through.

Zhu Xueqing also showed no interest.

"Sigh, modern Martial Artists are just straightforward and rough. In the past, we underwent special agent training," Luo Jingwen said.

"Special agent training?" Chen Shouyi asked curiously.

He said as he walked into the living room, where a thick layer of dust had accumulated, clearly uninhabited for a long time.

"In the past, any Martial Artist underwent special agent training. Did you think that with the otherworldly threat, the world is completely harmonious with no disputes?" Luo Jingwen retorted.

Chapter 370: God of Order

It was already three in the morning, and everyone was too tired to tidy up.

In the living room, there was a fabric sofa. When the cloth covering it was lifted, it was barely clean enough.

After closing the door, they each sat on it, seizing the time to rest.

...

As the sky gradually brightened, Chen Shouyi opened his eyes and carefully moved Zhu Xueqing, who was drooling on his shoulder, aside.

Seeing the large wet patch on his shoulder, he was speechless internally.

What a poor sleeping posture!

He picked up the briefcase from the floor and unzipped it.

Shell Lady, in a deep sleep, opened her eyes warily, glanced at Chen Shouyi, felt relieved, turned over, closed her eyes, and continued to sleep.

Zhu Xueqing woke with a start, wiped her drool, and asked, "What happened, what's going on?"

"It's dawn!" Chen Shouyi said, zipping up the briefcase.

"It's still quite early!" Zhu Xueqing covered her mouth and yawned.

Luo Jingwen also opened his eyes full of drowsiness, rubbed his eye crust, and looked at his watch, "It's only half past five!"

Sigh, young people sure have good energy.

After sleeping for only three hours, they're so full of spirit.

"You guys keep sleeping, I'll go upstairs to the window to observe." Chen Shouyi said.

"Sure, call us if there's anything." Luo Jingwen immediately said.

Chen Shouyi went to the second floor, the living room door upstairs wasn't locked, he opened the door, crossed the living room, and went to the balcony.

He pulled open the gap in the curtains, the sky was barely bright, and a gorgeous red dawn bloomed on the horizon in the distance, enveloping the entire city in a faint red hue.

A middle-aged man with a dark complexion, sweating profusely, pulled a cart loaded with vegetables.

On the street beside him, a small eatery had already opened, with stacks of steaming baskets piled at the entrance.

And in the park further away, many people were doing their morning exercises.

No roaring steam trucks, nor towering chimneys spewing thick smoke.

This place and Hedong were already two completely different worlds, with civilization having regressed entirely, as if everything had reverted to an agrarian society.

The whole city appeared tranquil and peaceful.

...

"Dong dong dang..."

The distant church bells rang melodiously.

With the ringing of the bells, the whole city seemed to wake up completely, with a large number of pedestrians flooding the streets, appearing as a vast black mass, each person solemnly heading toward the nearby church.

The elderly, women, young people, and children.

Luo Jingwen walked over, stood at the side, watched for a long while, then said in a deep voice, "I feel like this place is no longer Great Xia Country!"

Chen Shouyi remained silent, with a sense of heaviness in his heart. In this world of mysterious manifestations, the allure of faith for humanity was truly immense. Just the promise of entering heaven after death, with believers achieving eternal life, was enough to make people flock to it.

Soon, Zhu Xueqing also came over. After asking a few questions, she fell silent too, standing by the window observing.

Half an hour later, the citizens finished their morning prayers and gradually dispersed, as the whole city began to return to normal.

Luo Jingwen, being cautious and attentive, pulled the curtains and said, "I noticed that everyone had a badge on their chest. We must first get a few!"

"I'll handle this!" Chen Shouyi volunteered.

As a temporarily recruited team member, such small tasks naturally fell to him.

"Be careful, keep a low profile." Luo Jingwen advised.

Chen Shouyi nodded, went to the second-floor restroom, glanced outside; behind was a small alley, with most of the shops on both sides closed, and few pedestrians on the road.

He waited for a moment, and when no one was around, he opened the window and jumped down.

His feet landed silently.

He listened carefully to the surroundings, his ears slightly moving. Suddenly, he dashed a few steps, walked out of the alley, and onto the street, just brushing past a passerby.

He subtly blurred his movements, retracting his hand, now revealing a round iron badge the size of a longan in his palm.

The badge was shiny, obviously frequently polished by the original owner.

On it was an abstract, ferocious human face carved, exuding a faint aura of divinity and majesty.

Chen Shouyi took a glance and swiftly pinned it to his chest.

He proceeded to brush past two more pedestrians.

Easily collecting two more badges in his hands.

His reflexes were twenty times that of a normal person, and his thought processing speed slightly lower but still twelve times that of the average person. Even if someone was staring intently, they wouldn't be able to clearly see the movements of his hands.

Having effortlessly completed this task, Chen Shouyi immediately returned.

After checking his surroundings, he discreetly re-entered through the window.

Once Luo Jingwen and Zhu Xueqing put on their badges, the three of them confidently walked out the door.

Due to the swords they carried, pedestrians frequently looked on.

Fortunately, this attention was only filled with awe and admiration, without any vigilance.

"Let's grab some breakfast first." Luo Jingwen suggested in a low voice as they walked down the street.

They went to a small eatery and sat down. To avoid drawing attention, Luo Jingwen only ordered three servings of steamed buns for each person.

But for Chen Shouyi, this was already enough.

He picked up a bun, stuffing it into his mouth while listening to the surrounding conversations.

"Thanks to the God of Order, I used to have some asthma. No matter how much medicine I took at the hospital, it didn't help. Now, without seeing any doctor, it's almost healed, and I feel more energetic. Isn't that miraculous?" an old man said.

"That's nothing; the God of Order is truly a merciful deity. He descended to Earth to bring us endless blessings." Another elderly man said with a devout look, "As long as the faith is sincere, even after death, one can enter heaven and start a beautiful life anew."

"Ah, those Luzon people are quite annoying, haven't you heard? This time, in the Qinggang City Divinity School enrollment, locals didn't even make up a fifth of the spots. It's likely that in the future, the priests will all be from among them."

"Ah, what can we do? We haven't been under divine grace for long. Both the Defender Team and the High Priest are theirs. Luckily, the priests in our district are still locals."

...

The few of them quietly ate, not uttering a word, only exchanging glances.

After breakfast, Luo Jingwen paid the bill, and the three of them exited the eatery, still not speaking.

Passing by a church, ethereal hymns wafted from inside:

"Great God of Order, You are a majestic father, You set the chains of rules, You give reason to all things, making the seasons orderly, Your name spreads among people, dispelling evil, You are supreme, all glory..."

"There's no need to look any further here!" Luo Jingwen said solemnly.

Indeed, there was no need to look further; the entire Qujiang City had been completely infiltrated by the cult. Perhaps many people still remained unfaithful, but in the midst of this fervor, they could only go with the flow, becoming the silent majority.

"Where to next?" Chen Shouyi asked.

"Qinggang City!"

"Qinggang City? Why go there? Wouldn't it be better to go directly to the provincial capital?" Chen Shouyi asked with curiosity.

"According to the intelligence provided, during the mutation, a strategic nuclear submarine might have sunk in the shallow sea near Qinggang!" Luo Jingwen said grimly, "A large part of our mission this time is to confirm whether East Sea Province has secured the nuclear missiles inside!"