

SORCERER'S HANDBOOK

Chapter 4: The Observer

This was a tiny island.

But that was only because Sonya's limited vocabulary had failed to come up with a better term. After all, this place was no more than a palm-sized protrusion from the sea surface, as if a slightly stronger wave would be enough to submerge it.

Yet the sea was tranquil, eerily so, without even a whisper of wind. Sonya's legs were submerged in the sea, her feet pressing into the damp sand as she looked around.

The surroundings were engulfed in milky fog, filling every inch of space, and the sky resembled a blot of diffused ink, gloomy and oppressive.

I must be dreaming, Sonya thought.

She remembered quite clearly that she had been sleeping in her dormitory at Sword and Rose Sorcerer College. It was impossible that she would suddenly find herself on an island.

The realization that it was a dream made Sonya feel more at ease. Curiously, she crouched down to taste the seawater and found it to be like the water she normally drank, even slightly sweet, not at all the salty bitterness described in online education courses.

Sonya became even more convinced that she was dreaming because she had never been to the sea, never tasted seawater, so she had no idea what it should taste like.

“But if I’m dreaming...” Sonya turned towards the center of the island, “why would I dream of a corpse that I’ve never seen before?”

In the middle of the island, an unfamiliar corpse was half-kneeling on the sand.

The figure was clad in a black trench coat with a hood, its features indistinct, the clothing heavy, making it impossible to tell whether it was a man or a woman.

A longsword had pierced through the figure’s chest, but it had not fallen; instead, it knelt on one knee. The left hand was on the sheath at the waist, and the right hand grasped the hilt of the unsheathed sword as if they had been struck through the heart before they could draw their blade.

Apart from the corpse and the sand, there was nothing else on the island. Sonya couldn’t swim, but since she believed she was dreaming, she felt no fear of the body and boldly approached to observe.

She noticed that the longsword piercing the corpse was still dripping blood. The blood flowed along the beautiful engravings on the blade, up to the dark red gem inset in the crossguard, making the entire sword seem as though it had come to life, so beautiful it was...

When Sonya snapped back to reality, she found herself gripping the longsword tightly.

The sheath that fit perfectly in her palm, the dazzling engraving that hit her aesthetic sweet spot, and the feeling as if it was an extension of her own limb, this sword seemed as if...

...as if it was a weapon tailored specifically for her.

Without thinking, Sonya pulled the longsword out of the corpse.

She had thought the body would collapse, so she stepped back immediately after drawing the blade to avoid being hit by the falling corpse.

However, the corpse did not fall.

Instead, it stood up.

Tap, tap, the sound of steel-soled boots on the sand echoed as the figure slowly straightened its back under Sonya's fearful gaze, drawing a cold and sharp longsword.

With a whoosh, the blade cut through the air, the tip pointing directly at Sonya. Although she couldn't see his eyes, Sonya felt an emotionless, icy gaze!

"Do not worry, Swordsman, this time, I am not your enemy."

The voice of the figure was neither male nor female, as if mechanically produced: "I am here only to kill you."

Your definition of an enemy seems to be quite different from the normal person... Sonya tightly held the brilliant longsword in her hand as if it could provide her a sense of security.

"Who are you?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"I am known as the Apocalypse Observer, but you may call me the Observer," the Observer replied. "For the next seventy-two hours, you must defeat me to leave this place; otherwise, you must stay for the full seventy-two hours before you can depart."

"Isn't this a dream?" Sonya's eyes widened.

"The difference between a dream and reality is that reality is a dream woven together by everyone, while a dream..."

"...is the prison you construct for yourself."

As the words ended, the Observer swiftly stepped forward on the sandy ground, swinging to cut through the air. Despite Sonya's best efforts to retreat, she still couldn't evade the gleaming blade—

"You have ten seconds of rest."

Sonya knelt on the ground, her hands clutching her throat, her face full of shock.

The tearing pain was incredibly real, as if she had just had her neck sliced by this strange person.

If this were a dream, she should have woken up from her cozy, warm bed at the moment of such pain.

However—

"The ten seconds have passed. I advise you to hold your sword tightly. Only by doing so will you be able..."

Sonya looked up to see the Observer gripping the hilt of the sword at his waist, assuming a sword-drawing stance, and then lunging toward her with a powerful push from the legs!

Sonya hastily raised her longsword to retreat, but the Observer moved abruptly, covering a dozen steps in a stride. When she saw the trail of light left by the Observer's sword, his voice was already coming from behind her—

"...Die with a little dignity."

"You have ten seconds of rest."

As soon as Sonya regained her senses from the beheading pain, she didn't hesitate for a moment and jumped into the sea, not caring that she couldn't swim!

It seemed that the fear of death had unlocked her potential; Sonya almost instinctively learned to swim, albeit in an ungraceful, splashing dog paddle. But if only she could get away from that terrifyingly small island with the strange person!

If it weren't for the emptiness in her stomach in this dream, Sonya would even consider trying the humorous method she'd heard in jokes about propelling herself with flatulence.

Amid the splashing sounds, Sonya clearly heard the Observer's voice: "Running away is shameful."

"And futile."

Suddenly, a chill at the back of her neck; Sonya looked down to see a cold blade protruding from her throat.

Before the wave-like agony engulfed her, Sonya found herself back on the island.

"You have ten seconds of rest."

This time she didn't run but looked at the Observer's hand.

"It seems you're expecting that I'll be unarmed once I throw my sword away?" The Observer casually sheathed his blade, "After experiencing death several times, why are you still so naive?"

"That's really unreasonable," Sonya said with a bitter smile.

"Reason lies only at the tip of the sword. If you want to talk about reason, words are useless. Convince me with your sword."

Before the Observer finished speaking, Sonya plunged into the sea with a splash. But this time she didn't swim; instead, she dove underwater, attempting to avoid the Observer's assault.

“You can’t possibly cut through the ocean!” she thought to herself.

Indeed, it appeared to be true. Five seconds, ten seconds, thirty seconds... a minute went by, and Sonya had not been attacked.

However, since she couldn’t breathe, she felt like she was about to pass out.

Why is it that in a dream, her brain was still deprived of oxygen, leading to insufficient blood supply?

The pain from holding her breath was no less intense than being beheaded. Sonya couldn’t take it anymore. She randomly chose a spot to surface to try and take a breath before diving again, hoping for the best: “I’ll just breathe for a second or two, he surely can’t find me that quickly, right?”

A few seconds later, Sonya was sitting on the small island, covering her mouth, which had just been pierced, and continuously licking her teeth with her tongue to make sure her tongue hadn’t been cut off by the flying sword.

“You have ten seconds of rest.”

“Observer!” Sonya shouted angrily, her face full of rage, her teeth clenched, her hands gripping her longsword tightly as she mustered the courage to approach the Observer. The Observer uttered an “Oh” and gently touched the hilt of his sword, saying, “If you want to cut the rest short, I don’t mind.”

Thud!

Sonya fell to her knees before the Observer.

“Oh great, kind, and benevolent unknown master, Sonya is willing to pray to you day and night, listen to your holy words, follow your miracles, and chant your will... Please stop tormenting me like this. Just tell me what you want me to do. I’m very obedient, I’ll do anything you command, wuwuwu...”

“Really anything?” the Observer asked.

Sonya looked up, her face tear-stained and particularly alluring, as if she hesitated for a moment. Her cheeks flushed, she gritted her teeth and nodded her head slightly: “Anything.”

“Very well, I command you—” the Observer gripped the hilt of his sword, assuming a sword-drawing stance, “—defeat me.”

Clang!

“You have ten seconds of rest.”

Sonya lay on the sandy ground, staring blankly at the pitch-black sky, then rolled over like a carp getting up, and asked in confusion:

“Look, I never offended you before, so why are you wasting your time on a small fry like me? There are so many people in this world who are evil through and through, I could recommend a few if you’re looking to punish the wicked; if you’re the big bad, I could recommend a few high-ranking, respectable-looking people.”

“I’m just an ordinary female student, not worth you going to such lengths to deal with me. What you’re doing now is like using a spiral cannon to kill a mosquito, letting a Swordcerer chop wood. It’s a huge waste of resources, don’t you agree?”

“Just tell me what you want me to do. I’m obviously a delicate rose that’s meant to be trampled, born to go with the flow...”

As Sonya tried to persuade with emotion and reason, the Observer simply shook his head: “You’re wrong.”

Sonya immediately said, “Where did I go wrong? Tell me, and I will definitely change.”

“Your first sentence was wrong.”

“The first one?”

“How can you be sure,” the Observer gripped the hilt of his sword, assuming a sword-drawing stance, “that you’ve never offended me before?”

Clang!

“You have ten seconds of rest.”

Perhaps because she had died so frequently, Sonya even felt that being beheaded was just that, the pain became bearable with habit.

Sonya lifted her gaze to the Observer. “So, I just need to last for seventy-two hours to escape this cursed dream?”

“Yes,” the Observer nodded. “However, there are no clocks here. Seventy-two hours may not seem long compared to a lifetime, but in the context of death, it’s not short either.”

“Can you really endure continuous death for seventy-two hours?”

“And why would you believe the words of someone who keeps killing you in a dream? What if I’m lying?”

“Even if you do manage to escape the dream tonight, what about tomorrow night? Or the night after?”

The Observer assumed a sword-drawing stance. “Having experienced death, you shouldn’t hold out hope for a miracle.”

Clang!

The Observer stepped forward, his blade sweeping horizontally as he spun around, crossing a distance of several steps in an instant. The longsword, with its massive rotational force, was poised to behead Sonya once again like a hot knife through butter—

Clang!

For the first time, Sonya’s blade blocked the edge of the Observer’s sword!

At that moment, there was no expression on Sonya's face—no fear, no anger, no intent to kill, no pleading—only the coldest silence. In her ruby-like pupils, the blurred figure of the Observer was reflected as if she intended to etch him deep into her heart.

“You leave me no choice.”