

Watch Out! Danger Ahead

Chapter 16

Her situation was far more dangerous compared to when she killed number six. Even though both were sneak attacks where her victim was caught unaware, the doctor was a much more difficult opponent than number six.

The two of them laid close to each other, and they could both see the killing intent reflected in each other's eyes. Song Qingxiao felt like the bones in her fingers were about to break because of the force the doctor used to try and snatch the dagger out of her hands!

The dagger was her only trump card. Hence it meant something different to her. If she wanted to survive, she needed the dagger when she went back to find the assailant who had killed her in the alley. If it were snatched from her by the doctor, her chances of surviving would disappear!

As soon as she thought of that, Song Qingxiao gave up her intent to fight against the doctor's arm tugging on the mouse cord. She endured the feeling of being suffocated as she moved that hand to join the other one, which held onto the dagger, and gave it a hard shove.

The distance between them was small. Song Qingxiao could clearly see the doctor biting down on his cheek, along with the bulging blood vessels in his temples. A large artery throbbed in the side of his neck. She regretted that she had missed the chance to slice through that artery in her earlier panic, wishing that she had been calmer when she struck.

The doctor gritted his teeth as he tried to endure the pain. Spit flew out as he breathed through his gritted teeth. He could faintly smell the sickly sweet scent of blood. One of his eyes had swelled out because it had been gouged by the office lady. His good eye was wide open, and the copious amounts of sweat pouring out from his forehead made his hair wet. His facial muscles twitched violently.

Her tiny mistake had brought a terrible outcome. The cord around her neck continued to tighten until she could no longer breathe. Her arms and legs all

felt like they weighed a ton. She had no strength left within her to push the dagger further in.

The problem was that her mind was beginning to slow down, affecting her actions. She could not feel the weight of the doctor crushing down on her. Numerous old memories passed through her mind right at that moment.

Was she about to die?

As soon as the idea popped up in her mind, she thought about number one for some strange reason. At that moment, she was just like her. The mouse cord strangled her neck. The face of the doctor seemed to merge with the face of number six. He looked just like the grim reaper who was raised his sickle, ready to take her life.

However, she was different from number one. When number one was killed, she was utterly unable to fight back. Song Qingxiao had a dagger! As soon as she thought of that, she got a burst of energy. Her unfocused gaze became focused once more, and it sparkled with energy. She did not want to die there. She did not want to go quietly, without a fight like number one.

Song Qingxiao wanted to live. It had been a challenging process for her to grow up, graduate from university, and find a job. She did not die in the alley and enter the space only to sacrifice herself, allowing herself to become a stepping stone for someone else to leave the space!

Song Qingxiao gritted her teeth and forcefully crashed her head into the doctor's face. She thought she had exhausted all the energy in her body. However, she still had a tiny amount of energy left. It was not much, but since they were so close to each other, as soon as she crashed into the doctor's face, a dull sound rang out.

The doctor strangled her neck with one hand and used the other hand to pull her hand away. He already struggled from the effort of doing so. Song Qingxiao's attack caught him by surprise. He did not expect that she would still be able to retaliate in that situation.

He gasped in surprise, and his grip on Song Qingxiao's hands loosened. They had been in a stalemate up until then. That tiny chance was enough to cause one of their deaths. Seizing the opportunity, Song Qingxiao endured the pain of being suffocated and gripped the dagger in both hands. She drew it out slightly before she plunged it into the doctor's neck once more.

Fresh blood gushed out from his neck and flowed through her hands to drip down her arms. All the strength left in her body had been spent on those two actions. If she failed, she would be completely unable to fight back anymore.

She focused on the cards in her consciousness. There were still two cards that had not flipped over.

Her body had started to twitch. Perhaps all her efforts to fight back were in vain. The doctor's body crushed her. It felt like he was about to squeeze the last breath out of her.

The cool water tank was pressed behind her back. The eyes of number six—who had died in her hands—must have been staring right at her from inside the tank. Song Qingxiao's lips moved. The force on her neck began to weaken. The cord wound tightly around her neck slowly slid out of the doctor's hands. In her consciousness, the card on the right finally 'looked' to Song Qingxiao as though it was turning exceptionally slowly.

The doctor's gentle, smiling face appeared, and his name appeared on the bottom of the card—Liu Yixun.

She had won!

The air rushed into her lungs again. Song Qingxiao opened her mouth to gasp. Her body was so weak that she could barely lift her arm. There was no way that she would be able to push off the doctor's corpse that was crushing her.

She trembled to pull out the dagger from the doctor's neck. It was a simple movement, but she needed several tries before she succeeded.

An instruction rang out in her mind.

'The trial is complete. Leaving the space in ten seconds!'

As soon as the voice rang out, Song Qingxiao broke out into a smile. It was a smile that looked more gruesome than her crying face.

She had succeeded! The way to leave the space was just as she expected—she needed to be the last survivor. The card in the center of all the nine cards must represent her since the other eight people died.

‘Ten...’

‘Nine...’

‘Eight...’

The voice in her mind started a countdown. Song Qingxiao coughed loudly and vomited forcefully. She shoved the doctor forcefully off her. His corpse rolled off her and fell to the ground. She tried to sit up.

The mouse cord was still wrapped around her neck. It was a long time before she reached out her arms to remove the object that nearly took her life. She tossed it to one side as the countdown in her head continued.

‘Two...’

‘One...’

She closed her eyes, and in the next moment, a rumble of thunder rang out. Lightning flashed across the sky. Heavy rain began to pour down, falling on her head. It hurt when it landed on her face. The smell of the rain mixed with the soil and filled the air. It did not smell very pleasant, but it was far better than the indescribable gloomy repression within that space.

She was back!

Song Qingxiao was still lying in the same spot when she was stabbed by that man. It was as if everything that had happened was a bad dream. If it were not for the fact that she was still holding onto the dagger and that the rain had not washed the doctor’s blood off her hands, she would have thought that everything from that night was a figment of her imagination.

Her throat still burned with pain. She lifted her head and stared into the night sky. Bright flashes of lightning lit up the sky. The rain continued to fall onto her face, making a dripping sound upon contact. Rainwater dripped into her eyes and down her mouth. She swallowed two mouthfuls of rainwater before she truly felt alive.

There seemed to be a change in her consciousness. However, Song Qingxiao did not dare to take a look right then. The alley was too dangerous. She did not know how long she had been gone from real life after entering the space. She was worried that the guy who killed her earlier would return.

She was not in any state to defend herself from an ambush. She drank a few more mouthfuls of rainwater and got up slowly by supporting herself against the wall. She started walking in the direction of her home.

Thankfully, she was not far from home. She could see the familiar doorway of her house in the near distance. There was an iron padlock on the gate leading to her house, and the words 'Pay your debts' was written on it with red paint. It was a sight that had always frightened her, but she let out a sigh of relief as soon as she saw it.

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Song Qingxiao could not enter through the front gate, so she climbed into her house through a window at the back. The sound of thunder outside still rang out loudly. She could hear her mother snoring after she got drunk and fell asleep, completely unaware of the horrors her daughter had been through.

She left traces of water on the windowsill when she climbed in, but Song Qingxiao did not have the strength to deal with it then. The windows slammed back and forth non-stop from being blown about by the wind and rain, making a clattering sound as they moved.

Song Qingxiao collapsed onto the floor, utterly devoid of any energy. She could barely move even a finger. She still held the dagger in her right hand. It seemed to give her a sense of security to have it there.

The aftershock of the murder hit her out of the blue, and the taste of blood in her mouth made her stomach churn. She retched a couple of times and spat out some water. After she repeated it a few times, she finally settled down and began to pay attention to the prompt in her mind.

The cards in her consciousness had disappeared as she left the space. It seemed to be replaced by a completely new interface that showed the total number of credits she had.

200.

It was the reward for completing the trial. Song Qingxiao tried to interact with the credits in her consciousness, and an interface that allowed redemption appeared in her mind. She checked out the interface, but there were a few

things there. The first thing that caught her eye was the first item—Imperial City currency.

The credits required to exchange one hundred thousand Imperial City dollars was clearly displayed on the interface.

20.

If one remembered clearly, Song Qingxiao's family was not well-to-do. Her father had committed an offense a long time ago and left behind a huge debt. Her mother was an alcoholic...

Song Qingxiao had relied on her stellar grades to obtain the subsidies and loans given by the royal family to outstanding students to help them complete their education. She still had student debt, which was why she was so desperate to get a job as soon as she graduated.

The 200 credits that she possessed could be used to redeem an enormous sum of money. It would allow her to pay off her debts and live a less financially constrained life. That sum of money would have been extremely attractive to Song Qingxiao if she had not already experienced the horrifying trial of nearly losing her life in that mysterious space.

However, her previous encounter had left her significantly on edge and on high alert ever since she left the space. She had already removed the mouse cord that the doctor had wrapped around her neck. She even managed to kill the doctor.

Despite that, the dark cloud that hung over her head from that encounter had not vanished. She still felt like danger was a shadow that constantly followed her. It was as though the threat to her life had not truly disappeared, and it made her extremely uneasy.

Until then, no matter how hard she tried to pretend that everything that happened last night was just a bad dream, the evidence was too overwhelming for it to be imaginary.

The 'Trial of God' was real, and there was no doubt that she narrowly escaped with her life from the space as the only one out of the nine to achieve that temporary reprieve. She had a bad premonition that her success in the first trial did not mean that she was out of harm's way. It was not the end. It could merely be the start of the game.

It was like a grand door to a new universe had opened before her. Since she stepped in, it was impossible to leave. The rules in the real world did not apply there. Everyone who wanted to survive needed to do their best to fight for their lives.

Those credits were not easily obtained. Even though money was extremely enticing to her, Song Qingxiao was more interested in surviving than becoming rich overnight. She removed the idea of cashing out the money from her plan without hesitation.

Apart from money, there were other things in the interface that she could redeem with her credits. She could exchange her credits to get guns, ammunition, daggers, machetes, and a long whip. The price of a gun was 100 credits, but she needed to obtain bullets separately. Each bullet cost 50 credits.

Even though Song Qingxiao still did not understand the rules of how the credits were obtained. She had a total of 200 credits. She frowned.

Under the weapons selection, there was an option to change or upgrade bloodlines. That option cost 200 credits. She touched it with her consciousness and received a prompt.

‘Once selected, the bloodline cannot be changed.’

There was a mysterious sign next to the option to change bloodlines. The sign said ‘Special Reward’.

The token’s cost was precisely 200 credits. The option was not clearly displayed like the previous options such as money, weapons, and the bloodline upgrade. It seemed to represent that it was something unknown.

Song Qingxiao was a little hesitant. It might be because she had very few credits, and there were not many items that she could select. After all, she was not going to consider money for the time being. Guns and bullets could keep her safe, but they were too flashy. She would not be able to rely on them as a secret weapon to gain victory.

The option to change or upgrade her bloodline stirred her curiosity. However, what really caught her attention was the sign that displayed ‘Special Reward’. She felt that something waited for her behind that sign.

After she hesitated and changed her mind multiple times, she gritted her teeth and changed her choice from the option to change or upgrade bloodlines to select the Special Reward. A prompt appeared in her mind, 'Have you selected the Special Reward?'

Song Qingxiao took a deep breath in and selected, 'Yes'!

It was a gamble. It was possible that the 'Special Reward' would not be something she hoped for, but there was a chance that it would be a pleasant surprise. She lay on the ground as she bit down hard on her lower lip.

Once she had confirmed her selection by picking 'Yes', a prompt appeared in her mind, followed by a bout of sharp pain. It was as if the nerves in her brain had suffered a significant blow. Even though Song Qingxiao expected something like that after selecting the prize, she nearly lost consciousness.

In that moment of crisis, Song Qingxiao gripped the dagger in her hand tightly and pierced her thigh without hesitation. The tip of the blade pierced through her wet clothes and sliced through her skin, making a tiny cut. The slight jolt of pain was nothing compared to the pain in her brain, but it was enough to help her hold on so that she did not faint.

A large amount of strange and unfamiliar knowledge appeared in her mind. Her gray matter seemed to be used to its maximum potential. She felt her brain heat up, and her vision went dark before her. She closed her eyes, but she still felt the world spinning around her, making her feel sick.

Her head felt like it was about to explode. Time seemed to pass incredibly slowly. That kind of pain was far more brutal and unbearable compared to the choking sensation of being strangled by the doctor.

Song Qingxiao did not know how much time had passed. All she could do was endure it until she received the reward in its entirety. At that moment, she felt more tired than she did in the space during her fight to the death with number four. She felt as though she was about to pass out.

She opened her mouth and gasped silently. Her clothes, which had been drenched by the rain, were soaked once again by the copious amounts of sweat. She still had lingering effects from her previous headache. It took her a long time before she managed to suppress her fear and examine the reward that she obtained.

As soon as she had that intention, the phrase ‘Nine-Word Secret Order’ appeared in her mind. Before she had the chance to examine it closer, her consciousness was like a string that had been stretched too far and had reached its limit. With a loud bang, Song Qingxiao instantly fainted.

Chapter 18

After everything that she had been through tonight, getting murdered, entering the trial space, and finally escaping from a near-death experience, Song Qingxiao would have had trouble falling asleep. That problem seemed to have solved itself since she fainted.

However, it was not a proper restful sleep. Everything that happened in the test space became a nightmare. Song Qingxiao constantly ‘saw’ those nine cards, and she was filled with anxiety that when the next card flipped, she would see her own face. She dreamt that she killed number six and the doctor once again.

The doctor’s face looked extremely malevolent as he glared at her with bloodshot eyes. He looked as if he were about to snap her neck and end her life.

“Ah!”

Song Qingxiao reached for her neck as she opened her eyes. She panted heavily. It took her a while after she woke up to realize that she was back in the real world. When she got home last night, her wet clothes clung to her body tightly. The weight of the wet clothes sticking to her skin made her feel like it was really difficult to breathe.

The smell of her sweat mixed in with the rainwater and blood on her body made her think of the suffocating scent of blood in that space each time that she breathed in. She took off her jacket without hesitation and tossed it to one side as she wiped off the sweat on her face.

She still clutched onto that dagger that she had used to kill. As soon as she realized that, her hand shivered subconsciously, and she dropped the dagger. It fell to the floor with a loud clatter. Song Qingxiao hyperventilated as she recalled something...

When she escaped from the test space, she seemed to have received a prize. She used the credits in exchange for a mysterious gift and received the 'Nine-Word Secret Order'. It was a shame that she lost consciousness soon after that. Hence, she could not be sure if that truly happened or if it was just a figment of her imagination.

As soon as she thought about it, the secret of the nine-word order appeared in her consciousness. The nine-word secret order must have been incomplete because Song Qingxiao read it carefully and found that what she knew was only a small portion of the 'Arrival' word art.

Carrying out the secret order required mental force and energy to achieve the purpose of the attack. Song Qingxiao had never seen that type of attack technique before. She had never heard about it before either.

In that era in the Empire, people had a better grasp and understanding of martial arts. It included various attack techniques like punching, kicking, and other body strengthening exercises. Hence, Song Qingxiao had never heard of word arts such as the nine-word secret order.

Based on what little she knew, the nine-word secret order did not possess any ability to harm or kill. She was a little disappointed. However, since she had made her choice, there was no point in crying over spilled milk.

Perhaps it was because she had experienced too many highs-and-lows last night, but Song Qingxiao's emotions were in an extremely tense condition. She followed the nine-word secret order instructions and could faintly sense the presence of psychic energy in her consciousness. She attempted to awaken that psychic energy.

However, her attempts did not succeed. She attempted it many times in succession and finally formed a handprint. Unfortunately, her attempts had left her feeling extremely tired mentally. Her hunger had also reached unbearable levels.

The sky had begun to grow brighter. Song Qingxiao stopped practicing and got up to get cleaned up, as well as to fill her stomach with food. Her mother lay slumped in the corner of the house. She was as drunk as a skunk as she lay unconscious amid a messy pile. She had no idea that her own daughter had narrowly escaped death.

It was almost time for work. Song Qingxiao dragged her mother to bed and prepared some food and water for her before leaving for work. She was still traumatized from her experience in the alley from last night, so she took a longer route to get to the security guard headquarters. She was slightly late for work by the time she arrived.

There were a couple of strongly built female guards in the changing room. All conversation stopped as soon as Song Qingxiao entered the room, and everyone's eyes turned to land on her.

"Are you new?"

It seemed as though everyone in the team had heard about the new person who was as weak as a baby. Everyone seemed to be gleefully anticipating a good show when the new person ran from the job crying in terror and fright.

Song Qingxiao hung her head and softly replied, "Yes."

She was not wearing her uniform, and she looked extremely weak among all the strongly-built female guards. Her long fringe hung over her face, covering nearly half of her face. Her appearance made the female guards look at her with contempt. Her voice was a little hoarse. One of the women snorted. Her tone carried a sense of disdain and scorn.

"I don't understand why the people-in-charge hired a piece of useless trash like you. You're dragging down our standards."

As soon as the lady finished speaking, all the other guards started to laugh. She joined in the laughter as she reached out to push Song Qingxiao. Before she could continue, she saw Song Qingxiao lift her head to look at her indifferently.

The lady saw the strangulation marks on Song Qingxiao's neck. The skin around the marks was broken, and it had turned purple. It was an extremely gruesome sight. It was no wonder why Song Qingxiao did not sound entirely normal when she spoke earlier.

The new person was severely injured, but she did not make a sound. The guard lady who had pushed Song Qingxiao gulped subconsciously. The sight of Song Qingxiao's neck seemed to make her own neck feel vaguely sore.

The way Song Qingxiao looked at her made her feel perturbed. Her keen perception came from many years of experience. Hence, she swallowed the words that were on the tip of her tongue and lowered her voice to say, "Please step out of the way. I'm going to head out."

Song Qingxiao took a deep breath and hung her head as she stepped out of the way to allow the lady to step out. The rest of the people around her did not seem to notice anything wrong. The time it took Song Qingxiao to raise her head took a fraction of a second, and she was blocked by the other guard lady. Hence, no one noticed anything strange about her.

The rest of them filed out of the changing room. Song Qingxiao leaned heavily against the lockers when she heard the pitter-patter of footsteps outside. The voice of a female guard rang out.

"Have you heard any news about Gao Linlin's case?"

As soon as she heard the name, Song Qingxiao instantly froze. Her entire body stiffened. She did not know if it was a coincidence or not, but when the card of the girl who died first in the test space flipped over, the name written on the corner was Gao Linlin.

"She has been missing for three days now. According to the reports, it might be connected with the City Hall. Old An is in charge of this case now."

Song Qingxiao gritted her teeth tightly. She resisted the urge to chase after her to eavesdrop. She focused on calming herself down. She had initially planned to find her locker and get changed in preparation for work. However, she discovered that her locker had already been opened by someone, and the locks had been changed. Her other uniform in the locker had been tossed to a corner among the lockers.

She was the only one left in the locker room. Song Qingxiao changed into her uniform and took the opportunity to take out the dagger in her bag. She held it in her palm and swung it around a few times. The dagger had caused her death, but she had also killed with it.

The dagger's design was different compared to other ordinary daggers. It was about fifteen centimeters long. The back and the handle of the dagger was curved like a crescent moon. It felt pretty heavy in hand.

The blade was extremely sharp, and the cutting edge of the dagger was very long. The blade itself was quite thick. Song Qingxiao scrutinized it, flipping it over and over before she noticed a special leaf-like design on the back of the handle.

The unique design of the dagger was unlike any other dagger that she had seen before. Combined with the unusual pattern on the handle, it should be enough information for Song Qingxiao to investigate and find out who her killer was.

She could still remember the scent of her attacker, the curve of his fingers as he raised the dagger, and also the tune that he hummed after he killed her. She remembered the shape of his retreating figure.

Song Qingxiao narrowed her eyes. She did not know who she may have offended to bring it upon herself, or perhaps it was a spur-of-the-moment decision by her attacker. No matter what, since she was entangled in such a mess, she needed to be more careful.

She sighed helplessly and hid her dagger in her sleeve. When she left the changing room, she bumped into the person that Team Leader An had sent to get her.

Team Leader An was the person-in-charge of the team of guards in the west zone of the city where she worked. He was a strong, burly man in his forties. He wore an irritable expression as soon as Song Qingxiao walked in. He was standing and having a conversation with someone over the phone. He did not spare a glance to look at her when she walked in, completely ignoring her.

“We have been severely short on staff in the West District for a really long time now...”

His voice rang clearly, and his expression was extremely fierce. It seemed like he was requesting for more staff from the higher-ups.

Song Qingxiao stood in front of an office desk and noticed the cup that Team Leader An had placed on the table. Team Leader An was completely engrossed in his conversation with the other person on the phone.

Song Qingxiao made a seal with her hands silently and carefully tried to channel her psychic energy. The water in the glass began to ripple slightly under the pressure exerted by her psychic energy.

Team Leader An felt like something was not quite right. He subconsciously stopped mid-conversation and turned around. The office was quiet and peaceful, and Song Qingxiao stood there with her eyes shut. It was as if the strange feeling was merely something he imagined.

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Team Leader An frowned. After he ended his phone conversation, he pulled out his chair and sat down. He crossed his arms and stared intently at Song Qingxiao, assessing her carefully.

He still remembered the new person that had only joined the team yesterday. She was a newly graduated student with an introverted personality and did not speak much. Most of the patrol guards in the security guard headquarters were muscular and tall. Hence, she made a strong impression on him as soon as she entered.

He did not know why, but she seemed to give him a different impression after being on the job for just one day.

“I don’t know why the superiors have summoned you.”

There were some things that Team Leader An did not understand, but he did not question them. He had initially summoned her intending to dismiss her. When she entered the security team, they did not carry out a thorough background check on her. He only discovered that her father had a criminal record yesterday. However, upon looking at Song Qingxiao, Team Leader An changed his mind.

“The security team does not tolerate idle people,” he added.

As he spoke, he took out a file from his drawer and tossed it towards Song Qingxiao.

“There’s been a new assignment. It’s to find a missing schoolgirl.”

The file landed on the desk with a smack. As soon as Song Qingxiao heard Team Leader An’s words, she pursed her lips tightly and could not help but remember the name she overheard in the changing room earlier—Gao Linlin.

It was the same name as the young girl that died in the test space. Hence, she was naturally curious about the assignment as well. Team Leader An giving her the assignment was precisely what she wanted. Her expression changed as she reached out her hand to retrieve the information file on the desk.

When Team Leader An saw her reaction, he turned away, looking like he could not bear her presence.

“There’s no one else on the team to spare on such a simple job. Have a go and see if you can solve this.”

He did not even try to disguise his scorn and immediately indicated that she should leave as soon as he had finished speaking.

The division of labor between the security team and the Investigation department regarding large cases was clear. Gao Linlin’s missing case must have yielded no results for the other team, so the security team had to get involved.

As soon she thought about it before opening the file, Song Qingxiao was pretty sure that the missing Gao Linlin was number one who had died in the test space. If someone went missing in a modern and advanced era, they would always leave behind some sort of trace. Unless something like the test space existed, which went beyond human understanding. Only then could someone disappear without a trace.

She carried the file with her as she left Team Leader An’s office and found a place to flip through the file. A photo fell out of the file, held between two documents. She bent down to pick it up, and a young girl’s smiling face appeared before Song Qingxiao. She subconsciously gripped the photo tightly between her fingers.

Gao Linlin had disappeared out of the blue three days ago. She studied at the Imperial City secondary school and disappeared right as she was on the phone with a classmate. The signal broke off, and by the time they went to find her, she was gone.

Her classmates felt like something was wrong and reported her disappearance to the police. After the police had examined the surveillance camera, she seemed to disappear from view mysteriously. However, she did not show up on any nearby surveillance cameras elsewhere. They were also

unable to detect the location of her phone. It was as if she had disappeared from the face of the earth.

She was still a student, and her family was extremely well-to-do. Her lifestyle and family background was straightforward. They were not in any financial trouble and had no enemies. There was no reason that anyone would have reason to harm her.

All the information in the file had been shared with all the districts in Imperial City. After all, the more time passed since a person went missing, the greater the likelihood that they would encounter harm. In the end, the case was handed to the security team in the west district and ended up in Team Leader An's hand.

As soon as Song Qingxiao had confirmed that the missing Gao Linlin was number one, she immediately kept the file. Number one had died in the test space. The case was unsolvable, and it would yield no result.

However, the case was a warning to Song Qingxiao. The test space was not an ordinary game. Once a person died within the space, they would be truly dead. Even their bodies would not be found. They would end up like number one—a missing person, a case file.

At the same time, it made her sure of one thing. Number one went missing three days ago. Song Qingxiao entered the test space last night. When they tried to calculate time in the space, number one said that Song Qingxiao had only entered the space about ten minutes after her.

It proved that the people that the space had chosen did not enter at the same time or from the same place. It appeared to be random. The game did not have set rules, and it meant that there was no way for her to fully prepare beforehand.

With that insight, Song Qingxiao was not more guarded and apprehensive towards the trial. Of course, she could not inform Team Leader An of the news that Gao Linlin was already dead. She would spend the next few days using the excuse that she was working on the case to train in the 'Arrival' word arts from the 'Nine-Word Secret Order'.

At the same time, she cut down on the hours that she slept and went jogging every morning to strengthen her body in preparation for the subsequent trial.

A couple of weeks went by, and everything was peaceful, yet, Song Qingxiao did not let her guard down.

She did not find any new clues or make any headway in her investigations of Gao Linlin's disappearance. Thankfully, Team Leader An did not seem to have any hopes of her success. It would only serve to justify his dismissal of Song Qingxiao at the end of her two-month probation period.

The wound on her neck had fully recovered. However, the scars were still there. She had figured out the rules on how to channel her psychic energy. After much practice, Song Qingxiao could clearly sense an improvement.

Her weak psychic energy had become much more tangible and solid. Its benefits were self-evident. The previous application of her psychic energy was as wispy as a reed before, but it had multiplied in strength.

The result of her practice meant that when Song Qingxiao formed a seal with her hands and channeled her psychic energy, it would not be like before, where it was barely perceptible. She felt incredibly proud of herself for achieving it in the short period of a few days.

After a month had passed, there were still no summons from the test space in her consciousness. It was as if everything that Song Qingxiao had worried about in the past was just her overthinking.

Despite that, peaceful days made Song Qingxiao feel more fearful. She began to sleep later each night because she intensified her training for her psychic energy. She bought two daggers and sewed a simple strap so that she could conceal them under her clothes.

As always, by the time she got off work and returned home, her mother—Tang Yun—was rarely found in a state where she was not drunk and unconscious. Song Qingxiao had prepared some food for her mother that would be easy on her digestion. She sat down in front of Tang Yun.

Tang Yun had lost most of her hair and looked much older than her age due to her many years of heavy drinking. Her hands were so unsteady that she could barely keep the chopsticks in her hands.

Tang Yun stared at Song Qingxiao for a long time. It seemed as though she could not recognize her own daughter. In Song Qingxiao's memory, her mother was rarely ever as alert as she was then. Hence, the times when the

mother and daughter duo could sit together were extremely few. She did not know what to say to her mother, and it even felt hard to call her 'mom'.

They sat in silence for ages. Song Qingxiao was just about to open her mouth to speak when she heard the long-lost voice in her brain.

'You are about to enter the Trial of God.'

The color drained out of Song Qingxiao's face. The prompt about the trial came out of the blue. She could not care for her mother and rushed to her feet to head into the room. She did not have the time to observe Tang Yun's reaction, nor did she have the time to explain.

As soon as Song Qingxiao took a step out, the view before her eyes changed. It was no longer the scene of her old, run-down house. The dim lamp in the room had disappeared. They were all replaced by the familiar cold feeling in her memory of the test space.

'Welcome to the Trial of God's test space!'

She blinked. She was in an empty space covered in thick fog. The black muzzle of a gun was pointed at her face, the cold barrel of the gun was against her forehead. The force of the gun against her head was so strong that she took several steps back.

The mocking voice of a man rang out.

"Welcome!"

Chapter 20

The sudden change made all of Song Qingxiao's hairs stand on end. She broke out in cold sweat. In that moment of crisis, she subconsciously formed a seal with her fingers and attempted to use her 'Arrival' word arts to freeze the man for a second, giving her time to avoid the attack.

In the blink of an eye, a thought flashed through her mind. She recalled the scene when she redeemed her credits after she finished the previous trial. There were guns and bullets as options when she made her choice, but they were not cheap.

The cost of redemption for a gun was 100 credits, and each bullet cost 50 credits. She knew there would be people who would have redeemed a weapon with such firepower like that. However, unless a person had tons of credits to splurge, they would have limited credits left for the bullets once they had exchanged their credits for a gun.

Based on Song Qingxiao's experience with the previous trial, the number of participants in each trial could reach up to nine people. Even if every shot was a sure-kill, that person would need at least eight bullets to be able to kill all of the other people in a nine-person trial situation. It was not an insignificant number.

Besides that, it was Song Qingxiao's second time taking part in the trial. Since that person had a gun, she deduced that everyone else had at least one previous experience taking part in the trial.

Everyone had managed to survive their previous trial, so they must have redeemed some items and have their own ways of self-protection. The person wielding the gun had bullets, but he needed to consider the possibility of saving his bullets for self-preservation.

Since bullets were precious, it was unlikely that he would easily pull the trigger. A single shot may not be able to kill a person. Hence, firing at Song Qingxiao would not only be a waste of bullets but also an opportunity to make him an enemy of her.

The person could have held the gun to her head after she had entered the test space not because he wanted to kill her, but mainly to intimidate and threaten her. The most likely explanation was that the gunman used the opportunity to scare people into revealing their trump card, thus allowing him to gain more information and have a greater chance of surviving the trial.

When people were faced with danger, their first instinct would be to save their lives. That was where their secret would be most likely to be exposed.

In the last trial, Song Qingxiao won the fight because she had kept her trump card a secret until the very end and had the element of surprise when she killed the doctor. She deeply understood the importance of a trump card, and at that moment, her greatest trump card was the 'Nine-Word Secret Order'.

Song Qingxiao had an idea, and she forced herself to let go of the seal that she had formed with her fingers. She kept her fear under control and gripped

the gun with one hand as though she were about to snatch it away. With her other hand, she reached for her waist.

Before she entered the test space, she had bought two daggers and sewed herself a waist strap so that she could conceal one on her body. At the same time, she also strapped the second dagger to her wrist, keeping it hidden with her sleeve.

Song Qingxiao did that just in case her first prediction was wrong. In that case, she would need to retaliate to protect herself. She needed to be prepared so that she had an escape plan. Her actions were pure instinct.

However, before her fingers had reached her clothes, another hand had reached over to grope her belly roughly. It was empty! The dagger that she had prepared had disappeared into thin air. In her panic, the intent to kill developed within her because of that guy's actions.

The gun barrel pressed against her face was moved in the next second, and the tall and strongly-built man grinned at her. His eyes were extremely cold as he said, "Put your hands up."

The tall and strong man's behavior was just as Song Qingxiao had predicted. He would not open fire easily. She took a deep breath in and stared into the evil eyes of the gunman. She raised her arms hesitantly. A crescent-shaped dagger was pressed firmly against her arm, held in place by her strap.

For some unknown reason, the dagger that she had concealed next to her waist had disappeared since she entered the space. The dagger that she had used to kill in the previous trial still remained.

After she had raised her arms, her sleeves started to slip down to reveal her slender wrists. Song Qingxiao's heart pounded wildly, and it felt like it was about to jump up to her throat.

The dagger was hidden on her lower arm. If her sleeve continued to slip any further, it would be exposed and discovered by that gunman.

She pursed her lips tightly, and cold sweat beaded on her forehead. She dared not raise her arms any higher and did her best to shrug her shoulders, putting on her best look of terror.

The gunman did not seem to be suspicious of her expression. As he spoke, he used his gun to tap Song Qingxiao's body. He did so thoroughly, not missing out on any areas as he checked her chest, back, and even her legs.

Perhaps Song Qingxiao's previous instinctive movement to reach for her stomach had misled him. After he had completed his search, he did not bother checking her arms. He glanced at her arms and saw that her sleeves had slipped down, exposing her wrists.

Once he was sure that she was not hiding any weapons, he turned his head to one side and gestured with his chin off to one direction. Scornfully, he spat, "Head over there, number three."

Song Qingxiao narrowed her eyes. She was still filled with terror. Only when the man raised his gun towards her once more did she force herself to calm down. She followed the man's instructions and walked into the corner.

Based on what the man had called her, she realized that there were only two others who had arrived in the space before her. She looked at the skinny, young man who was seated in the west side of the corner. He wore glasses, looking extremely gentle and reserved. He must have similarly been held at gunpoint by that gunman. Hence, his expression was extremely wary.

As soon as he noticed Song Qingxiao's eyes on him, he immediately pushed up his glasses so that the light reflecting off his glasses concealed his eyes. However, Song Qingxiao could sense that at the same time, he was observing her closely.

Even though there were only three people in the space, the atmosphere was filled with killing intent, the sense of impending crisis and vigilance. The crushing feeling made one feel as though it were hard to breathe.

She sat down in a spot that was about two meters away from the bespectacled guy. Her keen senses noticed his body tense up in a fraction of a second as she sat down. It was clear that he would have violently reacted in defense if she had made any extra movements.

The environment in the test space was pretty similar to the first one that she entered. It was still an empty space surrounded by thick fog. Her eyes swept across the two men in the space as she wondered in which order they entered the space.

Based on outward appearances, the gunman was extremely strong. He was close to 190 centimeters tall, and he wore a tank-top, which showed off his muscular arms. At first glance, he looked like a huge threat even without the gun in his hand.

However, Song Qingxiao did not dare to underestimate the bespectacled guy. After all, in her first trial, the strongly-built number seven died in the hands of the doctor. If everyone in the trial were survivors of the first trial, then each person there was extremely dangerous.

The disappearance of the dagger that she had prepared before she entered the space still weighed on her mind. She was also in some pain from where the gunman had hit her with his gun.

He did not hold back the force of his blows, but he still maintained some control. He did not beat them until they reached their breaking point to prevent them from acting out in desperation. However, he used enough force and caused enough damage to affect their ability to act once the trial officially started.

Before Song Qingxiao had the chance to figure out why the dagger went missing, a lady appeared in the space. She received the same treatment as Song Qingxiao. Before the lady could react to entering the space, a gun was held against her head, and the gunman said, "Welcome."

The lady received a considerable shock. Her body twisted, and she instinctively took a step back. Her right hand shook, and a red whip slipped out of her wrist like a snake. With a whoosh, she waved it at the large chap.

He took a step back as he withdrew his gun to shield his face.

Smack!

The whip made a clear sound as it made contact with the gun. From the sound of the blow, Song Qingxiao could tell that the woman's attack was pretty powerful. Perhaps, she might have strengthened her physical attributes or even upgraded her bloodline!

The woman's attack did not hit its mark. She withdrew her whip and was about to attack once more. The large chap with the gun took two steps back. The gun in his hands was hit by the woman's whip, which left behind a faint imprint.

He took a stance that looked like he was surrendering and said, "Hey beautiful lady, it was just a joke."

He grinned and treated her differently compared to how he treated Song Qingxiao. The lady with the whip steadied herself before she raised her whip. She wore an uncertain expression. Her eyes were icy cold and extremely wary. It was as if she was trying to figure out if the large chap's words were true or false.

Song Qingxiao analyzed the scene before her. In her mind, she had set the large chap as a dangerous character in the trial. At the same time, the killing intention she had towards him grew.

It was not because Song Qingxiao empathized with the experience of the lady with the whip, nor was it because she was angry that the large chap had treated her differently from the lady with the whip. It was because the man appeared rough, but he was actually very meticulous.

He used his credits to redeem a gun and bullets with tremendous intimidation power. Even though these objects possessed a great lethality, they were also highly attention-grabbing. It would be extremely hard for him to conceal it after he entered the test space.

Hence he knew that before he became everyone's target, he needed to use his gun and force everyone else in the trial to reveal their trump card and ability.