

## **When God 251**

### Chapter 251 7 Bullets

Li Xiu brought the glass bottle close to Demigod Shana and saw that he didn't seem to reject it. Meanwhile, the evil inside the bottle was already stirring restlessly, bouncing around wildly as if trying to escape.

As soon as the cap was opened, the evil leaped out like a bouncing ball and rushed toward Demigod Shana's mouth.

Demigod Shana didn't dodge; he opened his mouth and swallowed the evil directly.

"Is that it?" Li Xiu watched for a while, but Demigod Shana didn't show any special reaction, just like when the Jedi Knight swallowed the evil back then.

Unless Demigod Shana upgrades in level, there shouldn't be any noticeable effect.

After testing for a while and finding that Demigod Shana's intellect didn't seem affected, Li Xiu relaxed and put it away.

In the following days, Li Xiu continuously entered the Hero Trial Ground, always choosing the attribute rewards, and finally managed to raise the Primordial Embryo Quality to 1.2.

Unfortunately, luck wasn't on his side; he didn't come across any entry ticket rewards and could only continue to wait for an opportunity.

"It's a call from the Red Sand City Lord." Sha Chu suddenly came looking for Li Xiu.

Li Xiu responded and went to the office, picked up the phone on the table, and said, "Hello, this is Li Xiu."

"I have something that might interest you." The words from the Red Sand City Lord left Li Xiu slightly stunned.

He initially thought the Red Sand City Lord was contacting him either about joining Changsheng Tian or the Demon Spirit Tournament, but now it seemed otherwise.

"Is this good news or bad news?" Li Xiu asked.

"It's hard to say whether it's good or bad news. Recently, there have been many high-level Demon Spirits appearing around Red Sand City. Have you heard about this?" The Red Sand City Lord said, unhurriedly.

"I haven't heard any news of Red Sand City being attacked by Demon Spirits." Li Xiu had been wondering about this matter before, and he hadn't expected the Red Sand City Lord to bring it up directly.

"That's because their target isn't Red Sand City; it's an old mine nearby. Those Demon Spirits have already ventured into that old mine." The Red Sand City Lord said with a smile, "Do you know what this means?"

"I don't know." Li Xiu answered directly.

"It seems you don't know much about Trial Takers, but that's okay. Let me enlighten you a bit about them." The Red Sand City Lord was patient and explained in detail, "Trial Takers are divided into six levels, with S-Class being the highest. You should be aware of this. However, S-Class is not the end for Trial Takers; rather, it's the beginning."

Li Xiu was fully captivated by what the Red Sand City Lord was saying. The Trial Takers he had encountered were not of very high levels, and his knowledge of this information was quite limited.

"S-Class Trial Takers have reached the limits of their physical traits and Symbiotic Contracts, unable to progress further, but within the Trial Ground, there are Demon Spirits more powerful than S-Class. These Demon Spirits can easily kill S-Class Trial Takers."

"Many of the early S-Class Trial Takers fell in the Land of Trial because of this, and later it was discovered that these Demon Spirits possess a peculiar power. This power can cause a transformation between their bodies and Light Energy, which we call 'Super Spirit.' Symbiotic Contracts can also attain Super

Spirit, but two conditions are required: reaching S-Class and obtaining a soul-transcending metamorphosis, which needs special energy as a guide."

"This special energy typically comes from Super Demon Spirits with Super Spiritual Ability. Currently, very few Trial Takers can kill Super Demon Spirits. Another source is certain special Gemstones on Earth, but ordinary people cannot differentiate which Gemstones have Super Spirit abilities, though some Demon Spirits can sense the existence of those Super Spirit Gemstones..."

"Are you saying that there are Super Spirit Gemstones in that old mine and those Demon Spirits are after the Super Spirit Gemstones?" Li Xiu understood the implication from the Red Sand City Lord.

The words from the Red Sand City Lord revealed a lot of information. Within Changsheng Tian, there are certainly Trial Takers with Super Spiritual Ability whose combat power might have surpassed S-Class Magic Armor Masters.

Yet, Li Xiu was still somewhat puzzled. Since Changsheng Tian possesses such formidable power, why haven't they taken over the world directly?

"That seems to be the case. If you're interested, you could check out that old mine. You might have some gains, you never know." The Red Sand City Lord didn't directly invite Li Xiu to the old mine, only left an address before hanging up.

"What does the Red Sand City Lord mean by this? Why tell me about it? Does he really think I'm one of his subordinates?" Li Xiu put down the phone, frowning slightly.

The manner in which the Red Sand City Lord spoke with him didn't seem like talking to a subordinate, nor was he forcing him to go to the old mine. So what exactly is his intention in telling him all this?

The Red Sand City Lord should know that Li Xiu has not yet reached S-Class, so even if there are Super Spirit Gemstones, they would not be of immediate use to him.

An ordinary Trial Taker couldn't possibly compete with so many S-Class Demon Spirits for the Super Spirit Gemstones.

After pondering, Li Xiu speculated that perhaps the Red Sand City Lord was suspicious of his identity as a Magic Armor Master and wanted to take this opportunity to test him.

Li Xiu didn't mind; even if the Red Sand City Lord knew he was akin to a god, so what? Would he bring a Super Spirit Tester to kill him? Li Xiu actually wanted to know just how strong a Super Spirit Tester really is.

Chapter 252 7 Bullets\_2

"Since the Red Sand City Lord didn't mention anything about the Magic Tournament, it seems my guess was right. The Everlasting Heaven doesn't mind revealing the matters of Trial Takers and magic spirits to the public. This way, we can safely hold the Magic Tournament." Li Xiu didn't plan to look for that so-called Super Spirit Gemstone.

Besides, whether what the Red Sand City Lord said was true or not, even if there really were a Super Spirit Gemstone, it wouldn't be of any use to Li Xiu at present. He's still a long way from reaching S-level.

"Right now, making money and leveling up are the most important things." Li Xiu put the matter of the Super Spirit Gemstone out of his mind and continued to enter the Land of Trial daily to enhance his attributes.

At present, the funds he had on hand were only enough to buy some topaz to upgrade the Masked Emperor's level, making the Masked Emperor relentlessly consume the topaz from the fuel tank every day.

Finally, the Masked Emperor advanced to level C, but unfortunately, it did not awaken a Talent Skill this time.

"It's really strange, why haven't any Trial Takers signed up for the Magic Tournament? It's been almost a month, and only six Trial Takers have registered, all from some unknown nearby cities." Chu Jun, feeling quite frustrated, came to Li Xiu to complain.

"The beginning is always the hardest. As long as we can successfully hold the Magic Tournament once, things will get easier afterward." Li Xiu said with a smile.

"But without Trial Takers participating in the Magic Tournament, how can we succeed?" Chu Jun said.

"That's simple. If no one comes to compete, we'll just join the competition ourselves." Li Xiu had no intention of relying on those participants to attract popularity.

"I guess that's the only option. With your magic spirits to support the scene, it shouldn't be too embarrassing." Chu Jun pondered for a moment and then asked, "By the way, how are things going on A Fei and Ye Yuzhen's end? Have they managed to get any results?"

Li Xiu shook his head helplessly and replied, "A Fei and Ye Yuzhen go into the Trial Ground every day with people, and after so many days, they haven't even seen a single entry ticket. Their luck is truly abysmal."

"Well, there's nothing we can do about that." Chu Jun was also at a loss since they couldn't find any entry tickets no matter what they tried.

"I'm feeling quite down right now. Since we're just idling around, how about we head to the Trial Ground?" Chu Jun suggested.

"Sure." Li Xiu was indifferent, as he went to the Trial Ground daily to boost his attributes anyway.

When the two of them entered the Trial Ground, they randomly ended up with the lowest E-level difficulty, leaving them both speechless.

The rewards for an E-level difficulty were essentially useless to them.

But who could have guessed that after completing the level, they would randomly obtain two entry tickets, which left them both dumbfounded.

The chance of getting an entry ticket from an E-level difficulty was extremely low, yet they got two at once, akin to winning the lottery.

"If A Fei and Ye Yuzhen find out about this, they'll be furious." Chu Jun chuckled.

"Sometimes, one has to accept fate." Li Xiu nodded and said, "I have some ideas that I want to test in the Land of Trial."

Both of them chose entry tickets and entered them individually. When they arrived at Black Death City, they both appeared at a crossroad, each with a Copper Lamp by their side.

"What is it that you want to test?" Standing at the crossroad in Black Death City, before the Black Death Demons appeared, Chu Jun looked at Li Xiu and asked.

Li Xiu summoned the Forbidden Spear and pointed to the end of the long street, saying, "This time, I'll handle all the Black Death Demons. I want to test the Talent Ability of the Symbiotic Contract."

"Alright." Chu Jun also wanted to see how strong Li Xiu's Symbiotic Contract was.

Soon, the Black Death Demon, dragging chains, appeared on the long street. Li Xiu raised his gun and directly shot the Black Death Demon.

The bullet hit the head of the Black Death Demon, piercing right through.

Yet, the Black Death Demon merely staggered, then charged toward them again as if it hadn't been injured.

"Your Symbiotic Contract's power doesn't seem enough. Can't even kill a regular Black Death Demon?" Chu Jun laughed heartily, finally seizing a chance to tease Li Xiu.

Not surprised at all, Li Xiu directly summoned Demigod Shana, who shot at the Black Death Demon, blowing its head apart with a single shot, killing it instantly.

This made Chu Jun laugh even more: "I say, brother, with the same gun, yours seems a bit inadequate, unlike Shana's gun; it's so mighty."

Li Xiu just smiled without saying a word, walked over to the shattered head of the Black Death Demon, and dug around in the fragments, quickly retrieving a black Gemstone.

"A regular Black Death Demon actually dropped a Talent Gemstone; that's some good luck. Is this the luck you got from offering your gun?" Chu Jun said with a merry smile upon seeing the Talent Gemstone.

The chance of a regular Black Death Demon dropping a Talent Gemstone was pitifully low, akin to winning the lottery; Chu Jun was still somewhat envious.

"Not just anyone can offer a gun and get results." Li Xiu chuckled as he pocketed the Talent Gemstone.

Before long, Black Death Demons from another street emerged, and Li Xiu fired again, using non-lethal ammo.

Bang!

This time, Li Xiu hit the head again, yet the Black Death Demon remained completely unscathed.

This time, Chu Jun didn't laugh, as he sensed something was off.

Li Xiu's strength was at least on par with Chu Jun's. These ordinary Black Death Demons could be killed by Chu Jun in one hit, so there was no reason Li Xiu couldn't handle them.

Chapter 253 7 Bullets\_3

The first shot can still be considered lucky, letting that Black Death Demon survive by chance, but how come the second shot didn't kill it either.

Demigod Shana continued to shoot, and after blasting the Black Death Demon apart, all the black aura on its body gathered towards the exploded head.

Li Xiu walked over and rummaged through it, quickly pulling out a Talent Gemstone from inside.

"Whoa, what's going on? Is there really something to the idea of swapping bullets for luck?" Chu Jun's eyes were wide with disbelief.

"You can try it and see." Li Xiu said with a smile.

Chu Jun fell silent, watching Li Xiu continue shooting.

The next shot didn't yield another Talent Gemstone, the bullet turned into a Demon Core.

"I said so, there's no such good fortune. Your luck with this bullet swapping isn't cutting it." Chu Jun laughed.

With three consecutive shots, all that came out were Demon Cores, no Talent Gemstones, and by the sixth shot, Li Xiu unexpectedly pulled out a Skill Ring, leaving Chu Jun speechless.

"Goodness me, out of six Black Death Demons, you got two Talent Gemstones and a Skill Ring. Aren't you the secret offspring of the Goddess of Fortune?" Chu Jun eyed the Forbidden Spear in Li Xiu's hands, guessing at the cause.

Li Xiu didn't speak, he fired the seventh shot, and again it was just Demon Cores, nothing else appeared.

When Li Xiu wanted to keep shooting, he found the Forbidden Spear wouldn't fire anymore, despite pulling the trigger, no bullets came out.

"Are the Seven Taboos limited to just seven bullets?" Li Xiu was a bit disappointed, dashing his hopes of relying on the Forbidden Spear to farm magic spirits somewhat.

Now Li Xiu only wanted to know when he could shoot again.

But getting three items from seven shots was already quite good, considering these were just ordinary magic spirits, if it were high-quality ones, the chances would be even higher.

Though up until now, no magic spirits have been shot out; it's uncertain if they can appear, theoretically, they should.

"It seems that the Forbidden Spear should only be used selectively on high-quality magic spirits to achieve the best results and maximum gains." Li Xiu put away the Forbidden Spear and let Demigod Shana handle the other spirits, while he used one Talent Gemstone directly.

Night Pupil: E-level talent, offering some night vision capability with a certain chance to see through dark mists.

Although having the same Night Pupil talent, both being E-level, this Night Pupil talent carries added ability to see through dark mists and is evidently stronger than the normal Night Pupil talent, overriding the previous one.

Li Xiu also used the Skill Ring he obtained, gaining the E-level Dark Curse skill.

Dark Curse: E-level skill, providing self with a dark curse, enhancing physique by a hundred and four percent during the night.

The Dark Curse did not have additional abilities but lacked the negative effect of weakening physique by forty percent during the day, making the skill much stronger.

Li Xiu was thrilled; the skills and talents from the Forbidden Spear indeed proved superior to regular ones.

Whenever encountering high-quality spirits in the future, this shot greatly increases the likelihood of acquiring skills and talents, not to mention getting better stuff. Nothing beats this ability.

"Too bad, it can only shoot seven bullets at a time." Li Xiu tossed the remaining Talent Gemstone to Chu Jun.

"What's the use? I've already got the Night Pupil talent; this thing isn't of any use to me." Chu Jun sneered.

"Go ahead and use it first." Li Xiu suggested.

Seeing that Li Xiu wasn't joking, Chu Jun, somewhat convinced, used the Night Pupil Talent Gemstone.

"How can the Night Pupil talent see through dark mists too, is there really a difference in the same talent's level?" Chu Jun looked at Li Xiu in amazement.

"Whenever you find high-quality spirits, remember to let me take a shot." Li Xiu calmly said.

By saying this, Li Xiu had vaguely revealed the capability of his gun to Chu Jun, making Chu Jun's eyes envious and red.

"This ability is too strong, with such a power, what could be unobtainable..." Chu Jun said excitedly.

"Don't get excited too early, I can only fire seven bullets, and now there's no telling how long it'll be before I can shoot them again." Li Xiu explained.

Sooner or later, he would have to team up with Chu Jun to kill spirits in the Land of Trials, so the ability of the Forbidden Spear didn't need to be kept secret from him.

"Only seven bullets?" Chu Jun's face instantly showed disappointment: "Then why waste them on these little ones, save them for the big ones..."

"Well, I was just testing." Li Xiu chuckled.

Without anymore shots, the items dropped by the Black Death Demons significantly decreased. Hundreds of Black Death Demons, including the final Flowing Color Black Death Demons, left nothing but Demon Cores behind.

The two picked up the Demon Cores, and just as Li Xiu was about to put them away, he saw Demigod Shana eyeing the Flowing Color Demon Core in his hand.

"Do you want to eat this?" Li Xiu was slightly startled, but quickly understood.

Previously, when the Jedi Knight was parasitized by evil, he started to show interest in Demon Cores.

Li Xiu assumed it was due to some attribute compatibility between the Jedi Knight and Black Death Demons; the Jedi Knight was formed from a crystal, and the entrance to the Hero Trial Ground also required a crystal to open.

Though the two had different colors, both were crystals, so the Jedi Knight's interest in Black Death Demon Cores seemed explainable.

Now it appeared, it wasn't just about attribute compatibility, their interest in Demon Cores was likely due to evil.

Li Xiu tossed the Flowing Color Demon Core to Demigod Shana, who swallowed it without hesitation.

Li Xiu rejoiced: "If you consume Demon Cores, that makes things simpler, I can't obtain too many blue crystals now, but there are plenty of Demon Cores."

There were still many Radiant Black Death Demon Cores he had obtained before, and Li Xiu couldn't wait to get out and feed the remaining Radiant Demon Cores to Demigod Shana.

Chapter 254 Mysterious Light in the Black Sea

Demigod Shana wasn't very interested in an Ordinary Demon Core, probably because it contained too little Light Energy.

Li Xiu and Chu Jun stepped out of the gate and cleared the Mechanical Skeletons once again. Unexpectedly, the last appearing A-rank Mechanical Skeleton turned out to be a Radiant Demon Spirit.

Fortunately, the Jedi Knight, under the reinforcement of the Gentleman Hat, could barely inflict injuries on it. With the support of several Demon Spirits, the Jedi Knight delivered the final blow, taking down the Radiant Mechanical Skeleton.

Unfortunately, the Radiant Mechanical Skeleton left nothing behind but a Demon Core.

Li Xiu handed the Demon Core to Demigod Shana, who took it without hesitation and swallowed it.

"Why are you randomly feeding Demon Cores to Demigod Shana? If the attributes don't match, the chances of awakening a Talent Skill are very low. Just having a high level isn't useful; it's Demon Spirits with Talent Skills that are powerful. Don't waste such a good Radiant Demon Spirit..." Chu Jun said, feeling heartbroken. But before he could finish his words, he saw a radiant blue light erupt from Demigod Shana, akin to a volcanic eruption, with blue Light Flame shooting into the sky.

"Finally leveled up!" Li Xiu was slightly pleased.

After the blue Light Flame dissipated, Demigod Shana's figure emerged. Its blue, shadowy body hadn't changed much, perhaps looking a bit larger, but the difference wasn't significant.

However, the gun and greatsword in his hands had some changes; some strange patterns appeared on them, and the glow of those patterns was notably brighter and more vivid than the rest.

Demigod Shana: Radiant Demon Spirit.

Grade: D-level (evolvable).

Talent Skill: Godslayer.

For some reason, Li Xiu couldn't see the Primordial Embryo Quality of the Demon Spirit. He had asked Chu Jun, but Chu Jun couldn't see it either.

"Feeding it so recklessly, and it still awakened a Talent Skill—how unfair! Is a Radiant Demon Spirit just that powerful?" Chu Jun lamented, feeling various emotions for Demigod Shana.

"Awakened a Talent Skill, but who knows what it's for." Li Xiu said as he headed towards the dam-like structure.

Chu Jun tried to sense it again but didn't sense the final Fanatic inside. As the two pushed the door open, there was indeed nothing inside, no sign of the final Fanatic, only those fourteen doors.

Chu Jun attempted to open a door but couldn't. It seemed they really couldn't enter.

"We've cleared this area; let's check out the other city gates." Li Xiu pondered and said.

"Where to? The desert, Black Sea, or that city gate with the ghostly wails?" Chu Jun asked.

"Let's check out the Black Sea again." Li Xiu thought for a moment and said.

The gate with ghostly wails was too eerie; Chu Jun couldn't sense it clearly, and going there recklessly was too dangerous.

There was nothing in the desert except fear of losing their way, as it was too far from Black Death City. The seaside was relatively better.

As long as they returned before the terrifying sea Demon Spirit appeared, there'd be no problem. With Li Xiu having the Masked Emperor, escaping was slightly assured.

The two of them opened the city gate and returned to the beach.

Strangely enough, the half-human, half-mechanical Demon Spirit from before was nowhere to be seen, and the Illusory Sea Clam disguised as a reef before was now only the cracked reef.

The beach and sea were eerily silent, without even the slightest sound, enveloped in deathly silence all around.

"Do the Demon Spirits here not reappear after being killed?" Chu Jun asked in confusion.

"It's normal for them not to appear. Did you really think this was a game where slain monsters could respawn?" Li Xiu replied.

"But the Black Death Demon and those Mechanical Skeletons in Black Death City appear every time we come!" Chu Jun countered stubbornly.

"Maybe those Black Death Demons and Mechanical Skeletons were always present, just not all at once." Li Xiu speculated as he surveyed the black sea, which stretched out in inky darkness.

Suddenly, Li Xiu's gaze sharpened. On the black sea's surface, he faintly spotted a glimmer of light.

No, it shouldn't be starlight; it only looked like stars hanging on the horizon because it was so far away.

In reality, there wasn't even a single star in the sky above the Black Sea.

That glimmer seemed to be moving along the sea's surface, shifting left, then right.

"What's that light over there? Can you see it?" Li Xiu pointed to the light on the sea and asked Chu Jun.

Chu Jun stared for a long time, shaking his head, "It's too far away; I can only see a light moving. I don't know what it is; maybe it's light emitted from a Demon Spirit?"

Neither of them could see clearly, their eyes wide open in scrutiny.

After a while, the light seemed to draw closer and glowed brighter. They vaguely perceived it might not be light from a Demon Spirit.

"Why does it look like a lamp to me?" Chu Jun rubbed his eyes and said.

"It should be a lamp." Li Xiu fixated on the light over the sea.

"It's not another Copper Lamp like the Longevity Lamp, is it? Wasn't the Longevity Lamp supposed to stay within Black Death City? How did it end up at sea?" Chu Jun murmured.

Li Xiu noticed the light drawing closer and, after watching for a while, discerned that beneath the light was not the sea but a shadowy outline.

"That's... a ship..." Chu Jun also saw the hazy silhouette.

The light wasn't very bright, and the distance was vast. They could merely make out a ship's shadow, deducing from its outline that it might be a sailing ship.

Chapter 255 Black Sea Suspicious Light\_2

"There's actually a ship on the sea, do magical spirits know how to pilot ships?" Chu Jun said with a peculiar expression.

"There's even a city, what's the big deal about piloting a ship?" Li Xiu replied indifferently. He had seen magical spirits that could speak, whose intelligence was not inferior to humans, so building a ship wasn't a big deal for them.

But now they didn't know what kind of magical spirits were on the ship, how many there were, and whether the spirits on the ship could enter the Black Death City.

The two of them lay on the beach, using the sand as camouflage, constantly watching the large ship on the Black Sea.

Strangely enough, even though this Black Sea was calm and windless, it was unclear why a sailboat was needed.

The sailboat seemed to be heading in their direction, and as time passed, the dark shadow gradually became clearer.

When the two finally saw the true form of the sailboat, they couldn't help but shiver.

It was indeed a sailboat, and quite a large one at that, a four-sailed wooden ship.

But now the ship was in tatters, the sails full of holes, the hull also dilapidated, with massive cracks in the wooden sides, making it hard to believe such a ship could sail on the sea.

The ship was covered in thick dust, not a single living creature in sight, only a copper oil lamp hanging on the mast.

The large ship rocked gently on the sea, resembling a ghost ship carrying dead spirits, eerie and terrifying.

"What's up with that ship? Could it be the legendary ghost ship, and the ship itself is a magical spirit?" Chu Jun whispered to Li Xiu beside him.

"How would I know? I don't have an Inspiration Skill." Li Xiu couldn't help but roll his eyes.

"The distance is too far, I can't sense it either." Chu Jun said, frustrated.

"Then let's wait until it gets closer." Li Xiu said, lying on the sand, focusing on the eerie ghost ship.

"I just fear when it gets closer, if there's a real emergency, we won't have time to escape." Chu Jun said worriedly.

"That's a ship, not a spaceship, are you afraid it will come ashore? Even if it can come ashore, do you think it can be faster than my Masked Emperor? As soon as we sense anything wrong, we'll immediately ride the Masked Emperor back to the city, no matter how powerful that strange ship is. One blow of the lamp, and we're gone; it won't be able to catch us." Li Xiu assured.

Chu Jun couldn't leave now, as Zhou Wen needed him to use the Inspiration Skill to sense what's on that ghost ship.

Chu Jun thought for a moment and agreed, knowing the speed of the Masked Emperor, he felt more at ease.

The dilapidated ship floated over the sea, and after waiting for a long time, it finally entered Chu Jun's sensing range.

Chu Jun immediately used the Inspiration Skill to sense the ship, while Li Xiu kept scrutinizing it.

Calling it a dilapidated ship was no exaggeration, with cracks as thick as an arm all over the hull, and the sails didn't have a single intact spot, with countless holes probably numbering in the thousands.

The largest hole could fit a small car through.

Dust covered everything, and there were spider webs everywhere, layer upon layer, almost resembling mosquito nets.

"Strange, the dilapidated ship doesn't seem like a magical spirit, and I can't sense the presence of any spirits within it." said Chu Jun, gazing at the ship.

"No spirits? Could it be a human ship?" Li Xiu pondered.

"How could that be? How could a human ship reach a place like this? Not to mention the ship itself, even a ship nail couldn't be brought into the Land of Trial." Chu Jun replied.

"You're right; maybe there are hidden spirits in the ship's cabin." Li Xiu suggested.

Chu Jun responded affirmatively and used the Inspiration Skill again, but the results were still fruitless, indeed no spirit presence on the ship.

"That's odd, a dilapidated ship without spirits appearing on this Dead Sea-like Black Sea, and ending up right here, it's too much of a coincidence." Li Xiu mused.

"I find it strange too, but I really don't sense any spirit presence on the ship." Chu Jun said, eyeing the ship.

The ship was getting closer to the beach, revealing its contents clearly but wasn't much to see.

The ship was covered with a thick layer of dust, even the sides were dusty, appearing grayish, and the sails and hull's colors couldn't be discerned.

"There is neither wind nor waves on the Black Sea, how did it drift over? The water in the Black Sea is highly corrosive, how could such a ship possibly sail on the Black Sea? It's just too strange... And we've been here for at least five or six hours, why hasn't that terrifying sea spirit appeared again?" Chu Jun muttered.

As the ship was about to reach the beach, Li Xiu and Chu Jun quietly retreated to the city gate, observing the ship from within.

They watched the ship approach the coast, but before it reached the beach, it became stranded in the sea, then motionless with only the oil lamp on the mast emitting an eerie glow.

The two waited another hour, but still no movement from the ship, so they exchanged glances and decided to check the beach more carefully.

Chapter 256 Black Sea Mysterious Light\_3

Li Xiu dared not be careless. He directly summoned the Masked Emperor, mounted it, and took Chu Jun to the beach, observing the wrecked ship up close.

In case of any sudden movements, Li Xiu would immediately unleash the full power of the Masked Emperor to rush back into Black Death City with them.

However, when they reached the seaside, the large ship remained unresponsive, quietly stranded there, about tens of meters away from the beach.

The two of them moved left and right along the beach, trying to observe the ship from different directions to see if there were any suspicious areas.

Upon close inspection, aside from an oil lamp, they did not find anything suspicious.

Suddenly, Chu Jun pointed at the wreck and shouted, "Li Xiu, look over there, is there something there?"

"What is it?" Li Xiu followed Chu Jun's finger and saw the area he was pointing at was the side of the ship's hull, which had many cracks. It was unclear which crack he was referring to.

"The largest and thickest crack in the middle. Look, is there something inside that crack?" Chu Jun continued.

Following Chu Jun's guidance, Li Xiu looked over. It was a crack thicker than an adult's arm and several meters long. The inside of the crack was dark, and from such a distance, an average person couldn't see what was inside.

Li Xiu used the Dark Mirror's ability to carefully inspect it, scanning along the crack from left to right.

When he reached around the middle of the crack, his heart skipped a beat because it seemed like he saw a pair of eyes, staring directly at him from within the shadows of the crack.

Instinctively, Li Xiu twisted the throttle, wanting to flee with Chu Jun, shouting, "Didn't you say there were no magical beings inside the wreck?"

"You saw those eyes too, right? I saw them too, but I still didn't sense any magical presence inside," Chu Jun's words caused Li Xiu to pause.

He turned to look at Chu Jun seated behind him, "Without sensing magical beings, could it be that the owner of those eyes is not a magical being?"

"In such a place, if not a magical being, what else could it be? Could it possibly be a human?" Chu Jun joked.

But upon hearing that, Li Xiu was slightly taken aback.

Earlier, those eyes had startled him, but recalling carefully, they seemed less like the eyes of a magical being and more like human eyes.

Li Xiu turned the vehicle around, twisted the throttle, and returned to the seaside, once again inspecting that crack, but he couldn't find the eyes anymore.

"Strange, they're gone again. Could it be that I was seeing things?" Chu Jun muttered while scrutinizing the crack for a while.

"If it was just a hallucination, how could both of us see it at the same time?" Li Xiu said coldly as he stared at the wreck.

"But if it wasn't a hallucination, and my Inspiration Skill detected no magical beings, then how could there be those eyes, which have now disappeared?" Chu Jun pointed at the wreck and said, "The ship is covered in dust. If there were truly living beings, why does it look like there's no sign of activity at all...?"

"Your Inspiration Skill has never been wrong. Since you didn't sense magical beings, then there must be none on the ship. If not magical beings, then the most likely possibility is..."

Li Xiu's words were cut off by Chu Jun, "Humans? Could there really be humans on that wreck? You must be dreaming."

"Whether it's a fantasy or not, we can test it," Li Xiu suddenly shouted at the wreck, "Anyone on the ship, listen up, we mean no harm. Do you need assistance?"

Li Xiu shouted thrice, but there was no response from the wreck, just a death-like silence apart from his own voice.

"See, I told you there couldn't be humans aboard," Chu Jun said after thinking, "In my opinion, the eyes we saw might belong to some humanoid magical being. However, it's not a living one but rather the corpse of a magical being, which is why I couldn't sense it. We saw them initially, but they disappeared, possibly because the ship settled and shook the body down. That explanation is far more plausible than yours."

Hearing this, Chu Jun suddenly grew excited, "Magical beings that can navigate the sea aren't ordinary. If there's truly a magical being corpse on board, we could strike it rich."

"Even if there really is a magical being corpse, you have to be able to board the ship first. It's at least fifty or sixty meters from the shore, possibly even farther. Can you jump over there? If you fall into the sea, I can't pull you ashore," Li Xiu stated.

Looking at the black sea water and recalling the consequences of minor contact with it earlier, Chu Jun shivered involuntarily.

"It's a pity we can't bring anything from outside. Otherwise, tossing a grappling hook onto the ship would solve the problem," Chu Jun said, frustrated.

As the two were discussing, they suddenly heard creaking noises from the wreck, which began to move again, as if a force was pushing it forward.

Due to tremendous pressure, the ship's wooden planks creaked as the stranded wreck moved towards the beach.

"Run!" Chu Jun, seeing what was happening, shouted immediately.

Behind the wreck, the black seawater was surging, with a large luminous object rising from below, causing the black waters to swell alongside it.

Judging by the color of the glow, it seemed to be the terrifying magical being they had seen previously.

Li Xiu also noticed it. Without needing Chu Jun's reminder, he had already activated the Masked Emperor. Golden flames erupted, and the wheels coated in Light Flame scattered the sand as they sped towards the city gate.

The black seawater rose higher and higher, and the wreck was also lifted by tsunami-like black water, rushing towards Black Death City.

The Masked Emperor's speed was noticeably faster than before, and the tsunami-like black water couldn't keep up with its pace.

After rushing through the city gate, the two jumped off and quickly turned the winch, rapidly lowering the gate.

Boom!

Just as they completely lowered the gate, a huge crash resounded, shaking the entirety of Black Death City, and the gate trembled incessantly.

Li Xiu suspected that the wreck had crashed into the gate, causing such a massive disturbance. Mere seawater wouldn't have been so terrifying, as they had experienced such an impact before and knew how seawater affected the gate.

Moreover, after the loud crash, Li Xiu also heard the sound of wood splintering.

Chapter 257 The Voice Outside the Door

The sound of the sea outside slapping against the city gates and walls was terrifying, making people worry that the gates and walls would soon be smashed to pieces.

No one knew what was special about the stone of Black Death City. Even after being repeatedly struck and eroded by the highly corrosive seawater, it still stood firm, showing no sign of black water seeping in.

No matter how fierce the tsunami-like black water outside was, it never managed to collapse the city walls of Black Death City.

It's strange; it's understandable that the walls and gates couldn't be collapsed, but the fact that not a single drop of water spilled over from the top of the walls is quite unbelievable.

Even though the city walls of Black Death City were very high, Li Xiu observed that the height of the incoming tsunami, even if it wasn't taller than the walls, should have splashed some water in after hitting the walls.

Yet, there was not even a hint of mist within the city.

"This Black Death City is truly an incredible place. I wonder if the other Lands of Trial are as magical as this one," Li Xiu thought, wanting to see the other Lands of Trial.

From outside came the continuous sound of waves crashing, occasionally mixed with strange cries. Those cries had a higher pitch than that of dolphins, lacking the pleasant quality of dolphin calls, and were quite bizarre and piercing, causing one's heart to shudder.

No one knew how much time had passed, but gradually the strange cries stopped, and the sound of water hitting the gates ceased as well.

"Do you think the demon spirit has left?" Chu Jun pressed an ear against the gate, listened for a while, and looked at Li Xiu uncertainly.

"If you don't know, how would I know?" Li Xiu said helplessly, spreading his hands.

"I guess it probably left. The demon spirit seems unable to leave the Black Sea. Just now, it only caused a tsunami to attack Black Death City. If it really came ashore, there's no telling if the gate could withstand its impact," Chu Jun hesitated for a moment before saying, "Should we go out and have a look? I wonder how that ship is doing."

Li Xiu was also concerned about the ship. He was hesitating whether to go out now or wait a bit longer when suddenly he heard a sound from the gate again.

Thud! Thud!

The sudden sound startled both of them; they thought the terrifying demon spirit from the sea was coming back again.

After listening closely for a while, they realized the noise was too small, unlike the terrifying demon spirit returning; it seemed more like someone was pounding on the gate with their fist.

"Who is it? Who's outside?" Chu Jun shouted through the door.

The only reply he got was the thudding sound, not a human voice.

The two exchanged glances, and Chu Jun said with a strange expression, "I still can't sense the presence of the demon spirit; could it really be someone from the ship?"

"Although it's a bit unbelievable, it is indeed possible," Li Xiu said, pondering.

"So should we open the door? If it's really someone from the ship who survived by a stroke of luck, and we don't open the door, wouldn't we be cutting off their last hope of survival?" Chu Jun said hesitantly.

"Let's wait a bit longer. If they managed to survive in such extreme conditions till now, a little more time won't matter," Li Xiu mused.

The two stood inside by the door, staring at it, with the thudding sound continuously echoing in their ears.

"Are you human or ghost? Say something, or even if you beat yourself to death outside, we won't open the door," Chu Jun couldn't help but shout again.

After this shout, the knocking sound outside suddenly stopped.

The outside turned deathly quiet. After waiting for a while, the knocking sound truly disappeared, and it never came again.

"Could it be that the person outside died?" Chu Jun said, somewhat panicked.

If there really was someone outside, injured and unable to speak, knocking the door for help, but ended up losing the chance to live because of his cowardice, Chu Jun would find it hard to accept such an outcome in his heart.

"Let's wait a bit more." Li Xiu pressed his ear against the gate, listening carefully.

"What if there's really someone outside waiting for our rescue..." Sympathy stirred in Chu Jun.

"Since the knocking stopped, I haven't heard any sound outside," Li Xiu said.

"Maybe they already passed out," Chu Jun suggested.

"Impossible." Li Xiu directly negated Chu Jun's claim and explained, "Judging from the height of the knocking sound just now, if there really was a person outside, they'd have to be standing to knock the gate at that position."

Chu Jun immediately understood Li Xiu's implication. If that person had been standing while knocking, whether they fainted or left, there should have been some sound.

But from then till now, there had been no noise at all. There was only one explanation for that: either it wasn't a person, or whatever it was is still standing outside motionless.

Upon closer thought, Chu Jun broke out in a cold sweat instantly. "You mean to say that whatever is outside is trying to trick us into opening the gate?"

"That's a possibility," Li Xiu said, staring at the gate. "Maybe it's attached right outside the gate now, just waiting for us to open it and then rush in immediately."

After hearing Li Xiu's words, when Chu Jun looked at the gate again, he felt as if something terrifying was staring at them from outside, giving him a chilling sensation.

"If that's the case, then let's not bother with it. Let's just blow out the light and leave Black Death City," Chu Jun said.

"No rush, let's wait a bit more." Li Xiu kept his ear against the gate, listening to the sounds from outside.

Chapter 258 The Sound Outside the Door\_2

Minute by minute, time kept passing, hours went by as they waited.

"It's been so long, and there's no sound from outside. Do you think we might have been mistaken? Could that thing have left already, and we just can't hear it?" Chu Jun said.

"It's possible," Li Xiu nodded in agreement.

"Should we open the door a crack and take a look outside?" The silent waiting was unbearable. Chu Jun was struggling to hold on.

"Let's wait a bit longer," Li Xiu said, maintaining his posture with his ear pressed against the door, expressionless. "If you're tired, you can sleep for a while. I'll wake you up later."

"Alright," Chu Jun said as he lay down beside him. But he tossed and turned, unable to sleep, his mind a chaotic mess, unsure of what he was thinking.

At some unknown point, Chu Jun fell into a hazy sleep, dreaming of a nightmare where a tsunami from the Black Sea engulfed Black Death City, submerging him in seawater, his body corroded by black water.

He desperately tried to swim to the surface, but his foot was entangled by something. Looking down, he saw a vengeful ghost under the water, grasping his foot with its bony, blood-red hand, pulling him down.

Terrified water ghosts surrounded him, dragging him down relentlessly.

"Ah!" Chu Jun awoke with a start, leaping up to find it was just a dream. There was no black water flooding the city, and no terrifying water ghosts.

The furnace on the long street still burned brightly, the charcoal occasionally crackling, while Li Xiu remained in his position listening intently at the city gate.

Chu Jun wanted to say something as he looked at Li Xiu, but Li Xiu made a gesture for silence.

Chu Jun swallowed his words, seeing Li Xiu motion for him to come closer. Chu Jun quickly moved over, pressing against the city gate to listen intently.

Soon, Chu Jun heard a sound like footsteps on sand, very faint, almost inaudible to anyone without the enhanced hearing of a Trial Taker.

Listening closely for a while, Chu Jun felt as though someone was stepping on sand, moving away from the gate.

"That was close, there really is something outside," Chu Jun thought with relief. If it hadn't been for Li Xiu's caution, he might have opened the door earlier, with unthinkable consequences.

Only when the footsteps were completely gone did Li Xiu lower his voice to speak to Chu Jun, "Whatever was outside has moved away."

"What on earth was it?" Chu Jun asked quietly.

"I don't know, but it's definitely something bad. Even if it's human, it's not someone good," Li Xiu replied.

Chu Jun nodded and asked Li Xiu, "How long did I sleep?"

"About seven hours, give or take a minute or two," Li Xiu answered.

Chu Jun looked at Li Xiu in shock and said, "So you've been listening here for over ten hours? How can you be sure there's something outside?"

"I didn't know, that's why I needed an answer. If we left earlier, we could never be sure, unless we opened the door the next time we came, which would be too dangerous," Li Xiu said.

Chu Jun looked at Li Xiu with a complex expression. To stand in front of the city gate, unmoving and listening for more than ten hours for an answer that might not exist, showed a terrifying amount of patience.

But as Li Xiu said, without a way to confirm if something was outside, it would be too dangerous to open the door next time they visited Black Death City.

"You rest for a while, let me take over," Chu Jun said to Li Xiu, now calmer thanks to Li Xiu's influence.

Li Xiu nodded, laying down beside the door and closing his eyes to sleep.

Chu Jun quickly pressed his ear against the city gate, listening carefully, while activating his Inspiration Skill to sense if any demon spirits appeared outside.

After listening for a while, with time passing indistinctly, Chu Jun felt increasingly uncomfortable.

Remaining motionless was more uncomfortable for him than doing hard labor, Chu Jun would rather run continuously than stay still like this.

Life is in movement, a natural instinct of life. Except when sleeping, making a person do nothing and stay still is far more uncomfortable than physical labor.

Moreover, Chu Jun was naturally restless, making the stillness unbearable.

"How did this guy manage to stay still for over ten hours? I should have been here less than an hour, but I already feel terrible," Chu Jun thought as he looked at the sleeping Li Xiu, wanting to move around, even just take a few steps or stretch.

In the end, Chu Jun gave up the thought, enduring his inner restlessness and continued listening for any sounds outside.

The longer time passed, the more uncomfortable Chu Jun felt. He seemed to hear his own heartbeat, feeling his blood vessels pulsate, and itched as though bugs were crawling on him.

He knew it was all psychological, just the urge to get up and move.

The worst part was not knowing the time, how long he had been listening, or how much longer he had to listen, which was the most tormenting.

"Li Xiu..." At some point, Chu Jun, unable to bear it any longer, softly called out, trying to wake Li Xiu to replace him for a while, to move a bit.

Chapter 259 The Voice Outside the Door\_3

But calling out twice couldn't wake Li Xiu, it seemed Li Xiu was really too tired and sleeping deeply.

"How long has it been? Not a sound. That thing shouldn't come back, right? I'm just standing up to move around, just for a few seconds, it shouldn't be a problem..." Once this thought formed, Chu Jun couldn't shake it from his mind.

But looking at Li Xiu sleeping there, Chu Jun forcibly suppressed the thought.

At this moment, Chu Jun was like an old smoker suffering from withdrawal, everything felt wrong, his whole body felt like insects were crawling over it, so uncomfortable he almost groaned.

"Just for a moment... ten seconds... no, five seconds... three seconds will do... just need to move a bit..." The devil in Chu Jun's heart was restless.

But looking at Li Xiu sleeping on the ground, Chu Jun forcibly suppressed that devil again, reaching out to pinch his own leg hard: "Li Xiu has entrusted his life to me, how can I mess it up, in a place like this, even a one-second mistake could cost a life, even one second is not acceptable..."

"Just one second... one second won't be a problem... that thing has already left..." The devil and angel in Chu Jun's heart constantly clashed, making his breathing rapid.

Uncomfortable, itchy all over, body felt extremely hot, although simply squatting there, his body couldn't stop sweating, the tight white clothes were almost soaked through.

It was unknown how long had passed, Chu Jun's breathing gradually calmed, and the heat in his heart gradually dissipated.

Chu Jun felt unprecedented tranquility, even his mind seemed much clearer, his body felt much fresher after having sweated.

"That sleep was really too good." Li Xiu finally woke up, sitting up from the ground and stretching lazily.

"You're finally awake." Chu Jun let out a long breath.

"How long did I sleep?" Li Xiu asked Chu Jun with a smile.

"How should I know how long you slept?" Chu Jun shook his head.

"Next time, remember to mentally note the time, in a place like this, time is very important." Li Xiu got up and said: "Did you hear that thing come back?"

Chu Jun was first stunned, then shook his head and said: "No, I didn't hear a sound."

"Then it's fine, open the door and take a look." Li Xiu said, walking towards the winch, operating it to slowly raise the gate.

Chu Jun quickly lay down, looking outside from the gap under the gate, indeed there was nothing outside. Looking out, only two footprints like humans left barefoot extended outwards, direction leading to the seaside.

Li Xiu raised the gate up halfway, secured the winch, and squatted down to look outside. On the beach, apart from footprints, there were many scattered planks, presumably left over after the broken ship wrecked.

"To be honest, were you pretending to sleep just now?" Chu Jun suddenly asked Li Xiu.

"Why ask that?" Li Xiu replied with a smile.

Chu Jun opened his mouth but seemed at a loss for words, then shook his head: "Forget it, it's nothing."

Li Xiu smiled silently, summoned the Jedi Knight and Demigod Shana to guard by his side, and then walked out the gate.

On the beach outside the gate, there were quite a few scattered broken planks, but judging by the number of planks, it should only be a small part of the ship, most planks were likely taken back into the Black Sea when the tide receded.

The sand had strong water absorption, the upper layer no longer had traces of black water, occasionally on those broken planks, black water stains could still be seen.

Li Xiu with a thought, Demigod Shana raised a gun and shot at the nearest plank.

The bullet shining with blue light hit the plank, forcing it into the sand, the blue light bullet shattered on impact, producing a metallic sound.

Li Xiu instructed Demigod Shana to retrieve the plank from the sand, the area hit by the bullet had not a single mark.

"Is this wood so hard?" Chu Jun said in surprise.

Demigod Shana brought back the plank, and Li Xiu took the plank, which was less than two feet long, suddenly feeling its heaviness, almost unable to hold onto it.

"This isn't wood... at least not ordinary wood..." Li Xiu used great effort to stabilize the plank.

Chu Jun came over to try holding it, at first using one hand, eventually having to use both hands to hold it steady, without dropping it on the sand.

"So heavy... this texture... must be metal..." Chu Jun said suspiciously while examining the plank in his hand.

"You cover me, I'll collect some planks, these might be useful." Li Xiu summoned the Masked Emperor and had Chu Jun ride it to cover him. He summoned other magic companions to help collect planks from the beach, piling them inside the gate.

These planks were shattered pieces, the smallest no bigger than a palm, the largest over three meters long and more than a foot wide, Demigod Shana couldn't move it alone, Li Xiu had to call upon the Jedi Knight to help, with two magic companions lifting the plank together.

"What's this?" While collecting planks, Li Xiu saw an item different in color beside a plank.

These planks were gray, somewhat like raw iron, but the color was a bit lighter, and seemed denser than raw iron.

The item beside the plank was black, with a matte feel. The part exposed from the sand appeared like a lid with a semi-circular handle, also of matte black material.

Li Xiu directed the Jedi Knight to grab the semi-circular handle, attempting to pull it out, but even after several attempts, the item didn't move at all, as if rooted in the sand.

Li Xiu had Demigod Shana join the Jedi Knight in gripping the edges of the black item, trying to lift it.

As a result, the glowing bodies of the two magic companions flashed because of excessive energy consumption, yet the item still didn't budge.

Chapter 260 The Strange Container

Li Xiu was somewhat surprised. After asking Demigod Shana and the Jedi Knight to step aside, he began to dig along the edge of that thing.

He dug about a foot deep when suddenly there was a flash of light beneath, flickering like lightning streaking across the sky in a fleeting blaze.

Upon closer inspection, Li Xiu discovered that beneath the black substance was a transparent crystal, similar to glass, from which the light was emanating.

After a few more digs, there was still more crystal beneath, occasionally showing lightning-like arcs that appeared and disappeared abruptly, as if many lightning bolts were interweaving within it.

Chu Ling noticed the anomaly over there, but he did not rush back to check, choosing instead to maintain his vigil by the sea.

Before long, Demigod Shana and the Jedi Knight had excavated a large pit, fully revealing the thing.

It was a cylindrical object, about fifty to sixty centimeters in diameter and over a meter tall, yet shy of two meters.

Each end was encased in a black substance, resembling two caps enclosing a cylindrical crystal container.

Inside the crystal container, winding lights flickered and intertwined, sometimes one or two, sometimes several, appearing randomly with no apparent cause for these eerie lights.

"What is this thing?" Li Xiu scrutinized it for a long while, unable to determine what it was.

He summoned the Pink Nightmare and the Black Death Demon, instructing all the spirits to push the object down, rolling it like a wheel out of the pit.

The object was exceedingly heavy. Even with the combined efforts of several spirits, they couldn't lift it, only able to roll it along.

Fortunately, it was a cylinder, so they were able to shove it through the city gate. After searching the beach to ensure nothing else was there, Li Xiu called Chu Ling back and lowered the gate.

"What is this thing?" Chu Ling looked at the strange container in bewilderment, not understanding what it was either.

"I don't know, but I feel the energy of those lights inside is very strong," Li Xiu mused, observing the lights that appeared and vanished inside the container.

"Maybe it's something good. Let's take it back and study it slowly," Chu Ling suggested.

"I'd like to take it back too, but as you know, the items from the Land of Trial must be liftable to be taken out. Even with the combined strength of Demigod Shana and the Jedi Knight, it's impossible to lift this, so how can we take it out?" Li Xiu replied helplessly.

"Is it that heavy?" Chu Ling was astonished.

Though Demigod Shana and the Jedi Knight were not of high rank, they had considerable strength. The fact that two spirits couldn't lift it made one wonder just how heavy it was.

"If you don't believe me, give it a try," Li Xiu offered.

Chu Ling summoned his two Radiant Black Death Demons. Whatever Chu Ling had fed them, they had both advanced to grade C.

The two grade C spirits took positions on either side, grasping the handles on the black caps and exerting all their strength to lift the container. They ended up exhausted and shrouded in black smoke, with no indication that the container would leave the ground.

"It's so heavy... Bringing it back will indeed be troublesome... If we leave it here, I wonder if it will still be here the next time we come in," Chu Ling was frustrated.

"If we can take it back, it's best not to risk leaving it," Li Xiu contemplated, "Do you think this thing fell from the ship?"

"It's quite likely, but with the ship in such disrepair, if there was something shining inside, why didn't we see anything earlier?" Chu Ling voiced his doubts.

Li Xiu pondered over the issue as well. The lights within the container were as bright as lightning, and with all the cracks in the ship, it was perplexing that they hadn't noticed it before.

"There are only two possibilities: one, it was covered by something within the ship, so we didn't see the light, or, two, it wasn't from the ship at all but had fallen from one of those terrifying spirits in the Black Sea..." Chu Ling analyzed.

Though Chu Ling's second theory sounded far-fetched, it wasn't entirely impossible.

"Let's think about how to bring it back first," Li Xiu suggested to Chu Ling, "Let's call out all the spirits and see if they can lift it together."

Upon hearing this, Chu Ling summoned all his spirits, which included merely two Black Death Demons and a Deep Blue Knight.

Li Xiu also summoned his spirits. A crowd of spirits encircled the container, some lifting with their hands, others using their heads. Together, they managed to hoist it up, albeit unsteadily.

But judging by the spirits' appearances, with their fluctuating auras, it was evident they were making a formidable effort.

Bang!

No sooner had they lifted it than a spirit faltered, and the container crashed down, cracking the black stone ground.

Both individuals jumped back in shock. Fortunately, the crystal-like glass container remained unscathed, prompting both to breathe a sigh of relief.