

Background Character? Nah, I'm Going To Be The Peak Instead

Chapter 120: The Rusty Iron Hell Has Everything—Except a 'Conscience'

At the very same time Tendou forcibly joined the Hidden Star Society, Chen Kong had already returned to the Rusten Nail Tavern, which were located in District 12, while carrying the severely injured Seokdu Ma and Vivian.

However, the focus of the interdimensional audience was not on them at all.

Instead, it was on the mysterious masked man who had appeared only briefly, yet had completely crushed Andromeda with overwhelming strength.

Because of Tendou's rather "special" performance earlier, the audience could no longer be certain that the mysterious masked man was Tendou.

After all, aside from sharing the same pair of pale blue eyes, the masked man's combat style was entirely different from Tendou's.

To pin his identity on nothing more than eye color was obviously a bit too much of a stretch.

"This masked guy uses wind and sword, he feels totally incompatible with Tendou from Season 1."

"What do you mean incompatible? Six years passed and even Chen Kong changed this much. Why can't Tendou, the peak of the stars, learn something new?"

“I don’t think it’s necessarily Tendou. If it really were him, why wouldn’t he just take off the mask?”

“Who knows what the production team is thinking, but my gut tells me this guy is definitely Tendou.”

The barrage of comments arguing over whether the mysterious masked man was Tendou instantly turned into a complete mess.

Everyone had their own reasoning, each sounding convincing in their own way.

And that was exactly the effect Tendou wanted.

He needed to maintain a certain level of presence early in Season 2 so that the interdimensional audience wouldn’t easily forget about him.

But at the same time, he couldn’t reveal himself too early, lest it interfere with his future plan in the Above the Firmament.

So after dropping some deliberately ambiguous hints, he tossed out a few smokescreens as well.

That was undoubtedly the best possible outcome.

Not only did it keep discussion and attention focused on him, it also laid the groundwork for a future *reversal*, further boosting his popularity.

A single move, multiple gains.

The mysterious masked man needed to remain mysterious, but not *too* mysterious.

After all, just look at it now: the audience's attention on the masked man had already surpassed that of Chen Kong, the actual protagonist of Stellaris.

When it came to building popularity, Chen Kong still had a lot to learn.

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[Steam City · Rusty Iron Hell District 12 · Rusten Nail Tavern]

“What’s going on, Kong? I only told you to find a way to send her off, how did you end up bringing her back here?”

Inside the Rusten Nail Tavern, Old Jack, standing behind the bar, suddenly stopped wiping his glass. His expression grew heavy as he stared at the silver-white figure slung over Chen Kong’s back.

As for Seokdu Ma, who had walked in and immediately collapsed onto a sofa with a pale, weakened face, Old Jack ignored him completely.

One glance was enough for him to tell that Seokdu Ma wasn’t a local of Steam City, so letting him stay in the Rusten Nail Tavern wouldn’t cause any trouble.

But Vivian was different.

She was a terrifying *time bomb*, one that could blow his entire tavern sky-high at any moment.

“Boss, she’s badly injured. Once she recovers a bit, I’ll send her back up immediately,” Chen Kong said.

“No.”

Without the slightest hesitation, Old Jack rejected Chen Kong’s naïve idea outright.

Still, Old Jack did have some rapport with Chen Kong, so he patiently explained:

“Kong, you’ve been in the Rusty Iron District long enough. You should understand exactly what it means for us to keep her here.”

“Hurry and find a chance to send her up above. That way, it’s good for you, good for me, and good for her.”

“Otherwise, I’ll have no choice but to make you and her leave District 12 for now. You can come back only after you’ve sent her away.”

Seeing how cold and unfeeling Old Jack was, Seokdu Ma, standing to the side, couldn’t help but speak up:

“Wait, look at her condition. If you tell Kong to send her out now, how is that any different from telling him to kill her?”

“Old man, no matter what, you’ve got to have at least a bit of conscience, right?”

Perhaps he’d gotten a little too worked up while speaking. Seokdu Ma accidentally tugged at the wound on his chest, the pain making him bare his teeth and grimace.

At that, Old Jack's gaze suddenly grew deep, as if it pierced through the thick smog hanging over the Rusty Iron District. In a heavy, earnest tone, he said:

"Outsider, do you know why the people of Steam City call the lower district the Rusty Iron 'Hell'?"

With a bitter smile, he pointed at the ceiling.

"It's because in a place where even sunlight can barely reach, conscience is like a plague. It doesn't just destroy you, it can also destroy the people around you."

"There are plenty in the Rusty Iron District who hate those from the Upper District, and even more who hate the Church of Gears."

"If they find out I'm hiding a severely injured Silver Knight here, they'll swarm over like rats that've caught a scent. So—"

*Knock. Knock. Knock*

Just as Old Jack was about to continue, three steady knocks suddenly echoed from the tavern door.

And for someone to show up at a time like this, there was no doubt—they meant trouble.

Old Jack knew it.

Chen Kong knew it too.

Only Seokdu Ma, the outsider, hadn't quite realized it yet.

“Go to the second floor. Put her in my room for now. Once this is over, take her and leave through the back door immediately.”

As he spoke, Old Jack tossed a ring of keys toward Chen Kong with his mechanically enhanced arm.

Chen Kong caught the keys, nodded, then hoisted the unconscious Vivian onto his back and headed straight for the small room on the second floor of the tavern.

What surprised Old Jack was that Seokdu Ma didn't choose to go upstairs with Chen Kong.

Instead, he stayed behind in the main hall of the tavern.

Seeing this, Old Jack asked curiously, “Why aren't you leaving?”

Seokdu Ma replied nonchalantly, “Leave? Why? I've just got a scratch, it's not like I was beaten half to death like that girl. There's no need for me to hide.”

“Besides, I'm kind of curious about this ‘hell’ you keep talking about.”

Hearing that, Old Jack shook his head helplessly.

“You young people really have guts. An old man like me only gets more timid the longer he lives, whenever something happens, my first thought is to hide.”

In response, Seokdu Ma grinned broadly, flashing a bright, sunny smile.

“If young people don't have guts, then what's the point of being young?”

“Besides, a friend of mine once said: the greater the power, the greater the responsibility.”

“And since I, Seokdu Ma, happen to have that kind of power, of course I’m going to stay and take a look.”

“After all, judging by your condition, old man... you don’t exactly look very sturdy.”

Old Jack chuckled.

“To be able to say something like that... I’m guessing that friend of yours must’ve gone through quite a bit of hardship, huh?”

Seokdu Ma thought about it for a moment, then shook his head.

“Actually, not really. That guy’s life has always been smooth sailing.”

“...Is that so.”

“Of course. One of the things he’s best at is making anyone who dares provoke or question him suffer badly, and it works every single time.”

“Interesting.”

Old Jack didn’t know who this “guy” Seokdu Ma was talking about, but from his tone, he could clearly hear the admiration Seokdu Ma held for him.

Whoever it was, he had to be someone formidable.

Just as Old Jack was about to chat a bit more with Seokdu Ma, the door of the Rusten Nail Tavern was suddenly kicked open with brute force.

The man in front wore a skull mask, and a steam chainsaw still dripping with oil hung at his waist.

He stared at Old Jack behind the bar and spoke in an arrogant tone:

“Old Jack, I hear someone here just brought back an Upper District Silver Knight.”

“You should know what it means for us people of Rusty Iron Hell to secretly shelter someone from the upper levels. I suggest you hand her over obediently.”

“Otherwise, your District 12 won’t remain a Safe Zone for long.”

“There’s no Silver Knight here like you say, and besides.”

Old Jack slowly set down his glass. His cloudy eyes suddenly sharpened like blades.

“Cicero, the rules of District 12—”

With a sharp motion, Old Jack flipped open a hidden compartment beneath the bar, pulled out an exaggeratedly designed steam-powered shotgun, and aimed it straight at the group of Blood Skulls gang members who had barged in.

“—are not for you Blood Skulls to teach.”

Seeing Old Jack still far from past his prime, Seokdu Ma let out a whistle and slowly rose from the sofa.

“Not bad. Looks like tonight’s getting an encore performance?”

“Young man, is your injury alright?” Old Jack asked.

“Don’t worry, old man. This little wound won’t stop me from stomping a bunch of scrawny piles of bones.”

“You’d better make sure you don’t blow your own arm off later. That gun of yours looks like it’s got quite a few years on it.”

“Hahaha! Don’t worry, this old body of mine is still doing just fine!”

Watching the two of them banter back and forth, Cicero signaled to his men with a glance, then raised his hand without the slightest hesitation.

A major battle was about to erupt.

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Link to the Novel Google Drive Fanart:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1f7oPMzGjLKukR1MXGIk3EGs71RXZYJ2g>