

# Mystical 61

## Chapter 61: Exploring the Entrance 1

After Garen waited for a while with Grace and Cynthia in the small restaurant, a motorcade of black cars slowly drove toward them. These cars came from a distance away from town and traveled along the roadway.

There were a total of four cars that gradually stopped by the roadside. Policemen in black uniforms stepped out, each wearing a white-rimmed helmet and black leather gloves. The man in charge wore a scarf around his neck. He had a slender physique and his height was accentuated by his black overcoat.

The man talked in an undertone with Dale Quicksilver and the others who greeted him, then looked toward Garen from afar. After a few glances, he nodded, went back to his car, and slowly headed toward the Silversilk Castle.

It was then that Garen noticed the White Eagle, clad in all black, from among the people who came from the cars. He stood near a dark-skinned, muscular man. Turning around, he and Dale Quicksilver walked toward Garen.

"Their men are here, so let's go together," Garen whispered. Cynthia and Grace didn't say anything, but both agreed.

The three of them headed toward Dale Quicksilver's crowd.

"The people from the police department have arrived. Let's follow them and head over together," Dale Quicksilver said in a deep voice as a brown pipe dangled from his mouth. "This is the Black Panther, the White Eagle's sworn brother," he said as he started introducing the dark-skinned man, who was dressed like a soldier.

"Nice to meet you." Garen extended his hand to the man and gave him a friendly smile.

"Likewise." Black Panther grinned, revealing two rows of pristine white teeth. "Your woman, she's very good."

"Umm, I think you've got it wrong. They are my assistant and my bodyguard," Garen explained, bemused. The two women behind him let out faint chuckles. "This is Cynthia. This is Grace. Cynthia is the head of my security team," he said, acquainting them one by one to the crowd.

Detective Dale's assistant, Miss Si Lan, suddenly appeared after they exchanged a few courtesies. She drove to a stop by the side of the road with a horse carriage that had four rows of seats with two seats per row and waited with a smile for everyone to get on.

"Come on or we won't be able to catch up to Sergeant Rio in the front," Miss Si Lan shouted.

Garen's group of three and the detective's group of four filled up the rest of the seats. A black car started following them when no one was paying attention. It was filled with youths wearing black overcoats and round black helmets that covered their lowered faces.

"Are those your men?" Garen looked to Cynthia on his right. The latter nodded with a smile.

Detective Dale, by merely glancing behind him, managed to figure out their origin based on the way they dressed.

"They're from Manuyllton. Your company really values you."

"Naturally, Mr Kelly is an important figure within the company," Cynthia rushed to answer. To one side, Grace frowned slightly.

"Cynthia, aren't you the bodyguard? Don't you have to be aware of the surroundings?" Grace sneered.

"Okay enough of this, let's travel quietly." Garen shook his head, speechless. Whenever there were signs of sparks like these, he would halt them.

"I am absolutely diligent as a bodyguard!" Cynthia gave a lovely smile, revealing two white canines. "You just wait and watch later."

While the three of them were chatting in the back, Dale Quicksilver, the White Eagle, and the other two in front frowned.

"Does this mean the Golden Hoop's men are in the vicinity?"

"Yes. According to master, it should be the Golden Hoop Number 10 that has come over. That woman is exceptionally powerful. Her tank-like Body Hardening Technique has almost reached the level of bullet resistance and her movements are like the wind. These skills, coupled with accurate marksmanship, make her a very tough assassin. The average person is just like an ant if they fall into her hands. She's obviously targeting the master this time."

"Master Lily should be fine, right?" Black Panther worried.

"It's alright, don't worry. Master was prepared to hide out temporarily, but that crazy woman was seriously injured by a maverick martial arts expert. She's currently still recuperating and won't be active for a few months, so we're safe for now." The White Eagle relaxed and smiled, but his face instantly sank a little. "But we can't let our guard down, the Golden Hoop Number 10 has two powerful lieutenants, Number 11 and Number 13. Both of them are extraordinarily strong and either one is significantly stronger than I am. If it weren't for the Black Panther intervening the other time, I wouldn't have been able to escape safely with the two children."

"It will be good as long as everyone is safe. Regardless of how skilled they are in martial arts, they can't withstand this many guns firing at them. We have more men this time, so safety shouldn't be too big of a concern," the detective consoled everyone. "Fortunately, I let my wife bring the two children to their granddad's, so I have nothing else to worry about."

"Sir, isn't it risky that we're bringing Mr Kelly along this time? Our investigation probably involves an ancient cult and no one knows what trouble is in store," Si Lan asked in a hushed tone.

"It was him, the White Eagle, and I who discovered the entrance together. I'll ask him about it again later. It's true that there could be unpredictable danger within," the detective nodded.

At this moment, a cool breeze blew over as the morning sun gradually rose with its light shining on the carriage, a few rays fell on everyone's clothes and brought some warmth.

The horse carriage trundled onto a white stone bridge. Ripples constantly formed in the clear green stream under the bridge. Every now and then, red maple leaves from the maple forest by the shore would fall in the water.

Sitting in the carriage, Garen turned to his side and looked out. The grass hills by the road were covered in trees creating a bright mix of red, yellow, and dark green. There were even a few does with their fawns drinking from the stream on the shore near the bridge.

Upon hearing the clattering of the carriage, the animals merely looked up, and then continued drinking as if accustomed to the situation.

Golden ripples formed where the morning sun shined down on the water surface.

"A little past this stone bridge and we're within the sparsely populated boundaries of the Silversilk Castle. In the past, this bridge marked the border between the Silversilk Castle estate and Canoe Town," Detective Dale explained. "Brace yourselves, the Golden Hoop won't give up on the castle's secrets so easily. They've lost a lot of men for this."

The White Eagle frowned, then hesitantly said, "Sir, I don't know if I should tell you this."

"Just say it."

The White Eagle hesitated for a while. "It's not really a big deal, but when I saved the two children, I met someone who was an expert in Body Hardening Techniques. He killed a Golden Hoop leader trained in the Red Hand Fist. Most importantly, I saw from his skills that he was probably trained in the arts of the Behemoth Gate."

"The Behemoth Gate?" The detective frowned. "Even they're involved in this? Other people might have been mistaken, but you, the White Eagle, wouldn't be. You escaped the clutches of death during a duel with a Behemoth Gate master, so you must have a deep impression of it."

"I, on the other hand, think the meeting was pure chance," the Black Panther said in a low voice. "And after all, it didn't seem like he was malicious. He helped you get rid of your opponent."

"That's true," the White Eagle nodded, "but I still don't know why he would do that."

"Don't think too much about it, it was just a coincidence," the Black Panther consoled.

The carriage kept rolling at a moderate pace. Soon, they reached a hill trail which could only be traveled on foot.

Everyone stepped off of the carriage and started walking. They passed the forested hill and arrived at the gates of the Silversilk Castle.

There were policemen scattered all around the castle. By the window of a room on the first floor, the slender sergeant looked out. Beside him was a policewoman and they seemed to be discussing something.

A police officer stood guard at the main gates. He walked over when he saw the group approaching.

"Sergeant Rio is waiting for you inside. We've secured the perimeter, but we didn't discover the body that the detective mentioned."

"Oh?" Dale Quicksilver frowned. "Looks like someone beat us to it... Come, let's check it out."

He took the lead walking toward the castle gates. Behind him were the White Eagle, the Black Panther, and also Miss Si Lan. Garen was last, surrounded by the black suits of all the bodyguards that Cynthia brought along.

Cynthia received a black shotgun and was checking its sights. Creaks could be heard while she did a firearms check.

"Have you prepared the handguns and brought the grenades? What about the explosives that I asked for?"

Her subordinate hurriedly handed her a piece of white paper which detailed the weapons and equipment they had brought.

Hearing all this, Garen and Grace felt their scalps go numb.

"Grenades... Explosives... Cynthia, are you here to be a bodyguard or go to war?" Grace murmured speechlessly.

"Given that none of us here are martial arts experts, what choice do I have? After all, this is the era of firearms. Martial arts expert? Nothing a few more guns can't solve." Cynthia casually scanned the paper in her hand, nodded in satisfaction, then pointed at a few shorter subordinates.

"Number 8, Number 11, you guys bring some men to set up an ambush around the slopes. Pay attention to the accuracy range and kill the enemy on sight. The assembled sniper rifles are still out back in the cars. Number 6, you get the equipment ready. Prepare to execute special measures at any time. And you, Number 3, how is the preparation for the explosive packets coming along?"

"Enough to blow up the whole site," the man called Number 3 joked indifferently.

"Get everything ready, pay attention to positioning, be more discreet, and avoid being discovered by the police. Even though we have legal gun permits, some troubles are best avoided."

"Yes, boss." With smiles on their faces, a few black suits dispersed while carrying the large and small crates.

Garen stood to the side feeling frustrated.

"If the Golden Hoop Number 10 reappears... Even if someone has the same level of Body Hardening Technique as me and could resist bullets, they would probably be defenseless against explosives and grenades."

He admitted to himself that he would be helpless if he was faced with more than ten guns. If a critical body part was hit — weak spots like the ears or eyes — there would be no escape from death. He also wouldn't be able to dodge bullets at close range.

He shook his head. at that moment, as a martial arts practitioner, he felt a sense of loss from being obsolete.

He kept up with Detective Dale and the group in front.

They entered the gates, and familiarly made their way to the small room that seemed like a study on the ground floor.

Dale Quicksilver and the rest, together with Sergeant Rio, were already gathered around the underground entrance, discussing something.

When they saw Garen come in, Dale and the White Eagle nodded at him and continued the discussion. Dale was talking to a heavily bearded man standing beside the sergeant.

Garen stood by, listening to Dale and the bearded man conversing in a weird dialect. One asked and the other answered, but Garen could not understand any of it. Only the sergeant would occasionally add a couple of sentences to their conversation and all three of them looked tense.

Garen walked to the White Eagle's side and whispered, "What's the situation?"

The White Eagle shook his head. "There's a problem. The expert in ancient traps said that there might be booby traps all over the underground lair. He thinks we should blast the traps with explosives first, rather than sending anyone down. He can't deactivate all of the traps and..."

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"And what?"

"When we came over, the entrance to the lair was open. I distinctly remember that it reverted to its original state when we left. Clearly someone discovered this too."

Garen started frowning too. "That is troubling, indeed. It could be the Golden Hoop." Suddenly he smelled a trace of fragrance, like sandalwood, but fainter. "What's that fragrant aroma?"

"Eh? This scent..." Detective Dale paused his conversation with the bearded man. His expression changed. He seemed to recall something.

Suddenly his face turned and he shouted, "Everyone get out! Don't stay here!"

Everyone else wasn't clear what had happened, but out of their trust toward the famous detective, they instantly ran out of the castle.

Garen did the same, but he only managed a few strides before all of a sudden he saw stars.

"Hehe..."

Subtle laughter could vaguely be heard coming from behind him.

His scalp went numb. He instantly remembered the time he was pushed out the window. It was the same laughter.

He quickly turned back, but there was no one behind him.

"Go!" a muffled voice said beside him. Garen felt a force pulling him straight out the castle gates.



He was shocked. He looked at his surroundings, but everyone who had been around him earlier were no longer there. He was the only one left in the castle. An invisible person seemed to be running in front of him, pulling his hand and swiftly running forward.

Bang!

The gates crashed open. Garen felt dizzy and lost his balance, falling on his face onto the grass. In the cool wet grass, a gust of fresh air went into his nostrils, waking him up in an instant.

Suddenly his vision blurred. A group of people appeared on the grass lawn around him all at once. The sergeant from earlier, the expert, a few policemen, Dale Quicksilver, Si Lan, The White Eagle, Black Panther and the others. Cynthia and Grace lay by his side. They looked dizzy.

"That was close!" Detective Dale Quicksilver stood up and wiped the sweat off his forehead. He warily turned to look at Silversilk Castle. "I kept thinking that scent was naturally occurring, but now it seems that someone must have intentionally released it. This time there were more of us, so they increased the concentration. That's how everyone managed to detect it."

"What was that?" Sergeant Rio stood up from the grass lawn, panting. Everyone else followed suit. Their gaze turned to the solemn looking Dale Quicksilver.

"I saw everyone around me disappear earlier. What happened?"

"Me too! I think I heard someone laughing behind me!"

"Keep calm. Let's listen to what the detective has to say." The sergeant gestured his hands and the surroundings quieted. Everyone focused on the detective.

Garen had prepared to ask questions, but hearing what the others had experienced, he suddenly realized that their experiences were identical to his own. He was shocked, and his gaze focused on Detective Dale too.

"This is a really strong hallucinogenic scent." Dale Quicksilver looked somber. "I've read its description in the books, but I didn't expect to encounter this almost obsolete thing in real life."

He took a deep breath, looked at everyone around him, and said word by word.

"Mindtwister Vine. This scent is the hallucinogenic poisonous gas naturally released by the Mindtwister Vine after it matures, which is extinct according to the books. It can induce hallucinations of loneliness and fear. The toxic gas released by this type of vine is usually extremely mild, imperceptible to humans. Only certain animals sensitive to smell can distinguish it."

"Mindtwister Vine..." Garen's eyes narrowed. He recalled being injured after being pushed out the first floor window when he first visited Silversilk Castle. "Looks like someone probably used the scent of Mindtwister Vine to hypnotize me first, and then took advantage to push me out the window when I approached it. And The White Eagle and Dale were probably hallucinating from the scent too, causing us not to see each other after we entered the room together."

"If that's the case, then someone is intentionally trying to stop us from entering the tunnel?" the sergeant asked in a hushed tone.

Dale Quicksilver nodded and started discussing the strategies with the sergeant and the booby trap expert.

On Garen's side, Cynthia and Grace had both regained consciousness. Cynthia was in fact the one who dragged Garen out of the castle earlier.

"If not for my prior training in resisting hallucinogenic poisons, I probably wouldn't have been able to drag you out of there." She smiled at Garen. "Thank me. You would have been in big trouble if not for me."

"Yes, yes. Thank god you were there," Garen said speechlessly. But it was true, Cynthia had played a significant role ever since she came. If not for her, Garen would have presumably been like the policemen who didn't manage to run out of the castle in time—passed out on the ground.

A group of people stood at the gates but didn't dare to enter. They merely looked at the two policemen lying on the ground through the gates. No one dared to rush in there, in case they suffered the same fate as the two of them.

"Quick, look over there!" a policeman suddenly yelled, his finger pointing at the roof of the second and highest floor.

Everyone looked toward where he pointed. In the second floor's window stood a person clad in black, seemingly a pale-faced woman. She had a strange smile on her face. Her pupils were dark green, and she drooled from the corner of her mouth from time to time.

The moment they got a good look at her, the woman instantly disappeared into the shadows behind the window.

"Use a wet towel to cover your nose and mouth! Water should be able to absorb the hallucinogenic scent!" Dale Quicksilver instructed loudly.

Everyone immediately took out the water bottles they had with them, wet their clothes, and covered their noses and mouths with it.

The sergeant was the first to rush in with a handgun. He ran to the two policemen lying within the castle and started examining them.

"It's no use. They're dead..." the detective said gravely after walking in. "Hallucinogen overdose, especially at such a high concentration, coupled with internal bleeding caused by a hard blow to the back of their heads."

Everyone else followed suit and re-entered the castle.

"We can talk after we've captured that woman! I'll go first!" The White Eagle said coldly. "Black Panther, you look after Mister Quicksilver and Miss Si Lan!"

"Leave it to me!" Black Panther beat his chest. He watched as The White Eagle sprinted toward the top floor, disappearing around a corner.

Cynthia too, was holding a white handgun, shielding Garen.

The sergeant stood up. His face was grim. "Everyone, search! Kill that mad woman on the spot once you discover her!"

Obviously, the deaths of his subordinates had fired him up.

"Yes!" All the policemen gathered and pulled out their handguns, all their faces showed a hint of anger and anxiety.

Everybody was on high alert, and started to spread out across the castle grounds to patrol. More than ten men divided into groups, patrolling every nook and cranny.

Garen led Cynthia and Grace carefully up toward the first floor. A few steps in, they heard two gunshots coming from upstairs.

"Arghhh!" a scream came suddenly.

"Tom!"

"She ran toward the first floor! Quick, finish her!"

"Damn it! This maniac is too fast, I can't aim accurately!"

"She ran to the stairs!"

Garen and the other two were at the corner of the stairs when they saw a dark shadow leap from the top, floating like a black cloth, weightless.

Cynthia's reaction was the fastest. A white handgun was in her right hand in an instance. She aimed at the black shadow and pulled the trigger.

Bang bang bang bang!

She let out four shots in a row. Within a second, all four bullets hit the black shadow.

"Hehe..."

The black shadow gave a high-pitched laugh, stopped moving, then pounced at Cynthia. It seemed that the bullets had had no effect on her, and her speed was even faster than earlier.

A chunk of her black shadow split to grab Cynthia's neck like a black tentacle. It was extremely fast so it couldn't be clearly made out.

Cynthia looked calm, holding her gun and not making a move.

Bang!

This shot made the black shadow's head lurch backwards.

"Arghh!"

The black shadow gave a piercing shriek. It gave up attacking Cynthia and escaped directly down the stairs. It was gone in a flash.

Garen did not move in the back. He didn't want to expose his skills when so many people were watching, The White Eagle particularly.

Even though he really wanted to help, he refrained.

"Are you alright?" He held Cynthia by her shoulders. She started, instantly snapping out of a highly-tense state, and gasped repeatedly to catch her breath.

"So... so powerful! Her speed managed to evade four of my shots!" There were tiny beads of sweat on her nose. "But in the end, wooh... I still got one shot in."

"It's a nightmare once martial arts experts get too close. Even if your marksmanship is excellent, it's no match for a close range martial artist's skills. Naturally, the reverse is true for long range." Garen nodded. "Come on, let's go down and have a look."

Grace stood to a side, speechless. Her marksmanship was quite good, but if she faced such an opponent, she would definitely not be able to react in time and be strangled to death. She wasn't too impressed with Cynthia's marksmanship initially, but that spontaneous reaction immediately contrasted their true strengths.

Pulled by Garen, the three of them rapidly ran down the stairs.

In the ground floor lobby, five to six policemen had surrounded the woman. They all stood with guns raised and nervously stared at the center.

The black-robed woman lay on the floor, twitching from time to time. There was a small bullet hole on the left side of her forehead. The injury was deep and had apparently injured the brain.

Garen's group, the sergeant and the others all crowded over, including Dale Quicksilver and Black Panther. Everyone was staring at the woman in the middle.

"She was shot in the head, she won't last long," Cynthia said casually as she spun her handgun in her hands. "My bullets are custom-made. Their penetrating power is extremely high, specifically intended to deal with these types of martial arts experts."

Sure enough, after a little while, the woman gave another twitch, then stopped moving completely. Her black hood fell off, exposing a full head of white hair.

"How old is this woman?" Garen was shocked.

"At least 80 or 90. I don't know how she's been living in this castle for so long," the detective said casually, while smoking his pipe. "Very few people with special constitutions are able to withstand poisoning by the toxic gas from Mindtwister Vine. But long term exposure to the hallucinogenic poisonous gas would make them lose their sanity and act like beasts. This person must have been one of those special ones."

"What now?" the sergeant asked, looking at the detective.

"Let's examine the body, see if we can discover anything from it. Then we'll enter the lair according to plan," the detective answered, removing his pipe.

"Alright. We'll follow your plan."

"The White Eagle, you protect the expert then. We'll enter the lair together, and everyone else stand guard at the entrance above." Dale Quicksilver started making arrangements.

"Sergeant, you bring two men and follow us down. We'll leave a lookout at fixed distances and link everyone up with the rope we've brought."

"What about me?" Black Panther stepped forward to ask.

"You stay above ground to protect Si Lan and the entrance."

"I want to go down too," Garen said, stepping forward. "It's such a huge underground passage. There must be a lot inside. I can find the most valuable item and bring it up!" This was his initial purpose anyway. Moreover, with the detective and the expert leading the way, he wouldn't have to worry too much about his safety.

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His initial intention for joining this mission was to find more Antiques of Tragedy.

"Among the men here, only I can identify the value of these antiques," Garen said in a low voice.

"It's not necessary for you to come now. Wait for us to check the surroundings first, then you can join us after we confirm that its safe," Dale Quicksilver replied.

Garen frowned with hesitation. He had a feeling that if he didn't go down now, he wouldn't have the chance. This feeling got stronger after he saw the mysterious green-eyed woman die.

"I still feel like I should go down. I can protect myself if I follow you guys."

"Can you really?" Dale Quicksilver turned around and stared at him. "Kelly, you are the antiques expert, your efforts shouldn't be wasted on the expedition itself. Leave it to the professionals, that's how this works."

Garen still felt reluctant. He turned to look at Grace and Cynthia. Both shook their heads at him.

"Fine... I'll listen." He knew he probably wouldn't be allowed to go down anymore. He shrugged his shoulders and walked aside.

Dale and the sergeant discussed the plan, and the men got ready to go down into the lair.

Garen stood at the door, leaning on its frame, not knowing what to do for now.



"To be honest, seeing a fascinating and mysterious place like this, I would want to go down there by myself and reveal its secrets. But ..." Grace said, standing next to him.

"If you were needed, especially for their current mission, I think no one would reject your presence. But I still suggest you do not to explore with them. If this cave has a trapdoor that can seal the only entrance, it would be extremely dangerous."

As she was speaking, she lowered the wet towel covering her nose and mouth. The gas had fully dissipated by now, and everyone had put down their wet towels.

"Right, that emblem!" Garen suddenly remembered the Bronze Cross Emblem. He left the detective and his men, and headed toward the lobby.

A few policemen were still in here, patrolling around while holding their guns. These men were wearing black uniforms with a badge of a silver eagle on the left chest of their jackets. Seeing Garen come back out, they didn't act surprised. Just casually glanced at him once and moved their eyes off of him.

Garen tried to remember the exact location of the emblem. He vaguely recalled it being at the dead body of the mysterious woman.

He approached the body and squatted down. Lightly, he picked it up and flipped her around.

The body was pushed to the side, revealing the Bronze Cross Emblem that was under it.

Garen grabbed the emblem and checked it, but didn't see anything different. The potential qi inside was the same. He felt the increase of potential meter, but it had at most one attribute point left in it.

"Better than nothing." Garen shook his head and stood up.

"What are you doing? Who gave you permission to touch the body?" came a voice from a man nearby. The sergeant walked over with a gloomy expression. He was 1.9 meters of height, which was a lot taller than Garen.

"I just wanted to see if I could find any clues," Garen casually explained.

"This is police business, not something a common folk like you could take part in. Go rest on the side! Don't interfere with us!" Sergeant Rio was impatient and waved his hands.

"Can I watch from the side? I may be able to help," Garen said with a smile. The sergeant's brusque tone didn't make upset in the slightest.

"I said this is none of your business, this is not something a private company could take part in! Get out of here and wait for them to come out!" The sergeant got more impatient. "What's that in your hand? Give me that!"

Garen handed over the Bronze Cross Emblem.

"All right, you can go take some rest." The sergeant took the emblem and breathed deeply. He turned to talk to his policemen in a low voice.

Garen walked to the side with Grace and Cynthia.

"Looks like we are done here," Grace said casually. "If I had known this, we wouldn't have needed to bring this many men over."

"That's still to be decided." Cynthia smiled and looked at her wrist watch, then her brown eyes looked toward the hill. She suddenly had a confused expression.

"What's wrong?" Garen asked.

"Someone is coming, my squad sent a signal. Let's go check it out." Cynthia's face turned serious, she led them out of the lobby just as a man in black came in from the gate.

"Captain Cynthia, there are people approaching, quite a few of them! They have lots of weapons," the man whispered.

"What kind of people? Can you hold them off?" Cynthia asked.

"Don't know, but they're all wearing golden rings in their ears. The guy leading them is wearing a white trench coat!"

"They're the men from the Golden Hoop." Garen realized and said, "Did you see the numbers on their earrings?"

The man in black nodded. "They must all be together, the leader is a number 9."

Garen froze for a second. He just fought off a number 10 with a loss-loss result, and immediately comes a number 9. By the looks of it, their numbers were based on strength, so this number 9 had to be a lot stronger than number 10.

"What kind of weapons did they have?" Cynthia asked again.

"From pistols and rifles to daggers and swords. It's really strange."

"Tell the two guys on the hill to stay alert, don't let them see us. As long as we have the snipers in the vantage point, there shouldn't be too many problems." Cynthia nodded. "We have the police on our side this time, I dare them to openly strike against the police."

The others started laughing, but Garen wasn't convinced. Silversilk castle had to have an important meaning to the Golden Hoop for number 9 to show up so soon after number 10.

His White Cloud Combat Arts got enhanced to intermediate level, so he was confident that he could fight number 10 without trouble now. Even if she was cautious, he could still beat her with his speed and not trade her blow for blow. But this number 9, there was no information on him. Though he was definitely stronger than number 10. Thinking of this, Garen was a little hesitant.

Even if the police were with them, the Golden Hoop's stance....

"S\*\*t! The signal on the hill is gone!" Cynthia's face turned cold as she glanced at the hills. "Little Seven, tell the other brothers to get back here! Our enemies might be tough this time!"

"Yes, captain!" The man in black jogged away.

"You think your men can handle them?" Garen asked in a deep voice.

"I'm not sure." Cynthia shook her head. "Our enemy is familiar with sniper tactics! We will cover your retreat."

"We will notify the sergeant." Grace was nervous too.

Garen nodded, he turned around and walked toward Sergeant Rio. The tall police officer was discussing the situation of the dead body.

"Sir, there are people coming, I'm afraid they're up to no good!" Garen walked up and whispered.

"Our men didn't see anything. How do you know?" Sergeant Rio frowned.

"My bodyguard accidentally saw them." Garen thought carefully before he spoke. "The Golden Hoop is up to no good, but the detective is still in the lair, right? You have to send me to get them out immediately! This is our safest plan."

"No need, our whole police department is out on this mission. If there really is someone coming, we can handle them without a problem." He waved at a police officer on the side. The man jogged over.

"Sir, what's the order?"

"What's going on outside?"

"What? Everything's normal outside!" the policeman casually replied, chuckling.

"Are you sure?" the sergeant asked again.

"I'm sure, you can see for yourself sir. Our men are still on guard at the top of the hill." The policeman took out a pair of binoculars and handed it to sergeant Rio.

The sergeant took up the binoculars and looked through them at the gate. A policeman on the hill was waving to signal everything was okay.

"Our expert's bodyguard said there are enemies approaching, what's up with that?" The sergeant laughed and handed the binoculars to Garen. He turned around and went inside the lobby.

Garen put up the binoculars against his eyes and gazed, the officer on the hill was yawning out of boredom.

"Cynthia, are you sure someone is coming?"

"I'm sure!" Cynthia replied. "They are hiding in the shadows. My men were hiding at vantage points that could see every corner of the surroundings, and they haven't sent back any signals in two minutes!" Her face was pale. "They are most definitely experts! Trained in assassination and camouflage techniques! Just as we speak, another two of my men went missing!"

"What do we do now?"

"Tell everyone to gather up at a vantage point, such as top floors of this castle! We should be able to hold the castle from the top. I'm already gathering my men!" Cynthia said with ferocity. "We cannot afford to spread out and go outside. Against assassins that are hiding in the dark, we must avoid our shortcomings and suppress their advantages! Otherwise our men will get eaten alive!"

Right as she finished speaking, they heard a loud command coming out of the lobby.

"Everyone! Spread out into the woods outside the castle! Report back immediately if you find anything!"

"F\*\*\*!" Garen and Cynthia both cursed.

"This idiot!" Cynthia exclaimed.

"These well-armed policemen are our main force right now, we can't afford to send them out to die!" She looked at Garen. "Sir, you have to tell the sergeant to get his men back to the castle! Otherwise we'll be in big trouble!"

"I'll try."

He knew how dangerous the situation was. Cynthia's men were all well trained and extremely well equipped. If the enemy could silently take them down, then they would have an even easier time dealing with these policemen.

Even with his strength he would barely be able to take down number 10 since his wounds hadn't fully healed yet. So if sergeant Rio and his men ran into the Golden Hoop's men...

He turned around and walked up to the sergeant again.

"Golden Hoop?" The sergeant laughed aloud. "You sure?"

"I'm sure, one hundred percent sure!" Garen nodded. "Sergeant you must..."

"Very well, brothers! Let's get out there and take out these little boys that call themselves the Golden Hoop! I've been longing to meet those rampant bastards. This time I'll show them the might of the top fifty sharp shooters in the entire confederation! Hahaha...."

The sergeant wasn't finished speaking when he pulled out his pistol and walked out of the lobby.

He obviously sensed something was going on and told his men to spread out just as a precaution.

The policemen answered by flooding out of the lobby, following their sergeant outside. Leaving one man behind to guard the entrance to the lair.

"These idiots!" Cynthia was irritated. "Face to face combat, the Golden Hoop might not be their match, but they are experts trained in assassination! Sir, leave them be, we have to get out of here! The Golden Hoop must be setting up an encirclement!"

Garen was also getting a headache from the sergeant and his men. He watched as they went outside and started patrolling the castle, not taking their opponents seriously.

"Sergeant Rio seems to be confident, maybe he knows a thing or two, let's just wait and see..."

Peng! Peng! Peng!

Suddenly, the sound of heavy gunfire came from outside, immediately followed by the policemen's screams.

"RETREAT!!"

"WHERE ARE THEY!"

"PROTECT THE SERGEANT!"

"RETREAT, RETREAT!" Sergeant Rio's voice shouted with anger. In the continuous gunfire, he staggered as two men covered him and backed into the castle. One of the men quickly closed the half of the gate behind them.

Two more policemen ran in.

"We must retaliate! These Golden Hoop bastards! Hiding behind the shadows like cowards!" Sergeant Rio furiously reloaded his pistol with ammo.

Garen followed the sergeant to hide behind an obstruction. Black Panther came out of the backroom after hearing the gunshots. He pulled out his gun and ran to the door after seeing the sergeant's situation.

The windows on the first floor were all shattered. Bullets were flying in from the gaps, resulting in chaos in the castle's lobby. There were four policemen left, bent down behind the door next to sergeant Rio. They all occasionally reached for their guns and made a few blind shots.

Garen hid behind a statue of an angel, the two women behind him. Cynthia was about to charge out, nodding toward two squad members on the opposite side.

Bang!

A bullet hit the edge of the statue, scraping off some rubble from it and barely missing Cynthia.

#### Chapter 64: Exploring the Entrance 4

"Damn it! Their firepower is so strong! How many people did they send?" Cynthia's cheek was cut by a shrapnel and blood seeped out from the gash. "Stay under cover. Don't come out!"

She leaped out, did a forward roll, reclined on the ground and fired three consecutive shots upward, creating a large cloud of dust. She then got up and fired another shot.

Bang!



Someone exclaimed outside the door. A black shadow was hit and crashed to the ground. The gunfire seemed to gradually slow down, until it stopped.

Sergeant Rio roared in anger, extended his arms out, and fired a few blind shots.

Three groans could be heard coming from outside the door. More people had been hit.

Garen remained hidden behind the sculpture, listening to the sounds of gunfire steadily becoming scarcer and scarcer. Cynthia and sergeant Rio returned fire while covering each other and were able to gradually suppress the gunfire outside.

After an unknown amount of time had passed - it could've been ten minutes, or maybe fifteen - the shooting finally stopped.

"Has it ended?" Garen asked, quietly sticking out his head to look.

The lobby was a mess. Sergeant Rio and his men were all injured. Out of over ten policemen who had come, only two were alive now. The fates of the rest were still unknown.

The sergeant was shot in the shoulder. His coat was wrecked and half of the white shirt inside was dyed red. He was crouching by the door, gasping hard to catch his breath.

When Garen looked over, the sergeant turned his face away in shame.

Black Panther was tending to a gunshot wound on his left shoulder. He held the white bandage with his mouth and was bandaging himself. Cynthia, on the other hand, was with the two remaining men, silently arranging the equipment.

"Is Radin still alive?" Cynthia casually asked.

"No... I don't know. Maybe," one of the men replied absent-mindedly. He took a dagger and gently dug out a bullet from his thigh. There was cold sweat and popped veins all over his forehead.

"This was a heavy loss. But those guys will figure out a way to hide." Cynthia reloaded the handgun in a swift move, then took out a black shotgun from the backpack beside her and loaded a shell into its chamber.

"Now it's up to us."

Garen recovered his line of sight, hunched his back and crept toward the study. Grace wanted to follow but was held by Garen motioning for her to stay.

"I'll be fine going alone, you stay put."

"Okay."

Faced with bullets, which would be troublesome to others, he was not afraid. Even though Golden Hoop Number 10 had shot at him yesterday, it hadn't caused any real injury. He was more concerned about Golden Hoop's Number 9. He was sure that the real reason the other side hadn't barged in directly, even though they had an absolute advantage over them, was out of wariness toward him.

He quietly crept along the corner of the wall toward the study. He crossed the corridor and entered the dark room before straightening up.

There were several new footprints at the entrance to the cavern in the study. It was clear that someone had followed them in.

Bang! Bang!

Gunfire burst out in the lobby again.

Garen gently pressed on the bullet hole in his lower abdomen. He could still feel a slight pain. Before his wound fully recovered, he could only apply 80% of his true strength. Facing an opponent stronger than Golden Hoop Number 9, he didn't want to confront him directly either.

"Antiques of Tragedy are not a priority now. I need to figure out how to get out of here! I can't believe the Golden Hoop was brazen enough to directly confront the police force." He started to regret this adventure to Silversilk Castle. He was different from Dale Quicksilver and the others. He was here just for the Antiques of Tragedy, not to investigate the case.

"I need to think of a way to escape safely..."

BOOM!

Suddenly, a muffled explosion came from outside. Its force shook the entire castle.

"Go to hell, you bastards!" Cynthia shouted fiercely from the lobby. It was clear that the explosives set up by her men were detonated.

Garen relaxed slightly. With the deterrence of explosives, the people outside wouldn't dare to simply approach. After all, they had no idea how many explosives were buried around the castle.

"I'll stay here for a while more, waiting for the detective to come out and leave together. There might be some unexpected gains..." He couldn't leave now anyway. He might as well stand guard at the entrance and wait for Detective Dale and the others. This way he might be able to get his hands on an Antique of Tragedy and then still be able to leave safely.

Garen was confident that if he wanted to retreat, neither firearms nor martial arts experts from the Golden Hoop could stop him.

He walked to the entrance. As he was about to sit down for a rest, he felt that the edge of the entrance was a little chilly.

"Could it be?" He suddenly turned serious. "Could it be that there is wind?"

He reached out with his head to the entrance and carefully felt around.

On his palm, he could feel a slight breeze flowing out from the entrance.

"There is wind indeed! There must be an exit on the other side!"

Garen stirred, his face instantly revealing his glee. He was about to stand up and go back into the lobby to inform the others, when turning around he saw a black shadow blocking the study entrance. It quietly watched him.

The shadow had a black hood on. A huge golden earring hung from his left ear, the number '9' engraved on it. By the looks of his stature, this was a strong and well-proportioned man. His face was covered with a black mask that revealed only a pair of very beautiful sapphire like eyes.

"This is the underground entrance?" the man asked softly. His voice was deep, and the accent a very standard confederal one. "He is indeed the famous Detective Dale. We've searched for so long but never managed to find it, while he located it as soon as he arrived. This is excellent."

Garen turned around fully, carefully listening to the sounds from the lobby. The gunfire was still going on. Obviously this person had sneaked in here by himself.

Without waiting for Garen to respond, the man continued to speak. "Kelly, I heard that you are an expert in appraising Antiques of Tragedy. That's perfect. Follow me down for a look. If you can prove your talent, I'll consider sparing your life."

Garen was stunned. He had just told Detective Dale not too long ago, yet the Golden Hoop had already gotten wind of it.

The man seemed to think that Garen did not believe him. He reached out with his hand toward the wall on the left and applied pressure to it.

Crack!

A slight crack instantly appeared on the wall. It was like a piece of glass that was about to break.

"This will be your fate if you don't agree."

Garen took a look at the wall. He could have produced that degree of splitting too. The castle walls have been in disrepair for years, so the stone bricks were extremely fragile. What he found strange though, was that this Golden Hoop Number 9 did not regard him as a martial arts expert, but instead thought of him merely as a normal expert with a strong build.

That move on the wall could probably work on most people, but it wouldn't have any deterring effect on a martial arts expert. Moreover, Garen was the type of martial arts practitioners who were known for their strength.

"Does he not know that I injured Golden Hoop Number 10?" Garen speculated internally, but said, "Are you the Golden Hoop's martial arts expert? As long as you can guarantee my safety, I'm alright with it." He was planning to go down anyway.

"You've got some nerve." Seeing that Garen was not afraid, a trace of admiration flashed across the man's eyes. He nodded, took the lead by walking to the entrance, and went down the stairs step by step. "Follow me. Don't play any tricks. Even if you have trained in some martial arts, I can finish you off in a few seconds."

Garen nodded.

"Don't worry. I'm very clear about the situation." He followed the man down the stairs.

Tap tap tap...

Both of them went down the stone steps, and soon they had completely entered the underground space.

The space was cylindrical. The black stone staircase spiraled down along the wall with white chrome handrails on the side. Garen looked down past the handrails.

Below him, the staircase spiraled into an infinite darkness, like a screw thread on a cylindrical inner wall. At the center was a small black void; it seemed bottomless.

When he looked up, the entrance they had entered from was reduced to a tiny hole.

The screw-thread staircase spiraled clockwise downwards, loop after loop. Strangely, this staircase and its handrails, as well as the surrounding walls, were exquisitely decorated. The walls were engraved with fine vines, and so were the handrails. The stone staircase felt unusually level and solid, like it was built by stacking whole stones together.

They walked in a single file. The black-hooded man was in front. The back of his hood would flap up from time to time, and a faint fragrance would disperse through the air.

Garen trailed behind. When he smelled the scent, his spirits lifted.

"Here, if you're not wary about the Mindtwister Vine scent, you'll just be walking to your death," the man walking in front of him said in a low voice. "Stay close. Otherwise I won't be able to take care of you either."

"Okay." Garen nodded.

The two of them walked down, round and round, their surroundings seemingly never changing. If Garen didn't occasionally look up at the gradually shrinking entrance, he would have thought they weren't too far in, just going round in circles.

He wasn't sure for how long they were walking, maybe half-an-hour or more.

Garen looked up again. The entrance was completely out of sight now. There was only darkness above. The only source of light around him was the small torch that Golden Hoop Number 9 carried in front.

The amber glow illuminated up to one loop above and below them.

The temperature in the stairwell seemed to be dropping too. Garen could see a white mist when he exhaled.

"How long do we still have to walk? It's already very cold here. No wonder you wore such thick clothes." Since the detective and the others were trailblazing ahead of them, there shouldn't be much danger in here. And now since Golden Hoop Number 9 was walking in front of him, he didn't mind anything at all. He might as well think of this as an adventure. Since he didn't know the extent of the man's powers and wouldn't be able to directly confront him in his current state, it was better for him to conceal his powers.

"These stairs are endless..." the hooded man replied in a low voice. "These are the Infinity Stairs of Ancient Endor, the stone steps leading to the realm of the dead, according to legend."

"You really believe it's endless?" Garen asked.

The man did not respond.

They continued forward in silence. The walls were black, same as the stone steps, only the handrails were white. They seemed to emit an eerie pale glow under the torch fire.

It was extremely quiet up and down the stairwell. There was no sign of the detective and the rest who'd come in first.

Walking downward silently, an unknown amount of time had passed until there was a change of scene in the monotonous stairs ahead of them.

There was a stone table leaning on the wall to their left, and on it was a square fishtank.

Sealed. It was half full with water, and some fish could vaguely be seen inside.

The hooded man put down the torch and went up for a look.

The water in the fishtank was already dark green, like slimy sewage water. The three to four dead goldfishes inside were not golden-red anymore, but instead covered in dark green, floating dead on the surface of the water.

"I didn't expect there to be goldfish in here..." Garen was confused. "So deep in."

"There will be more unexpected things down here," Golden Hoop Number 9 said indifferently. He raised the torch and continued forward.

Garen walked past the fishtank. He couldn't help but give it another look, then keep up with the man.

"Since it's a fishtank used to keep goldfish, why would it be sealed?"

"This was a simple ancient ritual. Seal up life, let it slowly die inside until it decomposes completely and fully integrates with the other ingredients. The seal will be broken when the time comes, and the content inside would be consumed. The life, blood, flesh, and soul would all be eaten. According to legend, this was a ritualistic method to attain immortality," the man explained casually.

"How disgusting." Garen was speechless.

## Chapter 65: Change 1

"Ancient Endor had many such disgusting practices. That was just one of the many inexplicably strange traditions that remains from the history of that grand bygone empire," Golden Hoop Number 9 calmly replied.

The two did not speak much after that and continued walking downward.



It was getting colder. A thin sheet of frost started to appear on the white chrome handrails. The breaths they exhaled visibly formed two white strands, then gradually dispersed into the air.

"Be careful," Golden Hoop Number 9 suddenly said.

Puzzled, Garen looked at him. Then he looked down to the front of the stairs and discovered a black uniformed policeman sprawled on the steps with a short black arrow pierced through his throat. He was slumped motionlessly against the wall. Blood flowed out slowly from his lower body, dripping bit by bit into the infinite darkness.

"The temperature is too low so his body temperature dropped too quickly." Golden Hoop Number 9 crouched to examine the body. "But he shouldn't have been dead for more than twenty minutes. Looks like the detective and the others shouldn't be too far ahead."

"If you meet Detective Dale, what do you plan to do?" Garen asked from behind.

"If he knew his place, I would spare him as well," Golden Hoop Number 9 answered casually.

As they stepped over the policeman's corpse and continued on, their crisp footsteps continuously reverberated in the silent space.

Bang!

A gunshot rang out from the darkness below, followed by a faint yelp.

"Quick, run!!" a voice shouted.

Golden Hoop Number 9's expression changed. He sped up and ran downward. Garen hesitated for a moment, then jogged in pursuit.

Detective Dale and the rest soon appeared on the staircase in front of them. Stunned, they stood on the steps and looked down the stairs.

Garen followed their line of sight and looked ahead. The steps in front were like thin spinning plates, revealing the dark empty space below as they systematically revolved. There was a normal step every five steps, but the rest of the steps were constantly and rhythmically rotating.

The person who approached had to keep leaping forward. Otherwise, once they stepped on a revolving step, they would immediately drop through, get caught between the revolving stone steps, and be crushed to bits.

One of Dale Quicksilver's leather shoes had been clipped into two halves. He was with the White Eagle. The booby trap expert was behind them and a young policeman was protecting Miss Si Lan.

Apparently, the sergeant had refused the initial arrangement to follow them because he wanted to marshal and command the police force. Instead, Si Lan had volunteered to follow the detective and the others to this place.

The five of them heard footsteps coming from behind them. When they looked up, they saw that Garen was slowly walking over with a black-hooded man. The man caught their eye due to wearing a black mask over his face and a golden earring engraved with the number '9'.

"It's one of Golden Hoop's men!" The White Eagle reacted quickly, drew his gun, and aimed at Golden Hoop Number 9.

"Keep calm." Golden Hoop Number 9 was unfazed as he looked at the group in front of him. "I think our motives should be aligned: we all want to find out the secret of this underground passageway, correct?"

"So you mean...?" the detective asked with a somber expression.

"Cooperate, of course. You help me explore this cavern and I can provide you with a lot of valuable information. Rest assured, you'll be at the bottom soon enough." There was an unusual calm in the eyes of Golden Hoop Number 9, without a trace of ripples.

Detective Dale pondered for a while. No one knew what he was thinking.

"Alright, you have a deal," he actually agreed.

Everyone else looked bewildered and even Garen who was at the back was stunned.

"Word is that Golden Hoop Number 9 is someone who doesn't break his promises. I trust you." Dale Quicksilver ignored everyone else's expressions and directly addressed Golden Hoop Number 9.

"You know me well."

"Naturally."

"Let's move on then." Golden Hoop Number 9 smiled and suddenly lightly rapped the wall to the left.

Wham.

The revolving steps before them stopped spinning and froze completely.

"Great, let's move on."

He led Garen directly to the front. When they passed the group of five, the White Eagle and Si Lan looked extremely nervous. They were clearly angry when they saw Garen trailing behind.

Garen gave both of them a wry smile and shrugged helplessly. It was just as well if he walked together with everyone else.

At the front, Golden Hoop Number 9 did not seem to mind. He walked on alone at a moderate pace and soon only the amber glow from the torch in his hand could be seen.

"Why don't we head back now?" Garen suggested in a whisper.

"We can't escape. Golden Hoop Number 9 is extremely swift and silent, so it's impossible for us to escape." Detective Dale looked calm. "Come, let's keep up."

He took the lead in catching up. Everyone behind him looked at each other and could only continue.

Garen and the White Eagle walked together. As he reported on the situation above ground to the rest of them in an undertone, the atmosphere in the group turned bleak.

"We're in a really sticky situation right now. Fortunately, the one we've encountered is Golden Hoop Number 9. He's a relatively unique presence within the entire Golden Hoop organization. If the key was in anyone else's hands, it would be much more problematic," Si Lan analyzed in a hushed tone. "I'm just not sure what Mister is thinking."

"Don't worry about it. Mister won't be wrong. Let's just keep up," the White Eagle said while frowning.

The policeman held the trap expert by the arm. The trap expert was so cold he was shivering and could not utter a word. Both of them tried to warm themselves with the torch fire, but it did not help.

Since they were now under duress from the Golden Hoop, they did not dare say anything, so they just gritted their teeth and went along.

It was unclear how long they kept walking down the staircase. Golden Hoop Number 9 would hit and knock on the walls from time to time, as if he was very familiar with the surroundings. They did not encounter any other booby traps along the way and soon the bottom could be seen.

At the end of the stairs was a small circular open space. On the black floor, there were three gray leather sofas arranged in a triangle and covered with a thin layer of frost. Not far from the open space was a grubby fireplace and the coal inside was also covered by frost.

There was a bookcase, but it was completely empty.

When he reached the last step of the staircase, Golden Hoop Number 9 stopped in his tracks. He stood on the step and did not walk down.

He furrowed his brows and slowly reached out his right hand which had been hidden under the cloak. He slightly flicked his wrist and something black could be seen between his fingers.

The black object flew out and landed on the black floor of the open space.

Woosh woosh woosh woosh...!!!

A dense flurry of arrows fired out from both sides, shattering the black object. Countless short black arrows punctured the floor.

Golden Hoop Number 9 tossed out another black object and triggered another shower of arrows.

After three consecutive instances, the holes in the walls on both sides finally sealed themselves up, and there was no more movement.

The crowd behind him was stunned. All in all, there must have been up to 1,000 short arrows released and the tip of each one glowed with a trace of purple.

"The short arrows have all been released," Golden Hoop Number 9 said casually as he crouched down and removed his hood. Unexpectedly, he had a white rat in his left hand and gently placed it on the black floor.

The mouse gave a few squeaks and scurried towards the sofas.

It traveled few steps in before its body suddenly plunged downwards. It sank into the ground. The white rat squeaked wildly, but it was no use. Suddenly, a black wire dragged it up and flung it back into the arms of Golden Hoop Number 9.

The tail of the rat was coiled with strands of black wire. It would have been easily missed if one did not look carefully.

Golden Hoop Number 9 gently soothed the white rat, then stood up.

"In front of us is the Swamp of Malice, one of the booby traps used in Ancient Endor to punish thieves. Only thieves and cowards with malicious intent will be caught in the swamp."

"What is your motive then?" Detective Dale questioned softly.

"Of course it's...that." Golden Hoop Number 9 did not turn around, but directly strode down the steps.

"Wait...!!" The booby trap expert was about to stop him, but was dumbfounded when he saw that Golden Hoop Number 9 was still standing firmly on the black floor and had already walked to the three sofas in a few steps.

In the middle of the group, Garen looked uncertain.

Just as Golden Hoop Number 9 approached the sofas, Garen suddenly felt a stream of mild warmth permeate through his skin into his body. It was Potential, a small amount of Potential.

Snap.

Golden Hoop Number 9 stood between the sofas — it was unclear what he did — but clicking sounds slowly came from the black floor.

Surprisingly, a light gray stone table gradually rose up from the floor in front of the fireplace.

The stone table was cylindrical and there were four owl sculptures around it. On the table was a black hardcover book.

There was finally a trace of excitement in the eyes of Golden Hoop Number 9. He strode towards the gray stone table and reached for the black book.

Bang!

A gunshot rang out. A smoking bullet hole suddenly appeared on the ground at his feet.

Golden Hoop Number 9 stood in his place and looked over his shoulder at the crowd.

"What are you doing?"

The White Eagle stood in front of Detective Dale Quicksilver with his gun raised and a solemn expression on his face, but he was not the one who spoke.

The detective's gaze silently concentrated on Golden Hoop Number 9.

"If my guess is correct, that book is your ultimate goal. Am I right?"

"Indeed." The man nodded without hesitation. "I am grateful that you helped us find this underground entrance, but my gratitude is that I let you all go. Since we are on opposing sides, I should directly kill you to rid my organization of trouble. You understand."

"You can't kill us." The detective smiled. "The booby traps here are no joke. If my guess is right, that book is the legendary Book of Silence. If this treasure fell into the Golden Hoop's hands, it would be as if a lion grew wings. The consequences would be disastrous."

"This book is not for the organization." Golden Hoop Number 9 smiled. His body jerked forward then swayed abruptly left and right. He grabbed the book and leapt from the spot. Like a black bat, he flew up and hung by the side of the upper staircase. With a somersault, he was on the staircase one level above their heads.

"Don't move!" Detective Dale halted the White Eagle who was ready to spring into action.

Suddenly, like a forest of skewers, a dense bunch of black spikes protruded from the ground. The sofas were instantly punctured with numerous holes. The White Eagle was so frightened he broke out in a cold sweat.

It was only then that the detective looked at the booby trap expert to his side.

Chapter 66: Change 2

"It's my fault." The expert's face turned ghastly pale, he shook his head. "I was one step too slow, the strength needed to activate this trap was slightly higher than my expectations." He looked at the stone floor tile below his feet.

"Kelly is gone!" Ms. Si Lan suddenly shouted out.

"He will be fine. No matter who acquired that book first, Kelly will be safe. They both need him to identify the authenticity of it," the detective said, shaking his head.

"Who are you talking about?" The White Eagle lowered his gun.

"Behind us, behind Golden Hoop Number 9, there are people following us." Detective Dale whispered, "Let's get going, keep walking. It's too cold here, we won't be able to hold for long."

"So earlier, you were purposely talking to Golden Hoop Number 9 like that?"

"Of course I was. Unfortunately, he didn't realize this fast enough." The detective smirked.

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On the spiraling stone stair case, there were two silhouettes sprinting and chasing after one another.

Someone was held under the arm of the first silhouette. It was Garen in his black suit.

The one sprinting and carrying him was Golden Hoop Number 9, who had left the scene earlier. His cloak flapped behind him like a dark cloud floating in the air. It covered Garen almost completely.

Bang!

A gun's barrel appeared around the corner of the stone wall, pointing at Golden Hoop Number 9. The silhouette made a few backflips on the railing, landing in front of him, and now stood with a pistol in each hand.

"I guessed it right, Number 9, you want to keep the Book of Silence to yourself." The man laughed grimly as he blocked the way. He lowered his head and stared at Garen and Number 9 with a sinister smile.

"So it's you..." Golden Hoop Number 9 put Garen on the ground. "I didn't expect the organization to be this suspicious of me. They sent you to spy. It's a pity... I didn't want to kill anyone."

"We've worked closely for many years, I didn't want to do this either, but you betrayed us first." A golden ring hung on the man's left ear, it was numbered 8. He was a rank higher than Number 9.

Both of them sneered without saying a word, and suddenly grappled each other.

There was no distinct sound of impact. They fought and tangled together, like two pieces of black cloth twisting and chafing. There was only the sound of friction as they jumped and dashed around the stairs.

Garen stood behind them on, watching the fight without blinking.

A while ago, he had let Golden Hook Number 9 take him hostage, so that he could find out where the potential qi was coming from. Now, he had it confirmed, it was from that book in a black cover.

It was the same type of antique as the Black Jade Disk, emitting Qi slowly instead of releasing it all at once.

"Should I wait for them to finish fighting and go plunder it then, or should I leave at once and wait for them to come to me for identification?" Garen hesitated.

The problem with waiting for them to bring the book to him for identification was that the Golden Hoop might have their own ways of confirming its authenticity. Thus, this method might not work.

He also didn't want to get more involved in the Golden Hoop's business. Pretending to be Mr. Kelly was only to find Antiques of Tragedy. But using brute force would risk his own safety, especially since the Golden Hoop already knew he was Garen. This could bring harm to his family.

"Catch!" Suddenly, a hurried shout came from the front. Garen didn't get a chance to respond when he saw the Book of Silence hurled toward his face.

He frantically reached for the book, catching it. A flow of warm qi drifted from the book into his body, and the potential meter at the bottom of his vision started to slowly but steadily grow.

"Keep the book for now, whoever wins will come to you for identification!" Golden Hoop Number 9's voice came from below.

After that, the two Golden Hoop members left Garen alone and fought their way down the stairs. Soon, they were three levels below Garen.

"Looks like I have to stay here for now."

Garen cupped the book in his hands. The Book of Silence had a pitch black cover with a white eye printed in the center. He flipped it open and found the cover to be made of stone.

Garen's pupils narrowed as he turned to the first page.

That page contained a drawing. There was a man, a naked man. The weird thing was, the back of the man's head was connected to a maggot's body. It looked like a long white tube, and shared the same head as the man. The worm's body was shining white, reaching down to the man's thighs, and it was even slowly wriggling.

"It's wriggling?" Garen closed his eyes and shook his head. When he looked again, the wriggling motion in the drawing had disappeared.

The strange man's creepy green eyes were staring at him as if he was alive. It made Garen feel lightheaded.

When Garen finally composed himself and was ready to flip to the next page, a shadow flashed in front of him.

"Give it to me!"

A strong force gripped the Book of Silence, trying to snatch it from Garen's hands. Suddenly, another silhouette raced toward Garen and quickly grabbed the Book of Silence by the other end.

Stunned, Garen instinctively held the book with all his strength. The sound of tearing came from his hands.

"If I can't get it, nobody will!" Golden Hoop Number 9 ranted in an exhausted voice.

The Book of Silence was torn apart under the pressure of being pulled in three directions. The pages went flying in the air. Golden Hoop Number 9 held a short sabre in his hand and effortlessly slashed all the pages into pieces. A fireball emerged from his left hand, instantly igniting all the flying book scraps.

"Number 9, you're insane!" Golden Hoop Number 8 tried to stop him, but was one step too slow. His fist struck Number 9, and the latter slowly slumped down against the wall.

It was a shame that the Book of Silence was destroyed and burned, but Garen did not want to get involved in Golden Ring's internal conflicts. If he could find an Antique of Tragedy once, it was likely that he'd find another at some point too.

While regretful, he still backed off a few steps. As the two Golden Hoop members continued wrestling once more, Garen silently left up the stairs.

"What a mess." He was speechless. "But at least there were some gains. I found the picture of me traveling through an alternate reality. If what that book said was true, I must be the lucky survivor. It had to be at an exact time, and I was lucky enough to be there."

Things had taken an unexpected turn, and Garen's primary target was destroyed. He didn't get the Antique of Tragedy he came for, but instead got into a conflict with Golden Hoop Number 10.

He looked down the stairs at Golden Hoop Number 9 and Number 8. Number 8 was standing a few steps up, his face distorted with fury. Below him, Number 9 stood with a black stone in his hand. It was the white eye on the cover of the Book of Silence.

"Hand it over!" Number 8 said as he extended his hand.

"This is a legendary rune with mysterious power! You think I'll just give it to you?" Number 9 laughed. "I had plotted for so long, and I've finally got what I wanted!"

Both of them had bloodstains on their bodies. But Number 8 looked quite normal, whereas Number 9 had blood streaming out of his mouth. Apparently, he had serious internal injuries.

Garen watched as they argued. His heart suddenly missed a beat when he realized that the flow of potential qi had not disappeared with the Book of Silence.

"Is it because of that rock?" His eyes landed on the white-eyed rock they were fighting over.

"The book was only about some cult's legends and nonsense. The real treasure was this rock, you think I didn't notice?" Golden Hoop Number 9 sneered. "I might not know what it could be useful for, but since it's in my hands... don't think about getting it back!"

Garen knew if he didn't go right now, he would get involved in their internal conflicts. The more he knew, the more trouble he was in. As the two were still talking, he slowly backed off up the stairs.

As valuable as Antiques of Tragedy could be, he could not afford to get involved. Unlike last time with Number 10, this time they already knew his true identity.

Before he could walk further, Golden Hoop Number 9 acted first and erupted into a black shadow, racing up the stairs. Behind him, Golden Hoop Number 8 followed closely. The two were speeding past Garen.

Number 9's face was as pale as paper, he couldn't hold for much longer.

Garen squinted. To be honest, he had a favorable impression of Golden Hoop Number 9. Since the beginning, this guy had not done any harm to him, but protected him ever since they got into the lair.

At this moment, Number 8 was sweeping past Garen. His physique was larger than Number 9's and could not get past Garen's body on the stairs.

"Get lost!"

Number 8 was furious, his hand slapped at Garen with inertia. His fingers were gleaming with blue light; he must have learned a venomous technique. As his hand approached, a sharp and foul odor came with it.

Garen's speed might not be faster than theirs, but he was able to block the attack at this range. He hadn't wanted to fight them since he really didn't want to get involved, but now that the opponent obviously wanted to kill him, rage surged in his heart.

"You're courting death!" Garen growled as he raised his right arm and grabbed.

Ssss...

His arm instantly inflated and swelled up, doubling in size. His veins and muscles intertwined and inflated to at least a half-meter radius. It didn't look like a human arm anymore.

His hand clashed against Number 8's blue hand like the claw of a bear clashing with the hand of a baby.

Bang!

The two immediately separated after the impact, but Number 8 still had the strength to grab Number 9 with his other arm and used inertia to throw him back.

Number 9 was dragged down and landed next to Garen.

As the two bumped into each other, Golden Hoop Number 9 reached into Garen's arms, acting like he was giving something. He then pushed Garen away while shouting, "Take it and go!" He himself immediately turned and tumbled down the stairs.

"You!"

Garen froze. Number 9 didn't give him anything at all, and yelled like this only to mislead Number 8. He looked up at Number 8, who was furiously boring down on him like a dark cloud.

"He didn't give me anything!" Garen shouted out.

"I'll find out after I kill you!" Number 8 smirked.

"S\*\*t!" Garen was livid. He hadn't plan on fighting with the Golden Hoop, but now he was randomly involved. "You idiot! There's an exit down there! He just wants me to slow you down! You really think he was injured that much?"

The two clashed with each other again. After the muffled sound of impact, Garen stood still, and Number 8 backed off a few steps.

"Indeed very strong, like it said in the intelligence report!" Number 8's face slightly twitched, his left hand was shaking behind his back, but one couldn't tell it from his straight face.

"That damned Number 9 framed me! I have nothing against the Golden Hoop! Let's go down there and deal with him first, then you'll find out where the antique is!" Garen said, enduring the prickling pain in his palm. He used the White Cloud Secret Arts on his hand, which made the skin too rough to be poisoned, but he still felt a slight uncomfortable numbing pain in his hand.

"You think I would trust you?" Number 8 replied.

"I'm coming along, what's your problem?" Garen was now seriously angry. "I don't want your stuff, but I can identify the item for you. You know who I am, you know where I live. Even if I run away, there's still my family and friends. What are you so afraid of?"

Number 8 stared at Garen for awhile, then finally agreed. "Fine, I'll trust you this time!"

"We have to hurry, he must know of a secret exit for him to fall down like that," Garen said ruthlessly. This was the first time he got used and framed by someone else. He quickly ran down the stairs.

"No s\*\*t!"

Number 8 twisted and jumped down the stairs after Garen. The two quickly disappeared in the darkness.

Chapter 67: Alleviation 1

Garen's current plan was to make use of the excuse of need to identify the eye shaped stone for a while, and keep the stone in his hands a bit longer; that would count as a way to absorb the potential.

To get away from getting suspected, he voluntarily asked Number 8 to chase after Golden Loop Number 9 with him, because the opponent intentionally pushed the blame onto him.

No matter what happened, he had to find Golden Loop Number 9 to clean himself from the blame. However, he knew that even if he was clean, Number 8 still won't let him go; maybe that his identification technique would protect himself, but it wasn't secure enough.

"The best case would be that they two kill each other during a fight!" Garen rushed down as a vicious expression flashed though his eyes.

Golden Loop Number 8 followed behind him closely. He had a small torch in his hand, and he used his cape to block off the wind that might extinguish the fire. The two of them were only about a meter apart; they could barely see what was in front and behind them.

Soon, a white stone gate that was half open suddenly appeared on the stairwalls. Peeking into it, Garen wouldn't see anything; it was pitch dark and cold breezes were blowing out of the gate.

Garen quickly stopped his steps, and caught up on his breath.

"It's the natural wind! They probably left from here!"

Golden Loop Number 8 had thought everything through by this point. He knew that he was tricked. Garen didn't have to say much; Golden Loop Number 8 dragged opened the gate and entered.

A few strange expression flashed by Garen's face as he followed Number 8.

There was a stone room behind the stone gate. There was a thick layer of dust on the ground, and there was a series of clear footprints leading forward, and these footprints disappeared as they got to wall on the right.



Golden Loop Number 8 walked up to the wall and rubbed it, however, he wasn't able to find any mechanisms on the wall that would open up any hidden paths.

"Shit!" He punched the wall, and it made a loud "Bam" sound.

"There is still wind! There must be a way out!" Garen said calmly: "We need to find the ventilation exit."

Number 8's eyes shined; he was very anxious and didn't think out that. He started to look for the ventilation exit after he was reminded.

Garen stood there and didn't move; he just watched as Number 8 searched.

What's the use for the stone? Do you Golden Loop folks know?"

"Hehe, aren't you afraid that you will die sooner knowing more?" Number 8 searched as he laughed. It seemed like he suddenly found the mechanism; he lightly pushed into the wall.

Crack! A small door flipped open on the wall.

At the moment where the door flipped out, a short sword pierced at Golden Loop Number 8 quietly.

Tink!

The short sword hit the barrel on Number 8's Gun.

Number 8 took a big step back and raised his gun to shoot.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

After four shots, there weren't any more movements inside the darkness behind the small door.

"He escaped, we have to chase!" Number 8 roared, but he didn't move. He looked at Garen who was standing beside him; his intention was obvious, he wanted Garen to go first.

"The stuff isn't mine, I don't really care!" Garen sneered. His strength wasn't as strong as these two people; with the injuries, he was only able to use 80% of his strength. There was no way that he could win against any one of them. If he chased into the darkness, he won't get used to it at all.

Although it was also dark in the stone room, but there was still some light, unlike the space inside that little door. At least Golden Loop Number 8 had a torch.

For a moment, the two of them froze inside the stone room. Number 8 knew that he wasn't able to order Garen around, but he didn't dare to rush in recklessly.

"If we delay it longer, he would be gone!" Garen said coldly.

Golden Loop Number 8 stared at him, bit his teeth, took one of the two guns he had, and threw it into the space behind the small door.

The gun swirled in the air as it entered the darkness.

Bam!

After a gun noise, a small red flame lit up the darkness inside the door. The gun exploded instantly! At the same time, there was a vague humph sound, followed by staggering footsteps.

Golden Loop Number 8 sneered. He didn't say anything and rushed into the door. He used the cape to protect his body against the flame, and disappeared into the darkness.

Garen didn't follow up. He saw what happened clearly; Golden Loop Number 8 shot the handle on the first gun using the second gun! The handle of the first gun was filled with explosives, and it acted like a bomb when it was shot.

Although the explosive was weak, but the sound of the explosive would shock and temporarily disable one's ear in that small space. Golden Loop Number 9 must have been hurt by that.

Therefore, Golden Loop Number 8 had no time to deal with Garen. He rushed in and chased after Number 9; he had to kill Number 9 before he recovered.

Garen knew that there was nothing for him to do anymore. He didn't want to get involved in this in the first place. Since now both of Golden Loops were fighting again, it was time for him to leave.

As he was about to turn around and leave, he suddenly felt a familiar flow slowly drilling through his skin.

"This is..... Potential?!" He glanced around in surprise. There wasn't any light, the surrounding was dark, he couldn't see anything.

Garen slowly walked around as he leaned against the wall; soon, he arrived at the place where the potential energy was the thickest.

He slowly squatted down at the corner of the room; there was a piece of black cloth nailed against the ground, and it was covering something.

Because it was dark, and it was at the corner, both Golden Loop Number 8 and Garen didn't see it. The potential energy as very thin at where Garen was standing at; Garen didn't feel it at all when he was all tensed up. After calming down, he just noticed it. Apart from the Black Jade Disk, there was this source of slowly flowing into his body.

"Could it be?" Garen's heart started racing. He slowly uncovered the black cloth, and a white stone revealed itself. The stone was in an eye shape; it also looked like a fish. It quietly laid on the black floor. Garen picked it up and rubbed it. Although he couldn't see it clearly, but he knew that this was there the

potential energy was coming from. From the shape of it, he knew that it was probably that white eye shaped stone.

"If it wasn't the potential energy that helped me locate it, anyone else wouldn't have been able to find it!" Garen quickly put the "white eye" into his pocket.

He stood up and walked toward the entrance.

There was still the smell of gas and smoke that came off of the torches left in the air; it was thick.

"It's probably the detectives who just passed by."

Standing at the entrance of the stone room, Garen turned his head around and looked behind him as a sneer appeared on his face.

"One intentionally framed me, one wanted to kill me casually. Both of them are bad eggs. Unfortunately, I could get rid of them if I'm a bit stronger! I won't let them get away easily."

He rubbed the white eye shaped stone in his shirt pocket as he thought of something. At the same time, he quickly ran up.

After a few minutes.....

A black shadow suddenly rushed out of the little door in the stone room. The black shadow didn't light up anything; he rushed to the corner of the room, uncovered the black cloth and reached for something.

The black shadow was stunned as it didn't find anything. He quickly swept around with his hands, but he still didn't find anything.

"That Kelly....!!" He bit his teeth and said.

Vague footsteps behind him, and the black shadow quickly stood up and rushed out of the gate.

As soon as he rushed out, he felt a wind gusting at him as a man jumped at him from the side.

Bam!

The two of them instantly separated, and the black shadow hit the gate forcefully. The whole wall shook as a result.

"Damn!!" He continued his rolling on the floor as he dodged the second attack; the frame of the gate behind him was smashed by a punch, and it let off a deep boom sound. A ton of stone chips crackled down the wall.

"Golden Loop Number 9, you deserve this!" Garen's voice sounded in the darkness. "How dare you shift all the blame onto me? Do you think I'm scared of you?"

Golden Loop Number 9 grabbed onto the handle on the stairs as he tried helping himself up; he was only able to half kneel on the ground. He looked pale as blood flowed out of his ears, nose, and mouth; there were many thin blood streams all over his face.

He wasn't practicing Body Hardening Technique in the first place; after getting injured by Golden Loop Number 8, and getting sneak attacked by this, he felt sick to his stomach, and his head felt a little dizzy.

"Where is it?" He endured the pain and asked with his hoarse voice.

"It's on me of course." Garen sneered. "I will give it to the Golden Loop, it will help relieve the tension between us. I will give it to Golden Loop Number 8 later."

"Idiot." Number 9 suddenly laughed reluctantly. He stood up straight and was about to speak; however, he suddenly opened his mouth and puked up a mouthful of blood.

The thick smell of bloody instantly dispersed into the space.

At this time, another black shadow dashed out of the stone room, and appeared in front of the gate; it was Golden Loop Number 8.

He was holding onto a small torch that was still lit, and the torch barely lit up the surroundings. Under the vague light, the three faces appeared red and looming.

"Do you really have it?" Golden Loop Number 8 looked at Garen: "Give it to me!" He said as he reached out his hand.

"I can give it to you, but it has not been identified yet. I think I'm the only one who is able to identify to see if it's fake or not. You guys know how long it takes to identify."

Garen didn't hesitate. He knew that he couldn't protect this item. Although he didn't like the way Golden Loop Number 8 talked to him, he threw the white eye shaped stone to him. The latter caught it in mid-air; he nodded in satisfaction after he checked it.

"It's ok. I misunderstood you before. This item has no value to you, so you have no reason to jack it. In terms of identification, we will have to bother you on that. Everything here is a big misunderstanding."

"I only like identifying all sorts of strange stuff. I actually do hope that I could identify the stuff that you Golden Loop get," Garen spoke his mind.

Golden Loop Number 8 swirled his eyes and said: "The organization is always looking to treasure and protect talented people. The henchmen didn't know much, and caused a lot of trouble for you; it is our fault. But I'm sure you know that you are on Dale Quicksilver's side, and a lot people in the organization is not happy about that. But if you Kelly could join Golden Loop, then everything won't be a problem." He just tested Garen's strength and was impressed. Since Golden Loop Number 9 just betrayed the organization, a new person had to be added to the top ten Golden Loops, he had an idea.

The two of them started talking and actually ignored Golden Loop Number 9 who was severely injured temporarily. Number 9 was happy to see that too; he needed the time to recuperate, his body couldn't handle it anymore.

"What can I get by joining Golden Loop?" Garen asked as he lowered his voice.

"Although we are not a Secret Martial Art Organization, we are not a pure Force Organization as well." Golden Loop Number 8 laughed proudly: "Detective Dale knew the reason why we, the Golden Loop exist, but he didn't tell you."

Garen squinted his eyes.

"For us to like collecting this much, someone must need them."

"When what kind of a person like these Antiques that are stolen and hard to sell? After all, these items are small and incredibly old; they only have minute historic value." Golden Loop Number 8 continued with his hints.

Garen was shocked.

"Nobles!" He shouted out.

"Actually," Golden Loop Number 8 started laughing. "Golden Loop represents not just an ordinary underground force. We are backed by many influential people in high places! Strength is actually our weakest link, what we have is power and influence! There are only benefits and no harms by joining us."

Garen was relieved, and he knew there weren't any problems; he said all of that to Golden Loop Number 8 Intentionally. He still had his families, relatives, and master; he wasn't a single person who was isolated. Although Golden Loop wasn't scared of Manuyllton Corporation or his master Fei Baiyun's status and influence, they wouldn't come and provoke him for no reason, as long as there wasn't any conflict of interest.

"No wonder the detectives couldn't do anything about you guys, so it turns out that Golden Loop's influence is this strong!" He murmured.

"We just need an identification expert that could identify ancient and mysterious items. This is your opportunity!" Golden Loop Number 8 was getting more and more satisfied with his idea. All of Garen's

strength, background, and talent were what his organization was looking for. If he was able to add Garen into their organization, then the small conflicts they had prior could be solved easily. So only a few people died? They weren't any of the top twenty Golden Loops, anyone after the twentieth position were pretty much useless, and their positions could be filled easily! At this day and age, experts and talented individuals are the most important resources.

## Chapter 68: Alleviation 2

"No rush, let's take care of business first." Garen looked at Golden Loop Number Nine, and the latter instantly tensed up.

Golden Loop Number Eight sneered as he charged at Number Nine and poked out with his index finger.

Pssh!

Weh!

Golden Loop Number Nine let out a deep "humph" as a bloody hole appeared in his chest.

Bam!

His whole body instantly flew backward, went over the handrail, and fell down to the "black hole".

"Let's go." Golden Loop Number Eight didn't even bother looking down. He turned around and began walking up the stairs. "What the people on top want is here, so we won't have any problems after I hand it in. Identification will be something for another day."

Garen looked down at where Golden Loop Number Nine had fallen in, but the place was pitch black and he couldn't see a thing. He quickly followed Golden Loop Number Eight up the stairs.



"Oh wait, did you guys get any clues in terms of the fragrance of the Mindtwister Vine? Why didn't I see that particular plant?" he asked as he recalled the strange things he saw at the Silversilk Castle.

"Mindtwister Vine? That thing is best for creating illusions and killing people. All of them were collected from our people, except for that crazy woman. She still kept some, but not that much," Golden Loop Number Eight said casually. "Okay, I will go up first and retreat with my people. You can come up later, so Dale Quicksilver won't get suspicious. If you join us, the Golden Loop, then your identity could be a great cover."

"Ok." Garen nodded. He stood still and watched Golden Loop Number Eight sped up and quickly disappeared into the darkness.

He turned around and looked back at the darkness behind him. The stairs seemed to extend downward forever, as if they led to the endless abyss. The whole stairway was so quiet that it was frightening.

"Why did this Golden Loop Number Nine rush in and try to steal this item?"

Garen still had a question on his mind, but unfortunately, Number Nine was already dead. There was no way that he could still be alive after falling down from a place this high up while already being severely injured.

After shaking his head, Garen paced himself and ran up the stairs.

At the very bottom of the staircase, Golden Loop Number Nine laid facing up. Numerous metal spikes extended from the ground, piercing his body. His eyes were open wide, but there was no sign of life in them. His blood slowly soaked into the black soil and solidified.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Silversilk Castle during the afternoon glowed a warm shade of red under the sunlight during sunset. In the courtyard in front of the castle, a few guards equipped with guns were checking their teammate's corpses. Their faces were all pale. Some of them were swearing, while others were choking and whining.

Their captain had a bandage on his arm and stood beside Detective Dale with an ugly expression on his face. The White Eagle and Black Panther were also with them. Grace, in the meantime, stood beside Garen and Cynthia. The latter wasn't that upset. Her people hadn't suffered too many casualties. They were within an acceptable margin.

Garen stood by the side and saw a bunch of detectives making small talk, trying to decide on something. However, he was not interested and too lazy to listen to it. The biggest reward for him in this trip was that he had built a connection with the Golden Loop. If everything went smoothly, he would no longer have to worry about his family's safety anymore.

"Unfortunately, I wasn't of much help this time." Garen murmured. "My original plan was only to follow the detectives and figure out the secret of the Silversilk Castle, though I also wanted to see if I'll be able to get some antiques. It looks like I thought too much."

"Next time if you want to run around, can you please let me know first?" Cynthia said helplessly. Both her face and body were dirty, but she didn't have any wounds. It was like a miracle! She didn't get injured during that intense shooting at all.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Ok, I got it." Garen smiled and said, "We should go back. This isn't the time and place for us to stay."

He walked directly toward the bunch of people, including Detective Dale.

After some simple farewells, Garen led Grace, Cynthia and the other people who had come with him towards Canoe Town.

They returned to Canoe Town in the early evening, the sky had yet to turn dark. Garen jumped into Grace's car and headed towards the city.

After getting back to the city, his life gradually returned to normal. Garen threw the situation with the Silversilk Castle to the back of his mind and no longer thought about it. Besides going to the library to

read books, he would only go to the old man's and learn about identification. Though at the same time, he was waiting for the boss of Manuyllton Corporation to find time to see him.

\*\*\*\*\*

After several weeks...

In a small room in the library, surrounded by bookshelves, Garen was seated down on a red sofa. He looked with concentration at the black hard cover book, which was about the size of a magazine, that he was flipping through.

There was a cup of coffee on the black table in front of him, but it had lost its heat already.

"Book of Silence?" a pretty blonde girl asked, leaning against an armrest as she sat on his right.

Her hair was bound with a black hairband, and she wore a tight, black silk shirt emphasizing her full chest and slender waist. There were many dark red flowers on the dress. The two colors, black and red, gave off an elegant and quiet feel. The skirt had a perfect length as its edge covered her knees.

"Why do you suddenly want to search for information on this book?"

This girl was Felicity. She had just gotten back from Manroland two days ago, and had contacted Garen, asking to meet up.

"I've heard this name before, and it sounds strange. I feel like this book is very mysterious." Garen shrugged his shoulder. There was no way that he would tell her the truth.

"You're asking the right person for this kind of knowledge." The girl's eyes opened wide. It was obvious that she was having a good time. "Book of Silence is an ancient book within which mysterious knowledge about the legends is recorded. The most mysterious and ruthless civilization, Ancient Endor, is the place from which the Book of Silence originates.

"Huh... There are a few mythology books that I want to read. I could take you to go through the books together, and we could see if we can find it." Felicity stood up, dusted her skirts, and said, "Follow me."

Garen quickly dropped the book in his hand and followed her out of the small room.

Felicity quietly said something to a maid at the door. The latter nodded and walked at the front, leading the way.

The three of them passed by a few connected study rooms, and then entered a small door on the left. There was a wooden staircase leading down to the basement behind the door. It was a bit dark. The floor was covered by thick black carpet that muffled all the noise made by their footsteps.

Garen followed Felicity and the maid. They walked down three floors of stairs, passed through a few gates, and opened a series of locks. After all that trouble, they finally arrived at a large, deserted underground library.

It was a rectangular hall that was dark and gloomy. There were a dozen or so black wood bookshelves, but most of them were empty. There was no one in here, and it seemed very quiet.

Felicity waved, signaling the maid to leave. After that, she dragged Garen towards a bookshelf on the very right.

"The books here are centuries old. There are some on mythology, but you have to look for them."

Garen nodded as he sniffed the air. There was a vague musty smell.

They didn't talk after that, each rolling up their sleeves and beginning their search for ancient books.

There weren't a lot of them on the shelves, and the books that were there had a thick layer of dust on them. When they took them off of the shelves, they breathed in noses full of white dust and coughed violently. However, Felicity didn't seem to care about that. Filled with excitement, she started to look for books on mythology along with Garen.

They started their search from the bookshelf on the very right to the bookshelf on the very left. They did find a few books on mythology, but they could tell that they were full of bullsh\*t. The stories in them could only be considered tales for little kids.

"Most of the books here are left behind by one of my friend's ancestors. He had taken the majority of the books out, but there were still some that he didn't clean up. These were left here due to some family reasons, and now are forgotten and abandoned here. If you didn't bring it up, I probably wouldn't have even remembered this place," Felicity said in a quiet voice, coughing, as she took out a grey book and slapped the dust off of it. The dust immediately dispersed, prolonging the girl's coughing fit.

"No rush, we have time, we can go slow." Garen laughed. He didn't seem to be impatient at all.

Time ticked away, second by second, in this dark hall as the fire flickered in the torches on the wall.

After who knew how long, suddenly, a deep crackling noise sounded in the left corner of the hall.

A dense cloud of dust was blown into the air.

"Cough, cough... Cough! Cough! Cough!... Damn! Why did it fall down," Felicity complained as she walked away from the bookshelves. Her entire body was covered in dust. The black silk dress was no longer pure black. There was a layer of white dust on the surface, and the girl looked miserable.

"Eh?" Garen was surprised. "There is a book there."

He was standing not too far away from the girl. After the bookshelf fell down, he suddenly saw a book fall down from the top shelf. Quickly, he walked up and picked it up.

After lightly dusting off the dust off of its cover, the book was unveiled. It was black, and its cover page had a set of golden necklaces. The author's name was at the bottom: Philip Jeffries

Garen lightly opened the book. The pages were a light yellow color. He could tell that they used to be white, but due to the passage of time now had turned to yellow.

The first page only had one line on it: "Dedicated to scholars who are searching and studying mythology".

He turned the page, and there was a simple index on the second page consisting of three parts: Nightmare, The White Color, Ritual.

There were more detailed tags under each part, and the page numbers were after them.

"What is this?" Felicity got close to Garen and asked, "Golden necklace? Why doesn't this book have a name?"

"No name?" Garen was surprised. "Yeah, it really doesn't have a name."

"There are only two possibilities. One is that this is a personal book. Books are regulated by the National Publications Bureau, and not putting a name is a way to avoid that. These kind of books are assumed to be notes or diaries." Felicity was very knowledgeable. She explained, "But the other one..." Her expression got serious.

"The other one would be the so-called banned books. They contain prohibited material. Not putting a name on it is also for the purpose of avoiding the National Publications Bureau. Because they're all banned by National Publications Bureau, they only have the name of the author on it."

"Banned book?" Garen instantly got interested. He flipped through a few more pages and found that the whole book was filled with symbols and strange writings that he didn't understand.

"Let's go, let's sit down over there and read it. This book must be a banned book! I've never seen a real banned book before."

Felicity got interested as well. Both of them came to a red wooden table, pulled out chairs, wiped them clean, and sat down. The light on the table was already lit up by the maid. Although it was a bit dim, it didn't affect their reading.

## Chapter 69: Shifting Destiny 1

Putting the book on the table, Garen continued to flip through the pages.

The yellow surface of the paper was slightly rough and crisp. The corner of the paper broke off after Garen lightly touched it. It was like an extremely thin template.

"Be careful, these books are very old, at least hundreds of years old," Felicity said quietly.

"Okay."

Garen softened his movements even more.

After flipping to the fifth page, it was still the table of contents. Garen ignored it and kept on flipping.

'Hereby I thank my friend, Lady Liana. If it weren't for her careful correction and sponsorship, this book might not have been published...' After this, the words became blurry like they had been soaked in water.

Garen frowned and continued flipping. To his surprise, the actual content of the book was crooked black letters that looked like toads. Garen could recognize individual ones, but when jumbled together, they became garbled and meaningless.

"Could it be... are these special codes? I need to decode it to read the actual content?" Garen said with a frown. He flipped a couple more pages again, but they were all the same.

"I think so. When writing down important information, a lot of people design their own codes." Felicity nodded and looked through the book alongside Garen.

"Then what do we do?" Garen stopped at a random page. From top to bottom, there was not a single paragraph he could understand. All he could try to comprehend were some drawn engineering designs.

"One of my friends' grandpa used to use this one method of encryption. I still remember it, so let me try to decode it." Felicity excitedly grabbed the book, took out a pen and started to work her way through the book.

The girl pushed Garen away and even stole his seat.

Standing at the back, however, allowed Garen to see Felicity's perky butt. One of her legs was sexily bent on top of the chair, lifting up her tight black skirt. If he crouched a bit more, he would be able to see what was underneath that skirt of hers.

"I am relaxed and happy," Garen softly whispered to himself. With a grin on his face, he walked back a few more steps and enjoyed Felicity's beautiful pose.

After about ten minutes.

"Garen, come here, I know what this book is about now!" the girl suddenly shouted.

Garen walked over in a hurry and sniffed her refreshing natural scent. He subconsciously inhaled deeply. However, seeing Felicity's serious face, he organized his thoughts and looked at the table.

On top of the desk was a piece of paper. It contained a small paragraph decoded from the book.

"I have a general idea of what this book is about," Felicity said with a bit of excitement.

She flipped to the table of contents and pointed at the page.

"There are three parts in the book: nightmare, the color white, ceremony. These three parts are in correspondence to the three strange events the author encountered. It tells the boring and difficult journey he went through to try and find answers, as well as the clues he picked up in the end. Basically,



this book is a travel journal. A journal detailing the journey of a man who was seeking the truth behind fables!"

"Travel journal? Does it really have records of the strange events the author encountered?" Garen asked suspiciously.

"It doesn't really clarify what exactly was going on. However, the author has recorded that he wasn't sure since when but he began to repeatedly have the same nightmare. To reach the roots of why he was having it and to ease the pain, he went on a journey to figure out why it was occurring. If it really was just about a nightmare, then it couldn't be categorized as a strange event. But, at the end of the book, the author seems to have learned something. The way he wrote became a little unclear, it was as if he was tabooing something."

"Tabooing something?" Garen squinted his eyes. "Can we find some information on the author?"

"No. From what I've noticed, after the author arrived at this one place and came out of it, there was a huge change in the book's content and it became ambiguous," Felicity explained.

"What is that place?"

"Rochwell Empire Library."

Garen frowned, picked up the book, and flipped through it.

"Look at the back cover, there is something!" Felicity yelled anxiously.

Garen flipped to the last page in a hurry. Immediately, a white piece of paper that was tucked between the cracks of the back cover fell out. If it wasn't for the cover being cracked after such a long time, a knife would have been needed to pry open the cover to get that piece of paper.

Felicity quickly picked it up and unfolded it.

On it was written only a single line: Navici Tsunami Mountain No. 174, under the third tree and six meters deep. I left the stuff there. – Charlie

"It's a note! Nobody has found it before us, or else this piece of paper wouldn't still be tucked in the book cover." Felicity was thrilled. "Let's go check it out! Maybe we can get our hands on something cool!"

"Navici... Where is this?" Garen had never heard of this place before.

"It's at the Jade Mountain Province, on the border of the Confederation. The province's capital is Navici. The Jade Mountain is a very poor province. It has awful soil and there is a lack of natural resources. Other than an overabundance of sunlight, there isn't a lot of advantages to that area. Their grapes and honeydew melon are quite nice though." Felicity became even more eager. "What do you think? Want to go? Let's go together!"

"Jade Mountain Province is too far from here..." Garen was speechless. "If we take the train, it'll take us a week. Going there and back will take us half a month."

"What are you afraid of? We have plenty of time." Felicity waved her hand, indicating that she did not mind.

Garen thought about it for a second. "How about this, let's decide after a while. I have to go back to school soon and the timing just doesn't work out. I also have a lot of errands to take care of. Felicity, don't you have some stuff going on at home too? How can you squeeze out the time to travel?"

"It's not that bad." Felicity then remembered something, and her thrilled look faded a little. "You're right. I do have some stuff to take care of. It might take us a whole month to go there and back. Okay... then let's make plans for our next break."

"Sure." Garen nodded without hesitation.

The two of them studied the content of the book for a bit longer. Both were rather excited. Only when the clock on the wall announced the time with its loud bangs, did the two of them unwillingly stop.

"It's almost noon, I have to go get some lunch. There's some stuff I need to do in the afternoon." Garen stood up and softly sighed.

"Something to do? What do you have to do? It's our break, yet you're so busy all the time. Aren't you tired?" Felicity finally took her leg off the chair. It was numb from keeping the same pose for so long, and she stumbled, falling backward.

Without knowing it, her small butt was aimed straight at Garen's lower body.

At that moment, both of them froze.

Felicity's cheeks slowly turned red as she felt a warm object slowly rising behind her. It suddenly jumped and stabbed her at a sensitive spot.

She screamed and jumped away as if she had been electrocuted. "You wanna die?" She turned around and cupped her butt with her hands. She stared down at Garen.

"I-" Garen shrugged. "You were the one that hit me. I can't control something like that..." he responded in a low voice.

"Go to hell!" Felicity kicked Garen's lower leg and left angry and red-faced.

Garen helplessly looked at the white and grey footprint on his leg. This kick didn't even make him itch. To a regular person however, it would definitely be a kick hard enough to bruise their bones. She was wearing a pointy leather shoe after all.

"Whatever. I have to go the old man's place in the afternoon. Ah, Ying Er is the only one nice to me. Even when she fights me, she doesn't hit hard."

He dusted off the dirt off his pants and walked out of the library. There was no sight of Felicity. After taking out his card to sign out for leaving, he hailed down a horse carriage and went home.

Sitting in the carriage, Garen closed his eyes and rested his mind while checking the status of his attributes. This was something he did regularly everyday.

Strength 2.22. Agility 1.10. Physique 1.87. Intelligence 1.50. Potential 258%. White Cloud Secret Arts: Great Achievement (Stage 4). Explosive Fist Arts: Intermediate. White Cloud Combat Arts: Intermediate.

"Strength went up a little bit. I'm not sure what to do with the potential I've been collecting though..." Garen thought about it with a frown.

"Before I kept on improving my Strength and as a result my Explosive Fist Arts became intermediate level. After acquiring strong defense and solo combat skills, I should be undefeatable in the short term. But if I run into a speedy opponent, then I'm in trouble. With my physique and my grasp on combat, I am considered to be an advanced martial artist. Compared to second senior brother and elder senior sister though, I am still lacking behind by a lot despite my advantage over normal people. I am not sure which attribute I should try to improve next."

He glanced over the Agility attribute. The number 1.10 hadn't changed since the beginning.

"I remember the elder senior sister telling me a few days ago that real masters cannot have any visible flaws. Even if they have them, they need to learn how to compensate for that weakness. My speed right now should be my most obvious flaw. It seems like I'll need to greatly improve my agility as well."

After analyzing, he finally focused his view on the Agility attribute.

After a few seconds, the number jumped from 1.10 to 1.20.

Another second passed, the Strength attribute hopped as well, from 2.22 to 2.42.

Garen was somewhat shocked. He looked at his Potential Meter. He had used up all of the potential he'd saved up over the last few weeks. There was 158% left.

"Why does improving my agility cause my strength to go up?" He was speechless. "Could it be.." He suddenly thought of a possibility. "Even if I want to keep my strength unchanging and only try to

increase my speed, the explosive force that results from it will definitely increase as well. This means speed plus strength creates the real explosive force and damage! I think this is the true trick behind these attributes. With a high strength attribute, I can add a little speed to exponentially increase my explosive force and damage."

He noticed that after the agility attribute went up, another symbol appeared. Looking carefully, the meaning of the symbol naturally flew into his mind.

"The difference between strength and agility is too big, therefore the two of them affect each other." Garen looked at the other attributes. "If that's the case, then should I try to even out all my attributes? I shouldn't be too extreme with one attribute because it will drag down my other attributes too."

With the little of potential left, Garen didn't use it up. The potential in the Black Jade Disk had been dying down and the potential inside was less than he anticipated. Because of that, it took longer to absorb the potential and after another time, two at best, there would be nothing left to absorb.

Sitting on the carriage, he slowly took out the Black Jade Disk from his pants' pocket. This piece of antique that looked like a tough medal was emitting potential that was as thin as a strand of hair.

Garen brushed his fingers over this long rectangular small medal and felt the uneven and bumpy words and carvings.

"After I absorb all of it, I can sell it through a company or through the Golden Hoop. It'll probably fetch me a lot of money and I'll be able to use it to find more Antiques of Tragedy." Garen moved around to feel the effects of the change in his attributes. "I guess I won't go to the old man's today, but try out my new physique at the dojo. If I don't familiarize myself, I might screw up in my next combat. I haven't been that dedicated to going regularly. When I see Master this afternoon, he will lecture me for sure..."

Garen smiled helplessly.

Chapter 70: Shifting Destiny 2

Afternoon, Pennington street.

Grey clouds covered the sky, not letting a single beam of light shine through. It was a gloomy day.

Inside Dolphin Antiques, old man Gregor languidly sat in the chair behind the table. He seemed to be dozing off with his head tilted.

Suddenly, he heard a familiar footstep from outside the door.

"Garen?" the old man opened one of his eyes and asked listlessly. "Look at what time it is! I thought you weren't coming today." He pointed at a white narrow-necked vase with two ear-like handles. "This is your mission for the afternoon, go take a closer look. Give me your appraisal report after."

Garen walked through the door in a red sports suit. When he saw the old man's lazy attitude, he rolled his eyes and shook his head in silence. He walked up and reached out to take the vase.

All of a sudden, he flipped his fingers and launched what seemed to be a black line.

The black line drew an arch in the air like a flying bug, speeding toward old man Gregor's forehead like lightning.

"Ow!"

It was too late for the old man to dodge, so he slightly tilted his head. Unexpectedly, the black line turned and struck down, stabbing into his left shoulder, and stopped there. It was a thin black needle.

"Garen, what in the world are you doing?" Gregor got up from his chair, took two steps back and pulled out the needle. He was both surprised and infuriated.

Garen was shocked. Suddenly, he had a pained expression and staggered two steps back. He spat out a mouthful of blood and his face turned pale.

"What happened? How are you?" Old man Gregor froze, but then immediately came around the table to hold Garen. His swift movements were completely contradictory to his elderly figure.

"My... my head hurts..!" Garen's shouted out in a weak voice, his face twisting with pain.

"Damn it, it must be those guys! How dare they ... ugh!"

Gregor's voice suddenly stopped, his body shuddering next to Garen. He lowered his head and saw a short black dagger stabbed into his belly.

"You..!"

Garen sneered as he promptly pulled the dagger out, flipped it in his hand, and backed off a step without making another move.

"If I wasn't disguised as that kid, I probably wouldn't have been able to trick you."

He pinched the skin on his left cheek and gently peeled off a mask made of human skin, revealing a handsome yet sinister face of a man. "Long time no see, Gregor."

"It's you... Sylphalan!"

Old man Gregor backed off two steps, holding his wounded lower belly. He had a complicated expression.

"Tell me, where is the thing?" Sylphalan demanded.

"The thing? Heh..." Old man Gregor smiled. "You still haven't given up?"

Sylphalan laughed. "I know you're strong, but there is no way you could escape after getting struck by my Duskhill Needle. Now come on, show me where it is..." He slowly approached Gregor.

Gregor unexpectedly started chuckling.

"Have you forgotten? No matter how many times you try, you will always eat my dust."

"We'll see about that," Sylphalan mocked with a smile.

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Phew!

Garen flung himself at the bed after the shower, his hair still wet. He took a deep breath, the blankets had the most familiar and warm fragrance.

"I'm so tired..." he mumbled. "Got beaten up by master Fei at the dojo, then scolded by mom and dad after getting home. Thank god Ying Er was home early, else it could've been worse..."

A tranquil orange light lit the bedroom, dyeing Garen's white bathrobe a faint yellow. Outside the window, the day was turning dark. It was almost dusk.

His parents and Ying Er went for a stroll after dinner, but Garen was too tired to go along, so he stayed and rested in his room.

He laid on his stomach and dug out the Black Jade Disk, carefully rubbing its rough surface with his hand.

Creak...

The door abruptly opened.



"Brother, what are you doing with the door closed? Doing something sneaky?" Ying Er walked in holding a glass of water.

Garen hid the Black Jade Disc in a flurry.

"Could you knock on the door when you come in?" he complained, sitting up.

"Knock on the door? For what? How will I catch you doing your sneaky business if I knock?" Ying Er looked like she had just showered as well. Her skin was shining pink from the heat.

She was wearing a white t-shirt and shorts, revealing her long and slim thighs. She stood at the door, her thighs level with Garen's face.

"Didn't you go out with mom and dad? Why are you back?" Garen asked while trying to avoid peeking at his sister's legs.

"I never left. I was just saying that to deceive you, and I've finally caught you in action!" Ying Er said with an evil laugh. "If you don't want mom and dad to know about your fishy business, you'll have to promise me something!"

"Promise you something? You think you can threaten me?" Garen replied, acting stubborn. He had nothing to hide, but he was trying to tease Ying Er. "What do you want?"

Ying Er walked toward Garen and looked down at him with one arm on her hip.

"What I want is simple!" She hummed and sneered. "That is ..."

Rumble!

Suddenly there was a thudding sound, and a violent rumbling came after.

The whole apartment started shaking strenuously, an eerie noise came from afar and numbed Garen's ears.

Ying Er couldn't even stand still. She fell into Garen's arms, her legs spread out, and sat up straight in Garen's right leg.

The two shuddered. Garen warily gripped onto Ying Er, but the latter blushed and ran out of the room in an instant.

Garen turned around to face up, still immersed in his sister's refreshing fragrance as she fell onto him.

"I've been quite lucky recently..." He lightly chuckled and collected himself. He sat in front of his desk and started reviewing the antiques appraisal knowledge.

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Suburbs of Huaishan City, inside a forest.

Old man Gregor covered his stomach and stood facing the burning woods. He quietly watched as the torching flames consumed the trees. The fire reflected on his face, coloring it red.

"If you still had the book, I might have been a little reluctant, but now..." From the searing flames walked out a man, Sylphalan. He had a wound on his left cheek, and blood was slowly streaming out of it onto his chin. "Gregor, you have become mortal ... Your only hope is the sustenance."

"Even without it, I can still... Cough Cough..." Gregor coughed abruptly, his hand was still placed over his abdomen, blood gushing from between his fingers.

"Weak and powerless, you even lost that book. The once glorious genius has turned into today's tragic sight!" Sylphalan said, opening his arms. "It really is .... pathetic..." he murmured in a poetic tone. "What do you wish to accomplish by extracting your power? Do you want to give it to the boy? It's no use, he isn't gifted enough. He is a mere mortal who will easily perish with time."

"Whoever I'm giving it to, it's my business. As for that book, I've placed it far far away, in a place you would never find..." Gregor panted and faintly laughed.

"We've lived together for all those years, brother. Do you really think I don't know that you would give it to that old hag?" Sylphalan smiled.

Gregor's face twitched a little. It was too late when he realized it.

"I knew it! Haha!" Sylphalan started laughing maniacally. "I was just trying to test you first, but your mind is still as slow as a turtle, even after all these years."

He stared at Gregor, his eyes full of sorrow.

"You've always put all of your life and power into someone else's hands. Even until the day you die, you're still like this. You think I can't tell how many days you've left? Putting all of your vitality into the ritual, only you could do something like this."

"I was already a useless man, I just wanted to leave a trace of myself in this big world..." Gregor had a tearful smile.

Bang!

It looked like he had been hit by something invisible; his body abruptly flew out and hit a trunk. Then rolled for a bit.

"Ugh..." Gregor covered his mouth with a hand, but blood flowed out from between his fingers and dripped to the ground.

"Why are you always this stupid! Why?" Sylphalan ran at him and fiercely hit Gregor's stomach.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Sylphalan's feet stomped and kicked, harder and harder.

It sounded like something hitting a leathered sack, the sound was clear even at the edge of this burning forest.

"Trace?" He finally stopped. "A scumbag like you wants to leave a trace in this world? Keep dreaming!" At some point during the kicking, his face had turned diabolical. "I've made up my mind. I will erase everything you've left! All of it!" he roared at the top of his lungs. His face was twisted, purple veins throbbing on his forehead.

Suddenly a hand gripped Sylphalan's boot. Gregor desperately raised his head, his face covered in blood. He was completely mute, thick blood continuously welling in his mouth. He stared at Sylphalan with it wide open, unable to say a word.

"You want me to leave him alone?" Sylphalan stopped raging and regained his calm expression. This time he had a mysterious smirk. "You're begging me? You are begging me, right?"

Gregor's pupils were dilating, his eyes had gone blurry, and he could not see anything. But he kept his grip on Sylphalan's boot.

"You're really begging me?" Sylphalan's smile turned into a wild laugh. "If you want to beg me, then lick my boots clean!"

Bang!

He stomped on Gregor's face.

"Lick it... the once glorious genius ... my dear brother.. LICK IT!"

His face turned diabolical again.

He stomped and grinded Gregor's face, again and again.

Suddenly he froze.

Old man Gregor, who was dying beneath his feet, really reached out with his tongue and licked his boot.

An inexplicable emotion filled Sylphalan's chest. He raised his head and felt a sudden bitterness.

"It... was... my fault... back ... then..." Old man's voice came from below his feet. "Forgi... me..."

His head slid down to the ground, the last bit of luster gone from his eyes.

Sylphalan did not respond. He looked at the body at his feet. The cold wind blew and angered the flames in the forest, but they were starting to burn down.

"Brother..."

Sylphalan silently squatted down next to Gregor's body.

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At the same time, Garen sat at his desk and felt a warmth in his chest.

He pulled out a necklace from beneath his collar. It was the book shaped one old man Gregor had given him.

"What's going on?" He checked it again, but could not find anything abnormal. The necklace was as warm as his body's temperature.

He decided not to overthink it, chunked the necklace back beneath his collar, and continued to study the appraisal cases.

As he stuffed the necklace back, a small line of text appeared on its surface.

‘Ain Gregoria, third life ritual – protection.’