

## Ancient 196

Chapter 196 - 99 The Origins of Moon Princess

West Port at dusk was shrouded in a yellowish twilight. A middle-aged man dressed as a boatman stood atop a shipping container, overlooking the scene: "Take out your black cards and stand against the wall. Not just anyone gets to work for Mr. Liu. If you want to earn a meal here, you have to know the rules."

He said, "No matter who you were before, no matter how powerful your background was in the real world, none of that matters here! Since you're already unclean, drop the arrogance!"

Armed mercenaries pointed their guns and herded a group of people to the corner like they were herding ducks, snapping impatiently, "Hands up! No carrying anything. Stand flush against the wall!"

Most people dared not resist and complied obediently, raising their hands.

But some showed reluctance—mostly those who had some status in the real world. They barely started grumbling before being struck down with a rifle butt and tossed directly into the sea.

The scene terrified the rest, silencing them as they submitted to inspection.

The Dark World was often this brutal. If it weren't for the corruption, most people would choose to live under the sun rather than come to the Forbidden Zone and endure the jungle law of survival of the fittest.

The Fallen here were mostly former members of the Ether Association or other Ascender organizations.

Having fallen for various reasons, their only choice to avoid eradication was to escape into the Forbidden Zone.

Abandoning all semblance of their identities in the real world, they lived with their tails between their legs.

Some were wild Ascenders who, after their fall, were hunted down and had no option but to end up here.

Of course, a small number hadn't fallen but merely violated the order conventions set by the International Ascender Alliance. In other words, they committed crimes in the real world and fled to the Forbidden Zone to avoid execution.

All these people shared one thing—they had black identities, ostracized from the real world.

Here, someone disappeared or died every day.

No one cared, nor did it matter.

Because by the next day, new faces would arrive.

Some walked in directly, others snuck in by boat, and some were dragged in against their will.

The flow of people kept the Forbidden Zone operating.

The Forbidden Zone was never a place for camaraderie.

It was a cage where capital could unabashedly reveal its true face.

Here, the tools of capital's enslavement weren't entirely profit—it was fate itself.

Zhong Li moved a box of goods to the shop's entrance and stared at the empty store, murmuring, "Everyone's gone again. Dad, do you think Zhang Yi and the others won't come back from Black Cloud City Stronghold?"

"Mind your own business—don't go poking around,"

A weathered, gaunt old man scolded, "Remember the rules here: anyone who leaves, you assume they're not coming back. What's with calling him your 'brother'? Do you really think Zhang Yi cares for you? He just sees you as an easy target because you're naive. Do you even know how you lost your Heavenly Born Grass last month?"

This man's name was Zhong Guoqing, and Zhong Li was his biological daughter.

The father and daughter were both Unclean beings who suppressed their deformation by consuming Heavenly Born Grass. They worked for the Third Master.

Their job here was to oversee the store, transporting goods from the port daily, recruiting treasure appraisers, sorting unpolluted goods, and selling them on the black market or shipping them out by boat.

It seemed simple but required a certain Rank.

Beyond moving goods, one had to guard against treasure appraisers who might kill for loot or steal things.

The father and daughter were both Second Rank—he followed the Ancient Martial Path, while she followed the Witch Path.

One handled physical fights, while the other kept watch. Over the years, they worked well together.

Eventually, they secured the shopkeeper position.

Of course, only those who lived long enough could become shopkeepers.

"Alright, I know you're growing up, little girl. Stop reading those trashy romance novels—they're full of lies. And besides, there's no such thing as true love in the Forbidden Zone. Once we save up enough money, we'll leave for a small country in Southeast Asia. You can even go to college and maybe marry someone decent. Your dad's biggest regret in life is being uneducated—no matter where I went, people always looked down on me."

Zhong Guoqing smacked his daughter on the back of the head and scolded, "We're not on any association's wanted list, nor have we committed crimes. As long as we save up enough money and get out, the rest of our lives can rely on medicine—you can still live another few decades."

Zhong Li pouted and unhappily replied, "Oh."

To Unclean beings, as long as they weren't on an association's wanted list, there was still hope.

If they consumed Heavenly Born Grass daily to suppress deformation, and purchased other medications to lessen the side effects, while dying of old age might be impossible, they could at least extend their lives by several years.

Zhong Li, who had been polluted at such a young age, could live to her fifties if conditions allowed.

Zhong Guoqing, on the other hand, was infected much later in life. Now fifty, he could barely eke out another ten years.

"Dinner's ready."

Zhong Guoqing brought two trays over from the store's kitchen.

Their meal consisted of two pieces of synthetic beef steak—the kind commonly found in supermarkets, often on discount.

Alongside were four fried eggs, two steamed buns, and half a sausage.

The whole meal cost less than fifteen yuan.

Such was the life of the bottom tier—not that anyone cared if it seemed a strange combination.