

Ancient 211

Chapter 211 - 104 Beast Fighting_3

As everyone could see, Gu Jianlin was indeed not skilled at hand-to-hand combat.

But that was not the reason why he was passively defending and evading.

Bam!

Gu Jianlin was punched and sent flying, slamming fiercely against the iron cage net, yet he didn't let out even a single groan.

In contrast, Vulture's attacks were akin to those of a savage beast—ferocious and violent. His combat techniques seemed to integrate into his raw instincts, each heavy blow venting the deep-seated rage and hatred in his heart. It looked utterly insane.

Roar!

With a furious roar, Vulture gripped the iron net with his four limbs and launched downwards again.

Gu Jianlin gazed at the oncoming beast and said calmly, "You've vented enough."

Bam!

A swift aerial roundhouse kick swept towards him. Even though Gu Jianlin raised his arms to defend, he was still struck and sent flying across the ground, sliding for over ten meters before crashing his back against the iron cage net with a resounding impact.

With one hand supporting the ground to steady himself, he said again, "Then it's time for you to go."

Vulture seemed completely oblivious.

This beast charged straight at him, claws crossed as if aiming to behead him!

At the critical moment, Gu Jianlin's hands shot out like lightning, firmly grasping his wrists!

"I'll make this quick. I'll let you have peace."

The boy's voice was not loud, but it echoed across the arena.

Vulture appeared completely consumed by murderous intent. Blood-red tears streamed from his compound eyes as his claws exerted even more force.

Suddenly, Gu Jianlin raised a leg, striking directly into his chest!

Bam!

Vulture flew backward like a cannonball, smashing violently against the iron cage net before falling to the ground.

Yet, he shook his head, dropped to all fours, and pounced forward once more.

Gu Jianlin raised a finger and softly said, "Die."

Ghost Curse!

With a squelching sound, an eerie cracking noise erupted from within Vulture's body. His centipede-like mutated form shrank suddenly, and dark, foul-smelling blood leaked out from between the joints of his exoskeleton.

Countless black spells appeared fleetingly on his body like living entities.

At the same time, black spell marks flashed across Gu Jianlin's face as he suddenly spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

At that very moment, he took half a step forward, raising his hands.

Pitch-black particles gathered and trembled in the void, coalescing into a Qi Realm shimmering with dark radiance. It expanded in an instant!

Boom!

Dark Shock!

It was as if a black sun had exploded. The exoskeleton covering Vulture's massive frame shattered loudly, and his burly form was struck by the fearsome shockwaves, rippling like fabric caught in a gust of wind.

At that moment, the entire arena fell silent. The roaring heavy metal music was abruptly cut off!

The spectators in the stands all rose to their feet.

The audience below gaped, watching the scene unfold in disbelief.

A ghost-like figure darted forward, lifting his right hand with fingers poised like a blade, then thrust it out suddenly!

With a sickening sound, Vulture's heart was pierced through.

The Divine Sacrificial Fire ignited instantly, consuming his life.

"Then find your release," Gu Jianlin said softly.

Vulture was engulfed in the Divine Sacrificial Fire. He fell to his knees, letting out a heartrending scream as the remnants of his exoskeleton shed away piece by piece. The mutated features faded, and his terrifying compound eyes gradually turned clear.

Gu Jianlin stood before him, his expression cold and detached.

As life drained away, Vulture suddenly raised his blood-red eyes to sweep across the arena. His gaze was feral and savage, and in that instant, no one dared meet his eyes.

Then, beyond the crowd, he saw the pair—a father and daughter. His gaze softened.

He withdrew his eyes, softly saying, "Thank you."

With a thud, he fell onto his back, his eyes forever shut.

Gu Jianlin lowered his head to look at him, his right hand dripping with blood, drenched in crimson.

The bar was silent.

The twist and counterattack had come so abruptly, catching everyone off guard!

At that moment, a sharp whistle broke the silence.

"Victory! The challenger has won!"

After being stunned for a few seconds, the announcer finally recovered, shouting excitedly, "For the first time in two months, a challenger has defeated a monster! Let us present him with his... first reward!"

Boom.

The fighting cage's door swung open as the announcer, arm wrapped around a Bunny Girl's waist, stepped inside.

The Bunny Girl held a tray with a thick stack of red banknotes on it.

"Please take your prize, challenger," the announcer said with a broad smile.

Challengers capable of killing a monster were often immensely skilled.

Perhaps some boss would notice them and groom them to become the next champion fighter.

So buttering them up never hurt.

Yet Gu Jianlin only threw him a cold glance.

The announcer froze, and the Bunny Girl visibly hesitated.

Gu Jianlin grabbed the stack of red banknotes and tossed them casually into the air.

Countless red bills scattered across the space, dancing in the light.

The fighting cage's rules were one thing, but humiliating someone who fought till they lost control and mutated for their family? Truly pointless.

Gu Jianlin simply needed the fight to climb higher in rank and gather intelligence.

Lending a hand was just incidental.

Rustle.

The banknotes drifted and fell.

The announcer and Bunny Girl stood dumbfounded.

The audience surged forward, scrambling to grab the bills.

Gu Jianlin didn't spare a glance, walking against the chaotic crowd and leaving.

The rain of red banknotes fell behind his retreating figure.

"Interesting," someone chuckled softly from the stands.

Butcher clicked his tongue, "This guy has a certain indescribable air about him."

Moon Princess watched the boy's departure in silence.

Chapter 212 - 105: Candle Dragon Legacy

The second-floor stands were reserved for only the most prominent figures in the Dark World.

After all, throughout history, those in high positions have always enjoyed looking down from above.

Behind the black curtain, Miss Lan seemed to smile faintly, her tone leisurely and pleased. "After watching for over two months, today's match finally had something worth seeing. Sister Yue Ji, Butcher, what are your thoughts?"

The Butcher scratched his head and turned to look at the boss.

After a brief silence, Moon Princess spoke softly, "Very strong."

"When even Sister Yue Ji says so?"

Miss Lan chuckled. "Then perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to make a friendly connection. Third Master, who is he?"

Mr. Liu raised his hand, and a bodyguard immediately placed a tablet in his hands.

"Gu Ting. Seventeen years old. First Order Divine Officer. A menial worker at a Treasure Appraisal Shop."

He swore with a laugh. "He's already proficient with Dark Shock, and he's still just First Order? Well, I suppose that's normal. Anyone in the Dark World who can't hide themselves well doesn't survive long."

Miss Lan smirked subtly. "That's not what I was referring to."

Mr. Liu raised an eyebrow, turning to her. "Oh?"

Miss Lan said coolly, "What I mean is, he doesn't seem particularly interested in money. Quite a character, wouldn't you say? Such people are either without desires entirely—or they're extraordinarily ambitious. Try giving him a Golden Card."

Mr. Liu made a sound of acknowledgment. "Yue... wait, Butcher, where's Miss Moon Princess?"

On the stands, Moon Princess was nowhere to be seen.

Only the Butcher remained, scratching his head as he said, "No idea—like you don't already know she's on the Ghost Slayer Path. Always coming and going like a ghost. Who could ever tell when she leaves?"

But as her long-time partner, the brute could sense that the boss's attention had been drawn to that young man.

After all, throughout the match, Moon Princess had fixed her gaze on the youth, never sparing a glance for anyone else.

Mr. Liu thought for a moment. "Alright then."

"Mr. Zhu, Boss Zhang, the matches are over for today."

He chuckled, his face like a smiling Buddha. "Would either of you care to stay for a drink?"

Boss Zhang gave an awkward laugh, muttered something about being busy, and quickly left.

Oddly, even though Zhu Cheng had won the match, his expression was sour as he too made a hurried exit.

Mr. Liu clasped his hands behind his back, his regretful smile almost comical. "A bunch of second-rate talents, all of them. These matches are getting duller and duller. I'm looking for talents comparable to the Ether Association's Omega Sequence geniuses. What are these clowns supposed to be?"

The Butcher scratched his head. "Third Master, then why keep hosting these fights?"

"You don't understand—it's a tradition of the Dark World. The very first king of the Dark World, many years ago, rose to power through underground brawls. Well, back then it wasn't called underground boxing; they referred to it as Beast Fighting."

Mr. Liu waved dismissively. "Ning Chen, go meet the newcomer for me."

From the corner emerged a lethargic young man, yawning as he replied, "Sure, boss."

Mr. Liu suddenly added, "Oh, and fetch an alchemy weapon from the warehouse. Hmm... one of the ones Miss Lan crafted. Let's not be as stingy as the Association."

Ning Chen yawned again. "Alright, got it..."

As Gu Jianlin stepped down from the ring, everyone who saw him instinctively moved aside, clearing a path.

In the Forbidden Zone, human life held no value, and there were no rules to stop someone from killing you. Here, the one with the stronger fists was always in the right. No one dared provoke a man ruthless enough to defeat a Mutant barehanded.

How quickly the tables had turned.

Gu Jianlin still remembered the way they had looked at him when watching the Beast Fighting earlier. To them, both humans and Mutants alike were just animals, struggling for survival in a cage, objects of their condescension.

As though the cage itself gave them all the safety they needed.

But when he emerged alive from the ring, their gazes shifted.

Fear. Caution. Flattery. Unease.

The shift in status and identity was staggering.

Whether you deserved respect was entirely dependent on your strength.

This was the Dark World.

Suddenly, a butler in a black suit approached with a smile. "Mr. Gu, Third Master Liu invites you upstairs for a private chat. He also has a gift prepared for you."

"Alright."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly. Of course, the reason he had stepped into the ring wasn't just to stand up against injustice—but also to showcase a hint of his strength and gain access to the upper echelons of the Forbidden Zone.

With his talent, this was a simple task.

"This way, please."

The butler led him to the second floor and into a private guest room.

The room's décor was quite exquisite. Though it was merely an underground bar in the black market, it had the atmosphere of a nightclub. The entire design resembled a crystal palace—decadent and indulgent.

On a crimson plush sofa sat a smiling, portly man, holding two Bunny Girls in each arm.

One Bunny Girl was feeding him wine, while the other peeled grapes and placed them in his mouth.

In the corner, the drowsy young man was still yawning.

"Ah, you're here?"

When Mr. Liu saw the young man enter, his eyes, narrowed into slits, gleamed briefly with an elusive light. He said with a grin, "Not bad, not bad. I was very satisfied with today's Beast Fighting. You've got potential, kid—though your combat technique is average, to say the least. Or rather, you have none at all. But your Extraordinary Ability is solid, and that money-throwing move at the end? Stylish."

Chapter 213 - 105: Candle Dragon Legacy_2

He waved his hand, "Sit."

Gu Jianlin walked into the room, where there was only one chair, clearly meant for him.

He sat down and looked at the mysterious boss of the Forbidden Zone across from him.

To be honest, even with his profiling ability, there wasn't anything special about him.

The only thing notable was that his eyes were incredibly small.

Smallest he'd ever seen in his entire life.

"Please don't tell me you dare to talk without opening your eyes."

Mr. Liu raised an eyebrow, "I've already opened them as wide as I can."

Gu Jianlin fell into thought.

Unless the man had a mind reading technique, everyone who met him always said the same thing.

"Go entertain the guest."

Mr. Liu smacked the two bunny girls on the backside.

The two bunny girls smiled alluringly and sashayed their hips, walking gracefully toward him.

Yet in that instant, the cold gleam of a dagger flashed, slicing off a strand of their hair abruptly.

"Don't move."

Gu Jianlin gripped the dagger and calmly said, "Sit back down."

The two bunny girls exchanged glances, a faint glimmer flickering in their enchanting eyes.

Because their hands, poised behind their backs, had nearly reached the holsters at their waists.

"Although you've undergone special training, your eyes still gave you away."

Gu Jianlin said indifferently, "This kind of probing? Forget it."

Mr. Liu burst out laughing, not showing the slightest hint of embarrassment. He called the two bunny girls back and smiled with satisfaction, "Not bad, not bad! Strong vigilance. Only someone like you can survive in the Dark World. I'll skip the pleasantries—here, take this Golden Card."

He retrieved a pure gold card from his pocket and tossed it over casually.

Gu Jianlin caught it effortlessly, seeing four words engraved on the card.

—Youying Consortium.

"Those who can't survive in the real world often escape into the Dark World. Some are persecuted, some have only themselves to blame, and others are after something. But no matter who they are, they'll want to join us. Because under our protection, they won't have to skulk around wearing masks or hide in the shadows."

Mr. Liu chuckled, "I don't know which category Mr. Gu falls into, but I hope you're in the third one. Only that kind of person qualifies to cooperate with us, and to truly... become one of us."

Gu Jianlin, hearing this, suddenly realized he had underestimated the forces behind this Forbidden Zone.

The fat man's implication was clear: under their protection, he wouldn't need to fear the Association's relentless pursuit anymore.

"Of course, joining us has benefits that go far beyond mere protection. What we need are true powerhouses—the kind who can collaborate on major ventures. You know as well as I do: with Qilin Immortal Palace now manifest, everyone's after the Mystery of Immortality within the palace. Legend has it that the Qilin Venerable possesses authority over disaster and life."

Mr. Liu hinted cryptically, "But it's clear to anyone with a brain that Qilin Immortal Palace is bound to be a battleground for the Ether Association. At this point, half of the Dawn Combat Sequence has already entered the entrance at the seabed in Black Cloud City, working alongside the Omega Sequence's elite seeds for a large-scale sweep."

Gu Jianlin froze for a moment; he hadn't expected things to progress this quickly and wasn't even aware of it.

That level of battle was obviously not something a rookie like him was meant to take part in.

Mr. Liu's eyes gleamed strangely, and he coaxed, "However, we have another entrance to the Qilin Immortal Palace under our control, along with a secret that is classified even within the Ether Association."

Gu Jianlin hesitated briefly, "Is a secret like that something you'd casually tell a small fry like me?"

"Of course. After all, Ether Association has always been stingy—they rarely share information like this with their lower ranks. But things are different in the Dark World. Here, loose tongues abound, and anything is possible."

Mr. Liu laughed loudly, "Judging from your expression, I can tell you don't know. Why don't you take a guess: over two thousand years ago, why did Candle Dragon Venerable wage war against Qilin Venerable in the East Sea? Their battle shattered the heavens and collapsed dimensions."

Gu Jianlin's pupils contracted slightly upon hearing this. "Why?"

Mr. Liu shrugged, "Specifically, we don't know either. Our archaeological experts aren't as reliable as those in the Association."

Gu Jianlin was momentarily speechless, nearly cursing out loud.

"But what we can confirm is that Candle Dragon Venerable experienced some kind of issue over two thousand years ago. Desperate and nearly insane, He searched for a solution. According to a hidden rumor, after nine hundred years of slumber, Qilin Venerable descended to the East Sea and planted the Qilin Wedge, attempting an ancient form of priestly ritual to restore His full strength."

Mr. Liu shrugged, "Meanwhile, Candle Dragon Venerable sought to seize the fruits of this ritual."

Gu Jianlin was stunned. Battles between Supreme Ancients like these felt far too distant for him to comprehend.

Even though he had inherited the power of Qilin Venerable, the whole idea felt surreal to him.

"At the same time, Qilin Venerable wasn't passive either. He used the opportunity to try swallowing Candle Dragon Venerable's strength! Our consortium has an Ascender claiming descent from Xu Fu, who, through ancient documents handed down in his family, pieced together a shocking truth."

Mr. Liu said somberly, "Within Qilin Immortal Palace, not only is there treasure left by Qilin Venerable, but also the legacy of Candle Dragon Venerable buried within."

Chapter 214 - 105: Candle Dragon Legacy_3

It was as if a thunderbolt exploded in his mind; even with Gu Jianlin's immense stability, he couldn't help but be moved.

"Don't think I'm bragging here. Our group has an Ascender who crossed into the Immortal Palace. He claims to have encountered the Ancient Ancestors of the Candle Dragon Clan inside! After verification, we found he wasn't lying, which completely proves this theory."

Mr. Liu chuckled and said, "Actually, some ancient documents also record this. Throughout the ages, people have ventured to the East Sea searching for traces of the Qilin Immortal Palace, some of them even becoming legendary figures in history. Do you know? The Candle Dragon Venerable is hailed as the strongest among the Supreme, but the Qilin Venerable is certainly no weaker."

"Even within the Ancient God Clan, It is an exceedingly dangerous and terrifying Divine. Aside from the Vermilion Bird Venerate who descended alongside It, nearly all other Supremes wanted to kill It."

He paused, his tone becoming enigmatic and profound: "Though no one knows why, It must possess some unique Authority that even Its Supreme peers fear deeply."

Gu Jianlin appeared outwardly calm, but internally, he was beginning to feel restless.

At the moment, his understanding of Qilin Authority was still severely lacking.

Aside from Ancient Divine Language and Ancient God Transformation, he knew nothing else.

"Two thousand years ago, that apocalyptic war was a trap set by the Qilin Venerable and the Candle Dragon Venerable, each intending to devour the other. Although the result was the Qilin Venerable being suppressed and destroyed, the Candle Dragon Venerable ultimately emerged victorious."

Mr. Liu said, "But it can be confirmed that the Candle Dragon Venerable paid a great price. Even though It has remained active in the Ancient God Realm and the real world over the past two thousand years, Its power is certainly no longer as strong as the peak period recorded in ancient books. Guess what—could It have left something in the Qilin Immortal Palace?"

He spoke in a furtive tone: "Otherwise, why would It deliberately leave behind this tomb? If It couldn't completely kill the Qilin Venerable, wouldn't banishing It into dimensional chaos have been better?"

Gu Jianlin's pupils flickered, but he said nothing.

"The goal of the Ether Association is the Qilin Venerable, while our goal is the legacy of the Candle Dragon Venerable."

Mr. Liu said, "Enticing, isn't it?"

Gu Jianlin had to admit, it did pique his intrigue and curiosity.

"Is this the gift you prepared for me?"

He asked.

"Oh no, no, no, of course not."

Mr. Liu crossed his arms and laughed, "I told you, we're not as stingy as the Ether Association. What I'm about to give you next is the ultimate masterpiece created by Miss Lan herself—a truly unparalleled alchemy weapon!"

Just as he finished speaking, the glass window suddenly shattered, and the fat man's head exploded with a loud bang, blood spraying everywhere.

It looked like a watermelon crushed to pieces.

Gu Jianlin: "..."

The two Bunny Girls' expressions changed abruptly, and they turned their gaze sharply toward the window.

The roaring sound of gunfire shattered the tranquility of the night sky, as if ripping apart the darkness.

"Another assassin."

The young man yawning in the corner turned and walked off, speaking listlessly, "Eagle Eye of the Overlord Path combined with Domineering-enhanced abilities. Sigh, since the invention of firearms, the Overlord Path has become more terrifying."

"Let the boss know that I'm going to catch the assassin."

After saying that, he leapt out of the window and vanished into the night.

At this moment, Mr. Liu's corpse began to tremble, the flesh squirming and regenerating from the horrifying wound on his neck. Countless blood vessels and muscle fibers burst forth and intertwined, rapidly reshaping into a new head within mere moments.

"Ah, my apologies—just a minor interlude."

He smiled and said, "Shall we continue?"

Chapter 215 - 106 Assassination Plan

Gu Jianlin turned his head toward the shattered window. Sea breeze poured in from outside, and the night was as desolate as death.

He had heard some rumors about the strengths and weaknesses of the Overlord Path.

In the official records of the Ether Association, the competitiveness of the Overlord Path has never dropped out of the top five throughout history. With the addition of modern firearms, it has become utterly terrifying in recent times.

Its advantages might not be evident at the low levels.

But those ultra-high-level Overlords are rumored to be able to shoot down enemy machine gunners from 800 miles away.

Of course, what shocked him even more was the capabilities of this resurrected chubby man with small eyes.

No one could explain this heaven-defying ability.

A shattered head, yet he could revive on the spot.

"After all, I'm one of the six shareholders of the You Ying Group, quite a big name in the Dark World. Assassinations are a daily occurrence—I'm used to it. If you eventually make a name for yourself, getting targeted for assassination will be entirely normal. These days, the more advanced alchemy technology becomes, the more heaven-defying the assassins on the Overlord Path are."

Mr. Liu acted as if nothing had happened, looked at his suit, and sighed, "Such a shame about my clothes."

The two Bunny Girls seemed indifferent, walked to the corner of the room where a safe was located, skillfully entered several digits to unlock the code, and retrieved a black metal box with gold edges.

"This weapon is called the Heavenly Evil Spirit. Yes, it's named following the Ying Province style because its core was crafted from the soul of a Yingzhou Mutant. When alive, he was a murderer, so it carries heavy resentment. Not everyone can handle it, but judging by your ruthlessness, you shouldn't have a problem."

Mr. Liu stood up and smiled broadly, saying, "Consider this your reward for surviving the fighting cage. If you want to continue, feel free to use this Golden Card for another attempt."

"Have you ever heard about the Butcher? Back in the day, he also climbed his way up using this Golden Card."

He hinted meaningfully, chuckling, "If you seek the qualifications to enter the Immortal Palace and follow us in pursuit of the Candle Dragon Venerable's inheritance, you need to work harder, young man."

The Candle Dragon Venerable's inheritance.

Gu Jianlin had no idea what the strongest Ancient God might have left behind.

But as the Qilin Venerable, he appeared to be the most likely candidate to seize it!

After all, even the strongest Candle Dragon probably didn't expect the Qilin Venerable, who had been suppressed for two thousand years, would break free from the Immortal Palace in some sense and gain freedom in the outside world!

"Understood."

Gu Jianlin said calmly, "Thank you, Third Master."

Mr. Liu seemed quite satisfied, clasped his hands behind his back, and left with an air of indifference. Before leaving, he said, "Hmm. I need to change into a new outfit and host a guest for a big business negotiation. You can leave on your own later; with the Golden Card, nobody will stop you."

As he finished speaking, the two Bunny Girls swayed their hips elegantly, escorting him away.

Gu Jianlin stood in place holding the black box, watched the man's departing back, then followed him out.

The second-floor corridor was packed with bodyguards.

In the reception hall upstairs, Mr. Liu, arm in arm with the two Bunny Girls, walked ahead.

Facing him came a young man in a white suit, surrounded by an entourage. He seemed harried, his face filled with frustration, vigilance, and unease.

He carried two heavy cash boxes, gripping them so tightly his knuckles appeared slightly whitened.

"Well, isn't this Mr. Yan Hao?"

When Mr. Liu saw him, he broke into an enthusiastic smile, "Honestly, why so soon? I just encountered some trouble over here and was planning to change first before meeting you."

Yan Hao forced a smile and said, "My family's encountered some issues and urgently needs to rent a ship to set sail. My sister-in-law insisted I come here quickly to finalize the deal."

Mr. Liu expressed a look of surprise and asked with curiosity, "Really? What kind of problems has the Yan family run into? If assistance is needed, my side is always happy to help!"

Yan Hao's expression turned strange, and he waved dismissively, saying, "It's not a major issue. We just need a ship. As long as it ensures timely departure, we're prepared to meet any terms you request."

He raised the two enormous cash boxes, "There's five million inside one box, and the other is filled with gold bars, both are solid currencies in the Dark World, considered your down payment."

"Oh, that's unnecessary! Down payments are too polite!"

Mr. Liu protested verbally yet accepted both boxes without hesitation.

At the far end of the corridor, Gu Jianlin stood silently, listening to their conversation.

The Lock of Nonexistence on his wrist shimmered with silvery light, erasing his presence.

When Gu Jianlin walked out of the underground bar carrying the black box, it was already 4 a.m.

The harbor was nearly deserted. The sound of waves rose and fell in the stillness, and the black ocean stretched endlessly, with only the roaring gales tearing through the gloom of the Sky Dome, scattering faint light among the fragmented clouds above.

A few workers were unloading cargo at the port after working through the night.

Nearby, drunkards lay sprawled on the road, likely stripped of their belongings.

"Supreme."

The Scholar was waiting outside the bar with respect, saying, "You've come out."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly, glancing at him, "Where are Zhong Guoqing and his daughter?"

The Scholar lowered his voice, "They've already gone back to the shop to rest. The father and daughter are living there—I could still hear crying when I dropped by. Vulture happens to be Zhong Guoqing's elder brother. He fell into the abyss and came here to fight in illegal matches because he's nearing corruption. But I've noticed something strange."

He paused. "I suspect Vulture has been affected by spiritual toxin."

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes.

"I asked around. Although Vulture has developed tolerance against suppressive drugs and can no longer control his deformation with medication, his state yesterday during the matches hadn't deteriorated to the verge of mutation yet."

The Scholar explained, "As for Wild Dog, he fought seven matches, of which in six cases, he was inferior in raw strength but managed to drag his opponents into deformation to win. It's hard not to suspect something."

Gu Jianlin responded, "Got it."

"Additionally, I just saw someone, presumably from the Yan family, enter the Black Spade Bar, likely negotiating a deal. Should we secretly capture him, interrogate him about the Yan family's sailing schedule, and administer the soul loss secret medicine? Alternatively, you could directly infuse him with Ancient God's Blood to exert full control."

The Scholar's expression turned savage, and he gestured slicing his throat, "This Yan Hao has decent standing in the Yan family, likely possesses good talent, and has bounty-list experience in the black market. He might handle the power of Ancient God's Blood."

Gu Jianlin considered silently for a moment. It was indeed an appealing plan.

Just as well, he was eager to test the black box and uncover the secrets of the so-called ultimate alchemy weapon.

Chapter 216 - 107: First Contact

At six in the morning, Yan Hao walked out of the Black Spade Bar with a sense of relief, sweeping away his previous gloomy expression, his hands clasped behind his back, exuding a certain air of confidence and flair.

His bodyguards followed behind him, visibly relaxed, as if they could finally see tomorrow's sunrise.

Standing at the doorway, Mr. Liu smiled and said, "Mr. Yan, take care on your way! We won't escort you further since you're stepping into the Ether Association's territory soon. Frankly, we've been too lazy to stir up conflicts with them recently."

Though he wore the expression of a grinning Buddha, his actual thoughts were polar opposite: "A bunch of morons, thinking I don't know you've messed with the association? If it were just a falling-out with the association, maybe you'd still have a chance, but now you're dabbling with the Gu Masters too? Damn it, even if the association cares about the bigger picture, they'll definitely come for your lives."

Let's see how long you last!

Yan Hao maintained a polite smile and replied, "Many thanks, Third Master, your help this time has been tremendous."

Yet inwardly, he thought: "Heh, stupid fat bastard, such a small amount of money was enough to buy you off. Once we leave, you can stay behind and deal with the association's wrath, haha!"

Businessmen are always like this: smiling on the outside, swearing in their hearts.

A black Maserati was parked outside the bar, and from inside, low whispers could be heard.

"Supreme, those two are really taking their time chatting."

The Scholar glanced down at his watch. At that moment, he was seated in the driver's seat, dressed in bodyguard attire with a baseball cap casting shadows over his face, disguised as the chauffeur.

Gu Jianlin was getting impatient, his tone indifferent as he remarked, "Looking at them, you'd think they were getting a foot massage."

The Scholar gasped, shocked that the Supreme, after integrating into human society, now knew something as mundane as foot massages. He quickly flattered him, "The Supreme's foresight is truly prophetic. No doubt about it—they definitely had a foot massage."

The original driver and bodyguard had already been knocked out and stuffed into the trunk.

The Yan family wasn't entirely foolish—the driver was a Spirit Medium, and the bodyguard specialized in Ancient Martial techniques, both at Second Rank.

However, Gu Jianlin wielded the Lock of Nonexistence and the Soul Comforting Bell, along with the ability to cast Ghost Curses from afar.

Pair that with the Scholar, a Third Rank Heavenly Master, and together they had subdued the two in under half a minute.

The entire process hadn't even made much noise.

"Supreme, if you plan to use the Ancient God's Blood to control Yan Hao, then the rest of his bodyguards and attendants can all be eliminated. After all, in a Forbidden Zone, losing a few men is par for the course. In fact, anyone privy to the specifics of the Yan family's evacuation schedule must be cleaned up."

The Scholar explained, "I could even follow them undercover, blending in with the Yan family's entourage."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly.

The Scholar added, "As for Yan Hao himself, while his abilities aren't feeble, it might pose a minor challenge to subdue him in a single move. Nevertheless, in your hands, he's unlikely to cause any issues."

Gu Jianlin, seated in the front passenger seat, turned slightly to find a strand of hair on the car seat. He coiled it around his fingertip.

Activating Ghost Curse Techniques is best done using a medium.

The curse's potency increases significantly.

By now, Yan Hao and his entourage of bodyguards had approached.

One of the bodyguards opened the car door, and Yan Hao assumed the demeanor of a man in power as he seated himself inside.

The bodyguard then joined the others in heading to the vehicle behind.

"What are you dawdling for?"

Yan Hao, oblivious to the oddities around him, commanded in a stern voice, "Drive!"

Almost instantly, ethereal silver-white chains materialized, crisscrossing and hovering in the void.

—Lock of Nonexistence, unleashed!

At that moment, Gu Jianlin abruptly raised his right hand, his index finger coiled with the strand of hair.
"Die!"

Thud!

Blood gushed from Yan Hao's seven orifices, as if his skull had suffered a brutal impact, his vision plunging into darkness.

Simultaneously, the Scholar's car seat reclined swiftly, and his eyes morphed into eerie serpent-like pupils. He lunged forward, employing close combat grappling techniques to restrain Yan Hao.

In mere seconds, Yan Hao's body was tightly entwined, rendered immobile.

Although the Heavenly Master's Path wasn't ideal for assassination—be it Element Manipulation or Mind Shock Burst—it often created excessive noise and carried the risk of accidentally killing the target.

Still, the Scholar's mastery of Controllable Deformation had bolstered his physical strength, making him more than just a simple mage.

Gu Jianlin turned around, pale Ghost Fire igniting in his right hand, and pressed it onto Yan Hao's chest.

Divine Sacrificial Fire, burn!

Yan Hao let out a guttural scream of agony, yet the sound seemed to be sealed within this confined space.

At the same time, bloodshot veins emerged in Yan Hao's pupils as he tried to summon his raging Qi.

Ancient Martial Path, Second Rank!

Gu Jianlin's left hand pushed down on the black, gold-framed metal case's handle. A sharp *click* echoed!

Something within the metal case sprang into motion as its surface segments snapped apart, reorienting themselves instantly. Bone-like steel emerged, engraved with scarlet vein-like patterns, transforming into a collapsed umbrella-shaped weapon whose razor-sharp tip gleamed coldly.

An iron umbrella, embedded with grotesque, blood-red veins.

The fabled Heavenly Evil Spirit weapon turned out to be such a bizarre creation!

Surprised, Gu Jianlin flipped the umbrella and drove its tip into Yan Hao's abdomen!

Thud! Yan Hao convulsed violently, his body succumbing to the shock as the umbrella discharged a jolt of electricity through him, leaving his hair standing on end!

The Scholar, too, convulsed under the current.

Well done!

Gu Jianlin couldn't help but feel exhilarated—this was the true power of an Alchemy Weapon!

Suddenly, the car interior was filled with a rapid beeping sound.

It was Yan Hao's wristwatch—the glass shattered, releasing scorching rays of light that surged ominously, threatening to explode any second!

Gu Jianlin squinted, and without hesitation, extended his hand to grab the watch.

But just then, the rear glass window reflected a bizarre apparition.

It was a girl wearing a cat-face mask, her waist-length black hair cascading ominously, her figure resembling a spectral presence from a horror movie, phasing through the glass to approach directly!

Her figure suggested femininity—petite and graceful yet subtly voluptuous.

Ghost Slayer Path!

The Scholar's pupils contracted sharply as he attempted further deformation to break free from the electric current.

Gu Jianlin was visibly startled.

At that moment, he recalled Uncle Mu's warning.

Never become overly dependent on your profiles or Life Perception.

That advice had sunk in; even amidst potential danger in this operation, he had ancient god transformation as a fallback.

But still—how had this entity appeared out of nowhere?

Crack!

The void splintered like shards of glass, countless ghastly cracks spidering through the silence!

The nearing explosive watch similarly shattered into countless fragments, scattering everywhere.

Simultaneously, the girl began to solidify into physical form.

Except she didn't seem particularly bright—after materializing, she was stuck halfway, her upper body inside the car, lower body left dangling outside. She swayed awkwardly.

Gu Jianlin refrained from activating his ancient god transformation.

This was because her arrival seemed akin to their own!

The cat-face masked girl gripped a syringe and drove it straight in!

"When is the Yan family planning to evacuate?"

Her tone was frosty, carrying an icy, distant edge.

Yan Hao rolled his eyes, twitching uncontrollably from the shocks, his lips trembling.

"Hey."

The cat-face masked girl turned her head and said evenly, "Could you stop electrocuting him for a moment?"

Gu Jianlin remained silent, slowly withdrawing the iron umbrella.

Fortunately, Yan Hao, being on the Ancient Martial Path, was tough and durable. After enduring sacred fire and countless shocks without dying, he stammered post-injection, drooling as he muttered, "Tomorrow night, six o'clock."

Having obtained her answer, the cat-face masked girl nodded in satisfaction, then turned to the young man beside her, saying, "Thanks for your help. If I'd acted alone, I might not have been able to subdue him. By the way, let me remind you—the You Ying Group has deep waters, and not many there are good people. It's best to keep your distance."

She paused, adding, "As for Miss Lan's creation, the Heavenly Evil Spirit, do your best not to let the association's people see it."

Gu Jianlin's pupils narrowed; he immediately recognized her identity.

The Scholar, having shaken off the electric current, slumped into his seat, panting heavily as he said, "Isn't this Miss Moon Princess? It's our first meeting in the real world, right? Haha, what a coincidence!"

"Indeed, quite the coincidence. You're still as weak as ever."

Miss Moon Princess gave the young man one last look and reminded him again, "Leave this area as soon as possible. Don't linger."

Chapter 217 - 108: New Clues

After Moon Princess got the answer she wanted, she seemed to transform into a ghostly specter once again. She floated gently away from the glass window and then vanished into thin air, like a true phantom.

Before disappearing, she seemed to wave her hand.

Gu Jianlin silently watched her departure and couldn't help feeling that her tone carried a trace of familiarity.

"As expected of Miss Moon Princess."

Scholar propped up his body, stretching his numb limbs, and said with emotion.

Gu Jianlin replied indifferently, "She seems to despise you quite a bit."

Scholar didn't appear offended. He explained courteously, "It's not just me; she equally despises everyone. Back then, when we ran into her at the lower levels of the Immortal Palace, we were chased around by a horde of resurrected ancient corpses. If she hadn't been there, we would've died long ago."

"At that time, Black Cloud City was yet to be eradicated. Those skilled Ascenders were all trying to reap benefits within the Immortal Palace. Breaking into the Immortal Palace recklessly as a Holy Land Level or above easily destabilized its dimensional equilibrium. Hence, without foolproof measures, they wouldn't dare enter. At ranks like Moon Princess and Butcher, they were considered outstanding."

Scholar continued, "Back then, our mentor saw Moon Princess and was amazed, believing that having her as a bodyguard would significantly increase our survival rate. You know what kind of person our mentor is—he's very good at making promises. At that time, he persuaded her, saying that if we could find the Supreme's tomb, we might become the second Light."

Gu Jianlin raised his eyebrows upon hearing this name. "Light?"

Referring to the deceased strongest human, who supposedly served as the guide for the Night Watchers.

"Legend has it that the vice president of the Ether Association, Light, stumbled into the depths of Yun Mengze by accident, where the Bai Ze Venerable was sealed, and obtained some kind of inheritance, thus reaching his current status."

Scholar said, "That was the vision our mentor painted for us. Miss Moon Princess appeared to respect his authority on the surface, but she carried an air of cold detachment. What her true intentions for entering the Immortal Palace were, I have no idea."

Gu Jianlin asked again, "Did she ever cross paths with Gu Ci'an?"

Scholar shook his head. "No, she was the last to join the Immortal Palace, and by that time, Gu Ci'an was long gone."

Gu Jianlin found it puzzling because that girl had behaved with clear goodwill toward him.

If it were for a reason similar to Butcher's, it would make sense.

But evidently, that wasn't the case.

Gu Jianlin recalled the girl's words and actions once more.

Though her voice and tone were entirely different, they somehow gave him an intense sense of *déjà vu*.

But now was not the time to dwell on such thoughts.

In the back seat, Yan Hao was still slumped there, slightly convulsing and drooling.

"Let's go. Time to handle the important matters first."

Gu Jianlin said indifferently.

Half an hour later, a black Maserati roared away.

Gu Jianlin watched the car as it drove off, shaking the bloodied right hand he had just used.

In the last thirty minutes, he had dealt with all the remaining bodyguards of the Yan family. Along the way, he tracked down a few runaway Fallen affected by deformity using Life Perception and sent them on their way.

Finally, he successfully condensed a droplet of Ancient God's Blood and injected it into Yan Hao's body.

The transformation effect was less than ideal but managed to control him for two to three days.

Beyond that timeframe, he would likely perish.

Still, for now, it was sufficient.

Gu Jianlin took a deep breath, his spirituality almost entirely depleted.

Yet with each Breath, he could hear the ebb and flow of tides resounding in his mind.

His spirituality began to recover.

Gu Jianlin paused for a moment and suddenly retrieved his phone, opened WeChat, and sent a message.

"What are you up to?"

He waited silently for a few minutes until a response came.

Su Youzhu: "In class, just dozed off. What's up? Are you coming back to school?"

Gu Jianlin improvised an excuse: "Mom asked what I was doing. She's suspecting I skipped school again. Can you send me a picture of the teacher teaching as proof?"

A moment later, Su Youzhu promptly sent a photo. It featured Mr. Wang passionately lecturing on English in front of the class.

Her fair, delicate hand with light pink nail art was visible in the frame as well.

Gu Jianlin paused for a second and still felt slightly uneasy.

He sent another message: "Can you do a video call?"

Su Youzhu: "What's wrong with you?"

Without hesitation, the girl initiated the video call.

She appeared with short pale green hair, supporting her cheek with her hand, sitting in the far corner of the classroom. Her refined, porcelain-like face was almost translucent in the sunlight streaming through the window, with an indifferent expression. In a soft voice, she muttered, "Wait, could this be my dad calling you, wanting checks on me or something?"

Gu Jianlin finally relaxed. "Nothing much. Just missed you, that's all."

Su Youzhu visibly froze, blinking her crystal-clear eyes.

Gu Jianlin calmly added, "I have some business to take care of. I'll end the call now."

Knock, knock.

After hanging up, Gu Jianlin grabbed a black crate and stood by the roadside, inhaling deeply.

He had told countless lies in his life, but this time, it made him feel slightly flushed and uneasy.

"Looks like I was overthinking."

Gu Jianlin murmured with a faint sigh.

To cover his true objective, he was even capable of saying words like that now.

"My moral bottom line is slipping lower and lower."

Gu Jianlin whispered, "I should head back to the shop and get prepared."

Just as he turned around, he spotted a group of people approaching from across the street's apartment building.

"Where on earth has he hidden himself?"

"No clue. Keep searching; otherwise, we can't answer to Nightmare Master."

"Based on logic, since he's infected with Corpse Soul Gu, he's practically as good as dead. Why keep looking? If you ask me, Nightmare Master is overly cautious."

"You don't understand. Alive, we need the person; dead, we need the corpse. My guess is someone saved him. Take his photo and ask around the Forbidden Zone to see if he has any acquaintances there."

"The Blood Sacrifice is fast approaching. There's no room for error."

Having said that, the group swiftly departed.

Gu Jianlin caught three crucial terms.

Nightmare Master!

Corpse Soul Gu!

Blood Sacrifice!

Gu Jianlin made a motion to follow them, hoping to capture and interrogate one of the group, but he suddenly sensed the dense, pulsating Life Rhythm emanating from them, like the overwhelming chittering of myriad insects, enough to make his skin crawl.

"No, this Gu Master is exceedingly cautious. The Joker and Li Changzhi incidents were mere bait to test my strengths, aiming to uncover whether I possess the relics my father left behind, like the Qilin Wedge! As for Lin Yuan, it's clear he played his hidden cards."

Gu Jianlin restrained himself: "I can't startle them prematurely."

At that moment, he heard a thud.

A blood-soaked figure fell from the second floor, landing in a trash bin.

Gu Jianlin moved closer to find the injured person was none other than the young boy he'd met multiple times before!

Chapter 218 - 109: The Mastermind Behind the Scenes

Deep Space Technology Building.

Chen Bojun sipped his goji-infused tea, his expression solemn: "Zijin, are you certain it's him? Is he truly still alive? If he really is a Nightmare Master, then he must be at least Superdimensional Level by now."

Lu Zijin stood with her back to him, staring out the window coldly: "When we surrounded the Joker back then, there was already a Gu Master who could use Death Spirit Gu showing up. I sensed something was off, dug around everywhere but found nothing. Xiao Gu also mentioned seeing large amounts of Gu Worms in the undersea underground palace. I started having suspicions then."

"When Zicheng went to capture the criminal, a mysterious man gave him key evidence. After identification, it was confirmed that it was the shed skin of a Parasitic Gu. The Gu Master inheritance path is rare to begin with, and we never found his corpse back then. This can only lead to one conclusion—he's still alive."

She paused: "I've been handling this case all along, and even requested assistance from the Nightwatch Department. But you know what? Six months ago, three Nightwatch agents who conducted an in-depth investigation disappeared entirely."

Chen Bojun narrowed his eyes and said in a deep voice: "If he really is a Nightmare Master, then this makes sense. When the position of the Qilin Immortal Palace was first surveyed, he was part of the exploration team. This explains why he's targeting Gu Ci'an's son. A few days ago, outside the Immortal Palace, he was the one attempting a Blood Sacrifice."

Suddenly, this Holy Land Level Ascender's expression shifted drastically.

"Wait, could he be trying to create a Blood Demon Gu?"

He exclaimed, "At first, I thought he wanted to make an offering to whatever is inside the Immortal Palace!"

Lu Zijin replied darkly: "This man attempted to ascend years ago, and the only reason he survived was likely pure luck; he must've stumbled upon the Immortal Palace by accident and encountered whatever resides inside. Since then, he betrayed humanity and became a Divine Servant."

"Over the years, he's solidified his power. His current ambition may no longer be ascension but rather causing large-scale disaster using the Blood Demon Gu. We must stop him; otherwise, the consequences will be unimaginable."

Her tone grew heavy: "As for Lin Yuan's case, we've already interrogated him and secured the key evidence. Issue the command for battle now. It's clear we don't have much time left."

Conversations between big players are always tacitly understood.

As soon as Blood Demon Gu was mentioned, they realized a Blood Sacrifice was looming in Peak City.

"That explains why the Yan family was targeted."

Chen Bojun's eyes turned icy: "A Nightmare Master requires a catalyst to refine a Blood Demon Gu!"

Lu Zijin turned around and looked at him expressionlessly: "Give the order."

Chen Bojun hesitated for a moment: "What about Zicheng?"

Lu Zijin sighed lightly: "Let him go. If we stop him again, he won't forgive me for the rest of his life. It would be worse than death."

Chen Bojun took a deep breath, pulled out his phone, and issued the command.

"Dawn Combat Sequence, Omega Combat Sequence, mobilize!"

Gu Jianlin glanced at the second floor.

Luckily, he landed in a trash bin; otherwise, falling from this height might have left him with a concussion.

A small boy was upside down in the trash bin, his clothes shredded apart, bruises and bloody wounds all over his body. His little face was plastered with dried nose blood, leaving him barely breathing.

Gu Jianlin instinctively raised his right hand, igniting the Divine Sacrificial Fire with the little remaining spirituality he had left.

Then he suddenly remembered that the Divine inheritance path's healing ability only worked on himself, not others.

He had no choice but to grab the kid's leg and pull him out of the trash heap.

With a thud.

A wrinkled, tightly-clenched red banknote fell out.

"Who beat you up again? Or did you steal someone's money?"

Gu Jianlin grabbed the boy by the collar and dragged him forward, speaking flatly: "Don't pretend to be dead. I know you're still conscious. My inheritance path is Divine; you can fool anyone but me."

The little boy's blood-stained face twitched slightly. He bit his lip and remained silent.

Yet as he was being dragged away, he reached out and grabbed the fallen one hundred yuan.

Gu Jianlin glanced down at the boy and furrowed his brow.

The boy's spiritual state was untainted, meaning he was completely normal inside and out—unless he'd committed some heinous crime, leading the association to hunt him. Otherwise, there was no reason for him to end up like this.

That said, what kind of crime could a little kid possibly commit?

Even in the worst case scenario, if he truly were guilty, the Ascender Alliance Treaty never handed out capital punishment, let alone lifelong imprisonment, for minors.

These were facts Gu Jianlin could easily confirm using his phone.

Although the Ether Association certainly had its dark sides, and the Judgement Court's methods were nauseating, they weren't entirely reckless—they stood as guardians of order.

At least they upheld order on the surface.

For example, while Gu Ci'an had been defined as a Fallen guilty of severe crimes, neither his son nor ex-wife were implicated beyond secret investigations. Nothing actually tied them down.

Except for the initial visit from Li Changzhi.

But Gu Jianlin knew one thing clearly—there had been a mysterious figure protecting him all along.

"Your name."

Gu Jianlin abruptly said: "If you don't tell me, I'll toss you into the sea."

The little boy coughed up a mouthful of bloody foam, stubbornly replying: "You wouldn't do that."

But after a brief pause, he suddenly said: "Fu Chaoyang."

Gu Jianlin cast him a glance: "Who beat you up?"

Fu Chaoyang coughed twice weakly: "Someone tried to rob me this morning."

Gu Jianlin raised a brow: "Were you just hiding from the group that just left?"

At this moment, Fu Chaoyang didn't reply, but his body tensed up completely, giving away the answer.

Gu Jianlin asked calmly, "Where do you live?"

Fu Chaoyang still held out stubbornly and refused to answer.

Gu Jianlin ran out of patience and said coldly: "There should be a Magician in the Black Spade Bar. I could find someone to hypnotize you. You know I won the Beast Fighting matches yesterday and got my hands on a Golden Card."

Fu Chaoyang's tensed body remained taut as he murmured weakly: "Exit this alley and you'll find a factory dormitory near the port. It's the room furthest inside on the top floor—here's the key..."

He fumbled in his pocket, pulling out a wad of tissues and advertisement cards. Among them was a key.

Gu Jianlin took the key, dragged the boy along, and followed the route he described to find a dilapidated dormitory building, climbing rusty iron stairs all the way to the top floor.

Passing through the corridor, he suddenly pried loose a piece of broken rubble and found another key hidden inside.

"The door has two locks and requires two keys."

Fu Chaoyang said.

Gu Jianlin stared at him briefly, surprised at the kid's caution.

At the corridor's deepest point, he found two locked rooms and used both keys to unlock them.

He pushed the door open, revealing a run-down interior. A mattress occupied most of the space, though its bedding was relatively tidy. Aside from an old wardrobe, an oil-stained stovetop in the kitchen, and a squat toilet in the bathroom, there were no other appliances—the electricity was even turned off.

After a quick inspection, Gu Jianlin noticed faint overlapping handprints on the wall.

"You live here?"

He asked flatly.

Fu Chaoyang replied, "Yes."

Without another word, Gu Jianlin walked toward the wall with handprints.

Fu Chaoyang's facial expression abruptly shifted as he struggled fiercely.

The kid was too battered to have any strength left, of course.

Even if he hadn't been beaten up, he wouldn't have been able to escape a teenager's grasp.

Gu Jianlin threw him onto the bed and pushed open part of the wall.

A dull grinding sound echoed as a hidden door in the stone wall slid backward, revealing a secret room.

The chamber had functional electricity and lit-up bulbs; a fan spun lazily, making the air less stifling. There was a desk paired with a bookshelf—countless files piled on the ground. Guns, ammo, daggers, and Miao Blades hung on the walls as cold weapons.

On the wall, a map of Peak City was displayed, covered with red lines, most of which marked areas out at sea.

On a bed lay a middle-aged man whose face was drenched in cold sweat, as though trapped in a nightmare.

His body was convulsing, seemingly in great fear.

"Who's this?"

Gu Jianlin asked coldly: "You have only one chance."

On the second bed, the barely-conscious Fu Chaoyang weakly replied, "My foster father."

That made everything clear.

Gu Jianlin understood; everything made sense now.

He stepped forward, glancing at the scattered files and noticing a particular draft paper catching his eye.

"August 7th, I realized the Gu affecting me is Soul Loss Gu. Although the boss warned us beforehand that the target's true identity was highly likely to be a Nightmare Master, so we took resistance medicine early, we still underestimated the Gu Poison's potency. My brain is already starting to malfunction; everything's becoming blurry..."

"I don't know what to do. I barely escaped from the Immortal Palace's outskirts and my first instinct was to contact my superiors. But for some reason, no response has come even after a whole day."

"Could it be my superiors were compromised too? I can't reach my comrades either; how could such a scenario happen in the Nightwatch Department? Everyone is Sixth Rank—it's impossible for them to just silently perish unless there's a traitor! For the sake of this covert operation, my identity in the real world has been wiped out. I can't trust anyone now—I have to hide in the Forbidden Zone."

"Right, Mu Feng. Mu Feng should still be hiding in Peak City—I suddenly know why he lost his memory! Soul Loss Gu, he must've been afflicted by Soul Loss Gu back then too! The mastermind is this Nightmare Master!"

"I must hold on; I have to find Mu Feng. Old Gu must be connected to him—they're the only ones I can trust..."

Chapter 219 - 110: The Wind Rises

Gu Jianlin's right hand couldn't help but tremble when he saw this.

Night Watcher!

The man lying on the bed was actually a Night Watcher—a comrade of Old Gu and Uncle Mu!

He never expected to accidentally stumble upon clues about Uncle Mu's amnesia during this mission.

Soul Loss Gu!

Gu Jianlin silently clenched the file in his hand.

Although he still hadn't found any evidence to exonerate his father, he'd at least found something related to Uncle Mu.

Suddenly, with a loud thud, Fu Chaoyang fell off the bed outside the room. He scrambled into the room, grabbed an alchemy pistol from the wall, and aimed it at Gu Jianlin, like a cornered young beast.

It was clear that, as the adopted son of a Night Watcher, this child had received a certain amount of training.

For instance, anti-surveillance techniques or marksmanship.

All of which must have been taught by the man on the bed.

Gu Jianlin glanced at him and fell silent for a moment.

Because he seemed to see a reflection of his younger self.

"Ether Association, Grade D Investigator, Gu Jianlin."

He pulled out his phone and logged into the Deep Space Network. "The 'Old Gu' mentioned in your foster father's documents is my father. My father and your foster father were colleagues. I won't harm you—if I intended to, you'd already be dead by now."

At these words, Fu Chaoyang's hands trembled as he gripped the gun, his face stricken. He exclaimed, "The Chair Killer?"

Gu Jianlin nearly spat out a mouthful of blood.

How the hell did even this brat know about that ridiculous nickname!

Fu Chaoyang lowered the alchemy pistol. The wariness in his eyes diminished slightly as he stiffly said, "In the West Port Forbidden Zone, many people have heard of you. A child of a Fallen who committed heinous crimes, yet still chose to join the Association. There have been others like you before, but after joining the Association, they either kept their heads down or couldn't cope with the ostracism."

Gu Jianlin pinched his forehead. "Is that so?"

In truth, there were reasons why he was ostracized within the Ether Association.

First, Old Gu had faced the Ancient Gods in direct combat—a rare feat. The likelihood of someone like him being accidentally contaminated was exceptionally low. In most cases, those contaminated succumbed to the lure of power and fell willingly into corruption.

This fact was well-documented, backed by countless examples throughout history, leaving little room for doubt.

Second, Old Gu was deemed the mastermind of the Blood Moon Slaughter Incident, accused of massacring countless comrades.

Finally, it was suspected that he had left some dangerous artifact to his son.

The combination of these three factors made Gu Jianlin an extreme outlier in the Ether Association.

Other families of the Fallen couldn't hope to attract the same level of attention.

Fu Chaoyang murmured, "You're one of the few who dared to challenge both the Association and the Judgement Court directly. I heard that those who bullied you were all killed with a chair—captains and even deputy captains weren't spared from your 'demonic chair'."

Expressionless, Gu Jianlin replied, "Let's change the subject. What's your foster father's name?"

This time, Fu Chaoyang honestly answered, "Fu Qingxuan."

Gu Jianlin pressed further, "You say he's your foster father. What about your biological parents?"

Fu Chaoyang coldly replied, "I don't have biological parents."

Gu Jianlin stared at him without speaking.

After meeting his gaze for a moment, Fu Chaoyang finally broke and said, "My father was a Gray Ascender who committed serious crimes and was hunted by the Association—a complete scumbag. My mother was an Unclean who needed money to retire in Southeast Asia. When I awakened accidentally at the age of eight, they sold me to West Port. Someone there bought me, planning to have me mine in Black Cloud City after I grew older and chose an Inheritance Path."

He stiffened his face and said coldly, "But I escaped and was taken in by my foster father. However, a few years later, after one of his missions, he came back in this state."

Gu Jianlin glanced around and understood.

Initially, this kid could have just left on his own.

But he stayed to protect the man lying on the bed, enduring bitter hardship all by himself.

The trash can in the room was filled with empty medicine vials.

It seemed they were used to prolong the man's life.

This child, Fu Chaoyang, was very resourceful. Survival alone wouldn't have been an issue for him.

But needing the funds to buy medicine—that was another matter entirely.

Yesterday's attempt to appraise treasures was probably born out of sheer desperation.

"So you've been wanting to ask me for help for a while now? You just didn't trust me," Gu Jianlin remarked. "Then why appear in front of me in the end?"

Earlier, this kid clearly hadn't been so weak as to fall from the upper floor.

That was an act to elicit sympathy.

A sly little schemer.

"Because you're a good person," Fu Chaoyang said in a low voice. "You're different from them."

Gu Jianlin glanced around the room, noting traces left behind. He even picked up a notebook and leafed through it casually. Amid simple arithmetic exercises, there was a scribbled line: "Zhang Tao will love Wang Xiaohui forever." He smirked, "So your name used to be Zhang Tao, huh."

At the age of puppy love, a person's affections often manifest in naïve, clumsy ways.

For instance, scrawling the name of someone they like in a notebook.

Perhaps it felt like an action in itself—a claim of sorts.

"..."

If Fu Chaoyang weren't covered in blood, his face would surely be bright red at this moment.

His toes seemed ready to dig a three-bedroom apartment complex into the floor from embarrassment.

Gu Jianlin even noticed two crookedly carved characters on the wooden desk.

—"Persist."

The handwriting was ugly, but the carving was deep and resolute.

Gu Jianlin could almost picture the child gritting his teeth, tears streaming, as he carved those words into the wood.

"Why don't you just escape by yourself?"

He suddenly asked.

Fu Chaoyang replied firmly, "I don't want to become like my biological parents."

In the eyes of this once-abandoned child, there was nothing but defiance.

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly. "I understand now."

Fu Chaoyang looked at him and warned, "After my foster father came back that time, he kept mumbling incoherently, but he always reminded me of something—Blood Sacrifice. He told me that if he ever forgot, I had to remember it and find a way to tell someone trustworthy."

He added, "My father needs medicine. Can you...?"

Gu Jianlin hesitated for a moment. "I understand."

This was a matter of grave importance. He needed to report it to the Association immediately.

But just then, the Deep Space Network disconnected automatically.

Frowning, he tried calling someone, but the signal was gone!

Gu Jianlin realized this was no coincidence; someone had deliberately severed communications here.

"It's starting," he muttered.

Seeing his expression, Fu Chaoyang asked nervously, "What's wrong?"

Gu Jianlin thought for a moment. "If I'm right, this place will be under attack soon. Don't worry, the Association isn't stupid—they'll realize something's wrong here. Stay put and don't go anywhere. As long as you make it through the next two days, you and your foster father will be safe."

He briefly checked the man's Life Rhythm on the bed.

Though weak, it was stable—at least five or six days of survival would be possible.

"Where are you going?" Fu Chaoyang pressed weakly.

"None of your concern," Gu Jianlin replied coolly, walking out. "Take care of your foster father. He's taken care of you all this time. Now that he's down, it's your turn to look after him. Think you can do that?"

Fu Chaoyang said nothing, but the determined gaze he shot back was all too familiar to Gu Jianlin.

Exiting the room, Gu Jianlin shut the two heavy Stone Gate doors behind him and stood in the corridor.

He gazed at the churning sea in the distance.

After a pensive pause, he tried dialing again.

This time, he called Jing Ci.

No signal, still.

Leaving these two here felt unsafe.

Gu Jianlin's thoughts turned to the mysterious man who had kept covertly protecting him.

The incident at the overpass, the cafeteria at Peak City's Second High, even Black Cloud City.

That person had always been there.

Though he had no clue how the man avoided detection.

He assumed this person must be nearby now.

"Hey, could you do me a favor?"

Gu Jianlin suddenly tilted his head to the sky and said, "Watch over that father and son for me. They're witnesses and possess critical information. I don't want anything bad to happen to them."

No response came.

Gu Jianlin waited silently for ten minutes, nearly giving up before—

Clink.

A coin suddenly dropped to the ground, clattering as it rolled downstairs.

Gu Jianlin eyed the coin and smiled wordlessly.

"I don't know who you are, but I suspect you had a good relationship with my father," he said softly.

"Thank you."

With that, he descended the metal staircase, vanishing into the shadows below.

On the rooftop terrace above, a figure silently watched his departure, unspoken and unseen.

Rumble.

Dark clouds churned across the heavens.

In April, the sea winds around the island were relentless, and the deafening roar of the tide threatened to engulf everything.

Amid the roaring tide, sunlight was devoured by the dense grey clouds.

Violent gusts swept through the coastal villa district, scattering sand and leaves in a chaotic storm, sending debris soaring into the sky.

Mrs. Yan sat curled on the sofa, clutching the hem of her skirt in silence, trembling.

Beside her, Yan Wu's chest heaved furiously, hinting he had just unleashed his rage.

His bloodshot eyes gleamed with unbridled fury, and his trembling arms clenched in restraint, his knuckles whitening.

"Made up your mind yet?"

A pale-faced middle-aged man sat across from them, casually holding a steaming cup of coffee. "You're aware that Lin Yuan has been captured and has already confessed. Your attempt to assassinate an Omega Sequence won't be tolerated by the Ether Association—or, rather, the real world itself."

"Do you really think renting a boat from the You Ying Group is enough to save your lives?"

He chuckled. "No, the only person who can save you now is me."

Slap!

Yan Wu, ever the tyrant, struck his wife hard across the face, knocking her back onto the sofa.

Like an enraged bull barely containing its anger.

This time, Mrs. Yan said nothing. Clutching her swollen cheek, she collapsed onto the sofa. Her free hand's fingers dug furiously into the leather, her face distorted.

"My name, perhaps you've heard it before—my codename is... Nightmare Master."

With a smile, Nightmare Master said, "Help me complete this Blood Sacrifice ritual, and you can escape Peak City alive. I also understand you've lost your son. This will be an opportunity for vengeance—doesn't that sound like killing two birds with one stone? Or perhaps, three."

He grinned, "I could even share secrets of the Qilin Immortal Palace with you. From the first time its location was pinpointed eight years ago, to its subsequent excavations, to the Blood Moon Slaughter Incident—aren't you curious about the truth behind it all?"

"—Think it over; time is running out."

Rumble.

Thunder roared.

In the distant sky, countless black shadows dashed out from the clouds like frigid hawks.

No, they weren't hawks.

They were helicopters.

The Dawn Combat Sequence's helicopters!

Chapter 220 - 111 The First Lesson

Gu Jianlin was returning to the shop when he saw a group of men in black cursing loudly as they exited. From a distance, he could see they were carrying steel rods, machetes, and even a shotgun.

Three stowaways stood at the shop entrance, watching with expressions full of fear.

Gu Jianlin ignored them and directly walked into the store to take a look.

The goods in the shop were intact, but other everyday items had been smashed into pieces. The ground was covered in broken glass, shattered fans, and torn electrical wires.

On a wrecked recliner, Zhong Guoqing sat with his head hung low. His hair had gone noticeably grayer overnight. His clothes bore muddy footprints, and his collar was stained with blood from his nose.

"Xiao... Xiao Gu."

Zhong Li was squatting on the floor, cleaning up her father's nosebleed. Keeping her head down, she softly said, "You're back."

Gu Jianlin asked indifferently, "What happened here?"

"Nothing, nothing, just a little conflict with some people."

Zhong Guoqing raised his head, wiped his nose, and forced a laugh filled with bitterness and spite. His expression was pitiful yet fierce—so ugly it provoked discomfort. "Keep working. The store's business can't be delayed, lest we draw blame from above."

He got up, took a broom and dustpan, and began to clean up the debris, not uttering a word about the unprovoked trouble.

"Xiao Gu, here's your pay for yesterday, plus a fifty-yuan bonus."

Zhong Li wiped her tears before retrieving 350 yuan from the shop and placing it in his palm. "I heard you didn't take that ten thousand yuan yesterday... Thank you. Really, thank you."

Gu Jianlin said nothing. He could sense that the attitude of this father and daughter toward him had shifted significantly.

The arrogance Zhong Guoqing had displayed as a shopkeeper was gone, and Zhong Li's demeanor had become cautious.

The reason? Likely that Golden Card.

Here, everyone fighting in underground matches aimed to win their way into the finals and claim the Golden Card.

Alternatively, they had to walk out of the fighting cage alive, defeating a Fallen.

Yesterday, when Gu Jianlin killed Vulture, it wasn't for money but to end his suffering quickly, to free him.

The ten thousand yuan was merely an added perk.

For those living in the Forbidden Zone, this sum was opulent, though for anyone who landed a decent job, ten thousand yuan could amount to just a month's salary.

Clearly, to Zhong Guoqing and Zhong Li, family meant far more than money.

"What happened earlier?"

Gu Jianlin noticed Zhong Li's hesitancy to speak, her reluctance evident in her expression. His voice turned cold. "Tell me."

She shook her head, biting her lip and saying nothing, then turned and ran off.

Even Zhong Guoqing disappeared into the warehouse, broom in hand, smoking quietly.

Left with no choice, Gu Jianlin turned to the three stowaways and placed a hundred yuan on the table.

"What happened?"

One stowaway, quick and alert, snatched the money immediately. "Boss Zhang's men just came by because Vulture lost his fight, costing Boss Zhang a fortune. All those resources spent on training Vulture were wasted. The shopkeeper and his daughter had reserved spots through Boss Zhang to leave here on a human-snake ship bound for Southeast Asia."

"Now, those spots are gone. Boss Zhang said they have to stay behind and keep working."

He added, "Until they pay off the debt."

Gu Jianlin said calmly, "That's it?"

"Yep. Boss Zhang manages port trade, and if you want to leave this place, you have to go through him."

The stowaway explained.

Gu Jianlin understood and replied evenly, "I thought he'd come looking for me instead."

The stowaway quickly smiled obsequiously. "It's not the same for you. You've probably got a Golden Card already, right? That means you're under Mr. Liu's protection. Mr. Liu has strict rules—Boss Zhang wouldn't dare use those means to coerce you into working for him. Unless you voluntarily seek him out as your ally."

Gu Jianlin considered this. "I see."

As luck would have it, Boss Zhang happened to be the one overseeing port trade.

The stowaway continued, "Boss Zhang just stepped away. He's given them five hours to come up with the money. If they can't, then the only choice will be to sell themselves into labor for him."

Gu Jianlin gave a subtle nod to indicate his understanding.

Such were the ways of social relationships in the Forbidden Zone. Just yesterday, he had been an unremarkable novice worker.

But the moment he got his hands on a Golden Card, everyone greeted him with smiling faces.

And yet, Gu Jianlin could see beneath the surface of every smile—the emotions concealed deep below.

Zhong Guoqing and Zhong Li's smiles hid sadness and humiliation.

Meanwhile, the three stowaways wore ingratiating yet sly smiles, masking deceit and treachery.

Five hours. Fine, let's wait it out.

Might as well use this chance to get closer to Boss Zhang and wait for the Yan Family to show up.

Gu Jianlin stood behind the counter, patiently waiting for customers.

Suddenly, a shifty figure sneaked a glance at him before darting away.

Minutes later, an overwhelming crowd of people flocked to the shop for treasure appraisal.

At the shop, there were five counters in total. With Scholar absent, only four counters remained.

Yet not a single customer ventured to the counters of the three stowaways.

Instead, everyone clustered around Gu Jianlin.

"Please, help me. My daughter is sick and can't hold on much longer."

"My wife is in labor, but I don't have hospital money."

"I want to get my father out of here, but I'm short five thousand yuan. Could you help me?"

Desperation or flattery, anguish or resentment, sincerity or pretense.

Faced with the crowd, Gu Jianlin was momentarily overwhelmed.

It felt like those historical dramas where a wealthy son visits the slums, and a swarm of scruffy beggars rush up with bowls, pleading for charity.

Gu Jianlin understood now.

Word must have spread, likely thanks to yesterday's attacker at the dormitory, about there being a soft-hearted "good guy" in the Treasure Appraisal Shop. Now, every needy person in the area had come flooding in.

Those eyes—they all craved that the young man in front of them would appraise treasures for them.

And afterward, hand them the money.

Right then, Zhong Guoqing and Zhong Li burst out with shotguns, shouting, "Get out! All of you, get out! You shameless bastards, huh? Are you trying to kill Xiao Gu by making him appraise treasures over and over?"

Perhaps this father and daughter duo could only stand tall at such moments.

Because they had to protect the shop's people.

The treasure-seekers recoiled at the sight of the gun barrels and left, albeit reluctantly.

One person spat toward the store before walking away.

"Don't worry, Xiao Gu. Those people won't dare return. Over the next couple days, if necessary, you can stay here at the shop. We've got guns—it's safer. You take my bed; I'll sleep on the floor."

Zhong Guoqing glared viciously at the departing crowd. "Those damn dogs."

The older man turned out to be more resilient than Gu Jianlin had imagined.

Despite losing his brother yesterday and having his hope of escape snatched away today.

Surprisingly, he had already begun bouncing back.

This was the tragedy of adulthood.

No matter what you face, you have to hold it together.

And you must hold it together.

Because behind you, there were no more people to lean on.

Zhong Li set a shotgun on the desk, forcing a smile. "The gun's here—be careful with it."

Gu Jianlin felt inexplicably agitated, his breathing turning heavier. In his mind, the waves of spirituality surged and roared, resonating loudly like a rumble of thunder.

Then suddenly, the world quieted down.

The roaring tide stopped abruptly, and the howling sea winds vanished without a trace.

The entire world seemed to rapidly recede, the noisy chaos of humanity drowned in silence and disappearing completely.

Someone pushed a wheelchair to the shop's entrance.

"The first lesson is over."

Jing Ci appeared in the doorway at an indeterminate moment, still impeccably dressed in a suit. His demeanor remained classical and refined. "This lesson is called human nature. I believe after these past two days, you've gained a thorough understanding of it."

The old man in the wheelchair appeared drowsy, his breathing steady and deep.

Gu Jianlin said nothing.

"Originally, the teacher and I were debating how to get you into the Forbidden Zone, but it turns out you came here on your own accord. Saves us the trouble. Since you're here, let's discuss your feelings."

Jing Ci gazed toward the sky. "The second lesson will begin shortly."