

Ancient 231

Chapter 231 - 117 Provoking the Candle Dragon Venerable

Within the dimension tunnel, the Netherworld's Death Country spread like a mist in the dark, accompanied by terrifying flashes of lightning, roaring scarlet blood rain, and a sky on the verge of collapse.

The peerless Candle Dragon Venerable hovered silently in the boundless chaos.

She was just one step away from tearing through the dimension tunnel to reach the depths of the Qilin Immortal Palace to uncover its secrets.

After all, there was still a ward she had left behind in the Qilin Immortal Palace two thousand years ago.

With her authority, she could use it as an anchor point to pinpoint her target's location.

And thus open the gates of time and space.

But unexpectedly, in an instant, the Qilin vanished strangely from her perception.

"How is that possible?"

She murmured softly, "What you used just now was unexpectedly modern Chinese."

Her enchanting blood-red vertical pupils stared silently into the endless darkness, devoid of emotion.

"I underestimated you. You are indeed not so easily killed. Now I'm a bit curious about what you've been doing for these past two thousand years... Moreover, it seems you're no longer as madly violent as you were back in the day."

Suddenly, she smiled faintly, her smile was as devastatingly beautiful as the Goddess in myth yet faintly exuded an icy and solemn killing intent: "But regardless, you can't escape."

The Candle Dragon Venerable raised a single jade-like finger, a bead of blood coagulating on her blood-red nail.

That bead transformed into crisscrossing streaks of blood light, forcibly tearing apart the space that was about to mend.

The rumbling sounded like the collapse of heaven and earth.

Yet the stunningly beautiful woman in red stood resolute, the smile on her crimson lips growing deeper and more chilling.

"I'll wait for you here, Qilin."

In the silence, faint song-like humming arose.

Like the drifting melody of wind chimes.

The gods were singing in the darkness.

Thud.

Gu Jianlin fell heavily onto the cabin floor, leaning against the wall, his head tilted back, staring up at the sky, gasping for breath.

The cold wind and rain smacked randomly against his face as he struggled to rein in his emotions and force himself to calm down.

His mind was, in reality, completely blank at the moment.

To describe his recent experience, there were only two words.

Holy shit.

That was the Candle Dragon Venerable, an Ancient Supreme who descended to Earth in the Ancient Times, the most powerful being of the Ancient God Clan, who had slaughtered countless lives across the ages to ascend to the ultimate throne.

Even the first-generation Qilin Venerable couldn't escape her ruthless suppression.

Let alone himself, a mere second-generation successor who had just inherited the position.

Earlier, the Candle Dragon Venerable unquestionably harbored murderous intent, even using some unknown method to forcibly transcend time and space. The overwhelming ancient barbaric killing intent she exuded was so profound and imposing that it utterly extinguished any will to fight.

Gu Jianlin merely felt the pressure, and his soul quivered with fear.

He couldn't breathe; his heart felt as though it might burst.

In that moment, Gu Jianlin felt he was carrying burdens beyond his age.

Perhaps, he could empathize with the Scholar's feelings now.

That was a Supreme.

A living Supreme. Though uncertain in what state, she retained most of her power at least.

And she could still speak modern Chinese—who knows how many years she had stayed in the human world.

Although the Candle Dragon Venerable possessed breathtaking beauty, her incomparably exquisite visage was like the sun illuminating the night. Even a fleeting glance would sear her image into one's memory for eternity.

No words could capture her beauty.

Even the portrait in the grocery store only managed to convey a fraction of her divine charm.

Still, the more beautiful the woman, the greater the danger.

Gu Jianlin believed that on Earth, or even across the Milky Way, there wouldn't be anyone more beautiful than her.

Similarly, there wouldn't be anyone more dangerous.

"Fortunately, I broke free of her grip in advance; otherwise, I'd truly have been done for today."

Gu Jianlin relaxed upon this thought.

Judging by the current circumstances, as long as he left the Qilin Immortal Palace, he wouldn't face any threats.

Based on his speculation, there'd never been a case like his in history—someone inheriting the powers of an Ancient God while retaining a human identity and becoming an ultimate anomaly.

He could be both human and Ancient God.

Switching between the two at will, reaping benefits from both sides without any downside.

He possessed the authority to use the Ancient Divine Language and could freely learn breathing techniques. It was ridiculously absurd.

The only lamentable part was that he didn't inherit the full strength of the first Qilin Venerable at her peak and needed to level up again.

"I've heard of adaptive citizenship, but adaptive species? That's a first."

Gu Jianlin rubbed his forehead, trying to relax.

Yet, upon reflection, a bitter laugh escaped him.

First, there was the Gu Family curse, with a Primordial Ancestor from the Vermilion Bird Clan waiting for him in the future.

That issue remained unresolved, and now he'd provoked the Candle Dragon Clan.

And it wasn't just any member—it was their strongest Supreme.

Gu Jianlin took a deep breath, grabbed the black umbrella, and stood amidst the corpses scattered across the ground. Wiping his face with the rainwater, his vacant eyes regained the aloofness of days past.

Ultimately, he bore everything alone.

No matter—it didn't matter anymore.

When one's mental state completely collapses, it reaches a point of apathetic resignation.

"The Candle Dragon Venerable wants to enter the Qilin Immortal Palace to kill me. I wonder if she can ever go back afterward."

After a brief hesitation, Gu Jianlin decided to test his luck: "Let's experiment and see if she's gone."

He closed his eyes and began visualizing the Floating Qilin Island in his mind.

The world shattered instantly, and scarlet light poured out from endless rifts, spreading like a tide.

Gu Jianlin began to undergo Ancient God Transformation, the pitch-black Qilin Mask enveloping his face.

Bathing in the Ancient God's Breath, he commenced Qilinization.

Yet, in the darkness, a pair of enchanting and terrifying blood-red vertical pupils suddenly lit up, gazing down at him with cruel, mocking amusement as ethereal singing echoed faintly.

Hiss!

Gu Jianlin hurriedly halted his visualization, his mind echoing with a roaring hum, his face pale to the extreme.

The Qilinization state quickly receded, as if it had never appeared.

She hadn't left—she was still outside the Qilin Immortal Palace.

Waiting.

No, more accurately guarding the tomb, waiting for the Qilin!

"But it seems... she genuinely can't do much to me?"

Gu Jianlin hesitated for a second, then decided to tempt fate once more, beginning to visualize the Floating Qilin Island again.

With a thunderous crash, the scarlet light from the dimension rifts poured forth once more, and the blood-red vertical pupils reappeared in the darkness.

Gu Jianlin underwent Ancient God Transformation again, forcing himself to meet her gaze for one second before halting his visualization.

Again, he visualized, and again those blood-red vertical pupils shimmered in the darkness.

Gu Jianlin immediately ceased visualization, leaning against the wall and panting heavily.

The optimistic takeaway was that despite numerous attempts to push his luck, he remained unharmed.

This confirmed that even the Candle Dragon Venerable couldn't directly cross into the real world to attack him.

"Fine, you're the strongest Supreme, you're amazing. Go ahead, stay there forever while I level up outside."

With this thought, Gu Jianlin once again visualized the Floating Qilin Island, undergoing Qilinization amidst the scarlet light pouring from the dimension rifts, staring at the blood-red eyes glowing in the dark.

This time, for the first time, those enchanting blood-red eyes revealed a clear emotion—frigid coldness.

As if silently saying: Come in if you dare!

Unfazed, Gu Jianlin met her gaze with his golden vertical pupils.

As if silently replying: Come out if you dare!

Silence persisted as neither side could do anything to the other.

Finally reassured, Gu Jianlin even waved casually, saying indifferently:

"Goodbye. I'll come visit again sometime."

Boom.

As the visualization faded, the world returned to normal.

Chapter 232 - 118 Heavenly Person Realm

In the ruins of the shipping containers, the Butcher maintained his Divine Servant Transformation form. His nightmare-inducing, half-human, half-Qilin appearance resembled that of an ancient deity. Unintentionally, he emanated a bloodthirsty, chilling aura.

He felt he had reached the pinnacle of his life, standing supreme and unrivaled.

He took seven steps forward, raised one hand to the sky.

"Heaven and Earth, only I—"

Before he could finish the sentence, his entire body erupted with blood, and he collapsed backward onto the ground.

The Divine Servant Transformation was undone. His Qilin Horn and scales began to peel away, decaying piece by piece, returning him to his human form.

A dark shadow flashed by; the Moon Princess landed lightly beside him, casting him a frosty glare.

"Idiot. That's what you get for showing off."

She snapped irritably.

His breathing and heartbeat were still present, though extremely faint. It was likely the aftereffects of the Divine Servant Transformation. Coupled with the use of the Ancient Divine Language, the backlash had reduced him to a severely injured state.

"This is true evolution! God-given power, elevating a life as lowly as an ant to greatness, even displaying the majestic stature of the Qilin Clan, and blending in the divine strength of the gods!"

The Scholar stumbled over, trembling as if a desperate wanderer in the desert who had discovered an oasis, or a devout believer witnessing a divine miracle, his eyes blazing with zeal: "Why couldn't I do this? With my talent, even if I had access to a full drop of Ancient God's Blood, I still couldn't achieve such perfect evolution. That ferocious form, those crimson vertical pupils, that unyielding armor of scales, the seamless contours of muscle—all so exquisite."

He stared at the unconscious musclebound man on the ground, muttering, "Such beauty!"

Moon Princess shot him a cold look. "So, are you bent?"

The Scholar was momentarily speechless. "No, Miss Moon Princess, that's not what I meant..."

Moon Princess snapped coldly, "Do you or don't you have Pharmacist Old Thief's secret medicine? Hurry up and give some to the Butcher."

The Scholar froze for a moment, then quickly rummaged through his pouch. "I have, I have! I snagged plenty from that old thief!"

Everyone worked for the same boss; they were supposed to be on the same side.

Except for that dimwit, Pharmacist Old Thief, they all knew who was truly in charge.

Especially after witnessing the miracles bestowed by the Qilin Venerable firsthand.

Pharmacist Old Thief was nothing but trash.

At that moment, a rustling sound echoed from the cracked fissures in the ground. An uncontrollable swarm of Gu Worms crawled up from the depths. They surged like an overwhelming tide of insects, skin-crawlingly dense.

Seated right at the center of this insect tide was Yan Wu's corpse.

The Gu Worms burrowed into his body, devouring flesh and blood.

"I suggest you leave immediately."

Lu Zicheng's exhausted voice emerged from the rear. "The battle you had with the Nightmare Master just now made use of ancient divine powers. The association will definitely sense it. If nothing unexpected happens... the Heavenly Person Realm will soon envelope the entire Forbidden Zone. When that happens, your kind of power will be unusable."

He paused. "And if you're discovered, they will inevitably hunt you down."

Moon Princess turned to face him, her icy, beautiful eyes watching him silently as she clutched her Gu Zheng tightly.

Her right hand gently brushed over the strings, as though ready to strike at any moment.

The Scholar hoisted the unconscious Butcher onto his back, retreating step by step.

"If I ask whether the person behind you is the Qilin Venerable, you obviously wouldn't admit it. Even though what you're doing is betrayal toward humanity's faction, being contaminated by the Ancient God's Breath leaves you no choice. I can understand that—but I cannot condone it."

Lu Zicheng's pale face softened as he spoke in a faint voice. "If I make it out alive, I'll definitely report your existence. So, if you don't want to risk exposure, you could kill me here."

As he uttered this, he pulled out his phone, smashed it on the ground, and then stomped on it until it shattered. "But I appreciate the help you gave me. I won't alert anyone about you right away. You have ten minutes to escape."

From the distance, Chen Qing, upon seeing the scene unfold, immediately bolted forward with her sniper rifle, running so fast that her high boots seemed ready to come apart.

Moon Princess remained silent for a moment before turning and speaking. "Let's go."

With that, she turned around and walked off.

The Scholar, carrying Butcher, said nothing and followed behind her.

Then, Lu Zicheng's voice floated from behind them, frail and barely audible. "Hey, the ones who captured Lin Yuan earlier and warned us about the existence of the Parasitic Gu—that was you, wasn't it? Why did you help us?"

Moon Princess didn't respond. Her slender, dainty figure flickered swiftly in the pouring rain.

The Scholar, however, halted. He turned back and said, "Don't probe too deeply. Don't attempt to glimpse that great entity. It merely asked me to relay one sentence to you... Break the cage, and freedom awaits."

In the dark night, lightning crackled across the skies, rain poured in torrents, and the world was shrouded in gloom.

Lu Zicheng watched them fade from sight, staggering as he moved to Yan Wu's corpse in the midst of the insect tide.

He removed the Sword Bag from his back and planted all of the blades into the ground.

With a shift in his crimson eyes, he opened his arms wide, unleashing an immense Qi Force from within.

Dozens of Ancient Blades trembled, and under the infusion of Qi Force, they detonated violently!

Boom!

The blades erupted into countless fine fragments, surging like a whirlwind of razor-sharp shards. In a matter of moments, they tore through the insect tide, reducing the swarm to a blood-soaked mess.

Even Yan Wu's corpse was obliterated, scattering into a mist of blood.

Having finished his task, Lu Zicheng staggered backward and plopped down heavily onto the ground.

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"Young master."

A moment later, Chen Qing walked over, crouched beside him, and without saying a word, injected a vial of medicine into his shoulder. She spoke softly, "How is it? Old... No, the Nightmare Master—he's still alive, isn't he?"

Lu Zicheng kept his head down, his damp bangs obscuring his face. His voice was hoarse as he replied, "I don't know. I just wanted to kill him. Even if I can't kill him, I'll do everything I can to stop him."

Chen Qing reached out tentatively and patted his head softly. "Minister Lu called," she said quietly.

She handed the phone over and pressed the answer button.

Lu Zicheng glanced at the name displayed on the screen but said nothing.

"Why didn't you answer your phone when I called?"

Lu Zijin's voice carried her usual spoiled and domineering tone.

Lu Zicheng paused for a moment and replied in a low voice, "My phone shattered during the fight."

"Heh."

Lu Zijin hesitated briefly before speaking with a faint smile, "I've got good news and bad news. Which one first?"

Lu Zicheng rasped, "The bad one."

Lu Zijin cleared her throat and said indifferently, "The battle on my end is over. All the Gu Worms along the entire southern coastline have lost control. To uncover what caused this, I had a high-level witch from the Omega Sequence perform a divination... The conclusion is, the Nightmare Master isn't dead."

Upon hearing this, Lu Zicheng crouched on the ground, clutching his head, threading his fingers through his hair.

"The good news is, the Nightmare Master's Rank has dropped significantly."

Lu Zijin's voice carried a hint of amusement. "At best, he's now at the Second Rank—perhaps even lower. Although it's not entirely precise, we're 100% certain he's no longer at a Superdimensional Level."

Chen Qing froze for a moment upon hearing this.

Lu Zicheng's body stiffened abruptly.

"I don't know who did it," Lu Zijin continued, "but the Nightmare Master has clearly provoked someone he shouldn't have. The follow-up is simple: we just need to clean up the Gu Worms in the city."

She paused before adding, "Cry if you want. I'm hanging up."

Beep. Beep.

The line went dead.

For a long time, Chen Qing remained dazed. Softly, she said, "For the Nightmare Master, completely losing his Rank must be far more painful than death itself, don't you think? Young master, do you remember how, when we were kids, I loved keeping hamsters? Most of them were never truly tamed, and they occasionally bit me. Even when you wanted to throw them out, I couldn't bring myself to do it."

A faint smile played on her lips. "Do you remember how you helped me vent my frustrations back then?"

Crouched on the ground, Lu Zicheng murmured, "Hmm."

"That hamster loved building its nest. Every day, it collected cotton and scraps of paper, tirelessly constructing. Each time it was close to done, you would casually swipe and destroy its nest. When it returned and saw the destruction, it would freeze for a moment, then continue gathering materials and start building again."

Chen Qing continued nonchalantly, "Each time it was close to finishing, you would destroy it all over again. After being stunned countless times, it finally gave up. It crawled into a little corner, sitting there, doubting its existence."

She chuckled softly, "The Nightmare Master must be feeling the same way now, don't you think?"

Lu Zicheng remained silent, his body trembling slightly.

Amidst the storm, a sound that seemed part-sob, part-laughter rang out.

The wind and rain swirled. A black umbrella reinforced with metal silently drifted through the night.

Gu Jianlin stood in the downpour, his umbrella shielding him. Using the Lock of Nonexistence to minimize his presence, he watched the pair amidst the ruins of the shipping containers. A trace of relief flickered in his smile.

The torrential rain was icy cold, but the figures huddled together burned like a torch.

Warm. Bright.

Both Lu Zicheng and Chen Qing were people carrying untold stories within.

Eight years ago, the past was like a tumultuous storm, trapping them in a cycle of longing and inability to let go.

Gu Jianlin had once been curious about their tale, and now he understood.

The Nightmare Master—he had been their team mentor back then.

Lu Zicheng, Mu Shishi, and Chen Qing.

They were likely part of the same squad.

"Consider this the first installment of repayment for these eight years of pain. Treat it as my thanks for saving me under that overpass back then. Next time I get the chance, I'll make sure to bring the Nightmare Master to you. You can personally sever his head."

Gu Jianlin murmured, "You've got this, captain."

Turning away, he stepped into the storm.

From his final glance, Lu Zicheng tilted his face to the sky, releasing a cathartic, unrestrained roar.

Chen Qing silently held the umbrella for him.

Yet, in Gu Jianlin's view, they were both smiling.

Smiling with such relief.

Because vengeance had been fulfilled; the departed could rest in peace.

What came next was simple.

To commemorate. To reminisce.

Plop.

Gu Jianlin's steps suddenly halted, splashing rainwater.

He realized something.

Since the Nightmare Master figured prominently in every aspect of the Qilin Immortal Palace incidents...

The entire matter appeared inexplicable.

Back when he defected eight years ago, the Nightmare Master was merely a Third Rank lackey. How could he orchestrate such a large-scale blood sacrifice, especially deep within the Underwater Ruins?

Could the Candle Dragon Clan within the Immortal Palace have helped him?

Or was there someone else behind it all!

At that moment, Gu Jianlin suddenly realized he'd made a critical mistake.

Mrs. Yan!

The Nightmare Master was simply too powerful.

Gu Jianlin had been forced to split his focus, summoning the Butcher within the Immortal Palace and enhancing it with Ancient God's Blood.

Then he clashed with an Ancient God from the Candle Dragon Clan, each using their Divine Servants for a violent exchange.

Finally, in the heart of the Immortal Palace, he encountered the true form of the Candle Dragon Venerable.

Three consecutive upheavals had left even Gu Jianlin—meticulous as he was—with lapses.

"Where did Mrs. Yan go?"

Gu Jianlin unleashed Life Perception, scanning the area within a hundred-meter radius—nothing.

At that moment, his phone automatically connected to the Deep Space Network.

"Attention Peak City District departments: detection of Divine Servant-level Ancient God's Breath. All units switch to combat readiness."

Taixu's normally affectionate voice took on a rare coldness, broadcasting to all association members in the city: "Authorization from headquarters confirmed—Heavenly Person Realm deployment imminent. Repeat—authorization confirmed—Heavenly Person Realm deployment imminent. All investigators, proceed to sweep the West Port Forbidden Zone for a full-scale investigation."

Heavenly Person Realm.

Gu Jianlin hesitated briefly, unsure what it entailed.

Soon enough, he understood.

Boom!

A blazing Golden Realm descended from the heavens, crashing into the earth, enveloping the entirety of West Port.

In that instant, all Ascenders tainted by mental contamination emitted bone-chilling screams.

Even Gu Jianlin himself felt an intense headache.

The Black Qilin in his mind roared angrily.

Gu Jianlin sharply noticed that under the influence of this Golden Realm, natural laws and order had shifted.

The rhythmic intricacy unique to the Breathing Technique flowed effortlessly here.

Meanwhile, the Ancient God Power within him felt suppressed, sinking into complete dormancy.

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When the golden domain descended from the heavens, Gu Jianlin felt an unprecedentedly strange experience, as though his entire being had split in two—two vastly different souls stirring within him.

One, the soul belonging to the Qilin, seemed out of place, and immediately fell into a state of languidness.

Meanwhile, the soul belonging to the human resembled a fish diving into the ocean, brimming with ecstatic joy.

"Relax, take a deep breath, maintain the rhythm of the breathing technique. This is a rare opportunity."

Out of nowhere, a faintly amused voice reached him from behind.

Gu Jianlin turned his head and saw that the familiar grocery store had replaced the abandoned ship's cabin. Inside, a warm candlelight glowed brightly, rain cascaded like a waterfall from the eaves, and a redwood recliner quietly rested by the side.

Jing Ci held an umbrella and smiled at him amidst the torrential rain.

Gu Jianlin was at a loss for words. This man was always so elusive, catching him off guard every time.

"Sit down, have a cup of tea, calm your nerves. This is Heart-cleansing tea dug up by my teacher in the Ancient God Tomb. It helps stabilize one's spirit, dispel worries, alleviate depression, and prolong life."

Jing Ci spoke, half-smiling, "Who did you meet just now that scared you like this?"

Gu Jianlin sat as instructed, taking the hot tea Jing Ci handed him without hesitation and pouring it down his throat. Warmth spread throughout his body, relieving the tension in his muscles.

"The Candle Dragon Clan."

He thought it best not to hide the matter: "Inside the Qilin Immortal Palace, there was a member of the Candle Dragon Clan."

Jing Ci tilted his head to look at the surging, pitch-black ocean and said lightly, "Ordinary Ancient God Seeds are unlikely, I've slain many of those. Ancestors are also unlikely. What you saw is very likely a Primordial, but it must have been a weakened Primordial; otherwise, it wouldn't have been defeated in the Ancient God Realm, especially by Chen Bojun."

"Nightmare Masters were created by it as Divine Servants. Judging from the strength of their Divine Servant Transformation, they are formidable. Yet, there aren't many Primordials left among the Candle Dragon Clan. Eliminating those already killed, and excluding the ones at Buzhou Mountain, only one remains."

He chuckled, "The Kui Dragon Ancestor. 'The Ancient Times' once recorded its appearance as cow-like, with a grayish-blue body devoid of horns, and possessing one single foot. Whenever it emerges from water, there must be wind and rain. Its voice resounds like thunder, and it is known as Kui."

Gu Jianlin froze for a moment, realizing Jing Ci had indeed seen it all.

The Kui Dragon Ancestor—he hadn't made a mistake seeing it back then!

"What's interesting is that the Qilin Clan's Divine Servants also appeared in that battle."

Jing Ci smiled, "One of them turned out to be that little creature you've subdued, didn't it?"

Gu Jianlin fell silent, unsure if he should reveal the matter.

However, Jing Ci didn't intend to inquire further. Instead, he asked, "Kui Dragon Ancestor is in the Qilin Immortal Palace? That's unexpected. But was it really the one that scared you to this extent?"

Gu Jianlin hesitated for a second, "No, it was something tens of thousands of times more terrifying than the Kui Dragon Ancestor."

To any human Ascender, the Kui Dragon Ancestor would undoubtedly be a terror.

But as the Second Generation Qilin Venerable, he had long ceased to fear it.

Instead, he found it somewhat amusing.

After all, he could freely enter and exit the Qilin Immortal Palace.

Even if the palace was eventually destroyed by the human faction, he would remain safe outside.

As for the Kui Dragon Ancestor, it seemingly couldn't leave casually—after all, it was a genuine Ancient God.

When the Ether Association invaded the Qilin Immortal Palace, it would be a tough ordeal for the Ancestor!

Jing Ci asked skeptically, "Then what was it?"

Gu Jianlin took a deep breath, pointing to the painting hanging in the shop and calmly said, "This painting—it's terribly inadequate. Though the artist's skills could be considered masterful, they still failed to capture even a fraction of her beauty. No, to be precise, no one in this world could ever portray her beauty."

He paused and commented sincerely, "She is not merely art; she is the ultimate embodiment of art itself. Even using the word 'art' to describe her feels like a blasphemous presumption."

Jing Ci narrowed his eyes, "You've seen the person depicted in this painting?"

"Yes."

Gu Jianlin's throat bobbed slightly, "If there's no mistake, the one I saw was the Candle Dragon Venerable. Although it was only a fleeting glimpse, I indeed saw her—and she was utterly terrifying."

Jing Ci gave him a long, contemplative look, falling into silence.

"Alright, if the Kui Dragon Ancestor is in the Qilin Immortal Palace, then it's evident that it must be guarding something for the Candle Dragon Venerable. It's no wonder that Supreme Being is keeping watch here."

He murmured, "You saw the Candle Dragon Venerable, so your fear stems from her? Across the ages, only six humans have ever been able to contend against the Candle Dragon Venerable, and only two of them are still alive."

Gu Jianlin asked, "Who are they?"

Jing Ci glanced at him with a cryptic smile, "These are ancient secrets. Even if you've joined the Omega Sequence, you'd need sufficient merit to exchange for such information. However, I'll give you a hint. The first of them is none other than the Emperor sleeping in the northern region of Lishan."

"Many refer to him as 'Ancestor Dragon,' believing him to be the first true Emperor in our nation's history, thus earning him the title. In truth, this is a misunderstanding. In the most hidden chapters of history, the Emperor personally slew the Ancestor Dragon Primordial. He was the first human cultivator in history to kill a Primordial one-on-one, in the physical realm, without any external aid."

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He explained, "At that time, Ascenders weren't called Ascenders but were referred to as Cultivators or Immortal Practitioners."

Gu Jianlin paused in thought for a second: "And then, because one of them slew an ancestor-level Ancient God, they provoked a Supreme?"

Jing Ci nodded: "Yes. Although history doesn't record the specifics of that battle, it must have been devastating. Otherwise, why do you think the Emperor was so short-lived and desperate in his quest for immortality?"

Gu Jianlin thought to himself, so that's how it is.

"The second figure was Mr. Gui Gu, the ancestor of the Zongheng Sect during the Warring States Period, said to have manifested the Ghost Star Formation. The first President of the Ether Association inherited his legacy and traveled overseas to seek the ruins of the Ancient God Realm, amassing abundant resources for the Human World. That's how they returned to Hua Country and established a stable Ascender order."

Jing Ci said calmly, "You may not realize this, but before the Ether Association was founded, our country didn't have any organizations for Transcendents. Back then, this land was known as the Land of Divine Revelation and followed a traditional family-based system. Many Ascender families today trace their lineage back to historically renowned figures. There are even descendants of the Imperial Family among them."

"As for why they went overseas, the reason is simple. Our country has far too many Ancient God ruins. Why else would it be called the Land of Divine Revelation? If you don't loot some resources from abroad, you'd have no chance against the Ancient Gods and Ancient Ancestors here. To put it simply, our country is a hell-level dungeon, while other countries are beginner villages."

He shrugged: "If you were born in North America, you wouldn't see an ancestor-level ruin even in your next life."

Gu Jianlin murmured, "No wonder."

"The third figure is the first President of the Ether Association, the fourth is the current President of the Ether Association, the fifth is my teacher, and the sixth is the Red King—though he's already dead."

Jing Ci explained, "But without exception, these five Catastrophe-level Ascenders all clashed with the Candle Dragon Venerable in the real world. Occasionally, battles took place in the Ancient God Realm, leveraging the power of the Heavenly Person Realm."

Gu Jianlin looked up at the golden realm in the sky.

"What exactly is this thing?"

He raised his head to the heavens, his eyes illuminated by the dazzling golden radiance.

Jing Ci explained in layman's terms, "You already know that the rules of the real world repel the Ancient Gods because this world does not belong to them; they cannot adapt to its natural laws. It's like fish being unable to live on land without water. The Heavenly Person Realm intensifies this repulsion to an extreme degree, significantly weakening their power."

"Otherwise, how do you think humanity gained today's advantage and became the masters of this world, given the massive power gap between humans and Ancient Gods?"

He said, "It's all thanks to the Heavenly Person Realm. It not only strengthens the repulsion of Ancient Gods in the real world but can also create real-world rules within the Ancient God Realm."

Gu Jianlin's pupils quivered as if a surge of electricity ran up his spine to the back of his head.

Jing Ci glanced at him: "Yes, exactly what you're thinking. The Heavenly Person Realm is indispensable when human Ascenders venture into Ancient God ruins."

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment: "I hadn't expected humanity to develop something like this to combat the Ancient Gods."

"Wrong."

Jing Ci's gaze became profound as he said, "This wasn't invented by humanity. It was the ultimate killing weapon created by Supremes to destroy each other, and humanity merely ended up utilizing it."

At these words, Gu Jianlin felt a chill spread through him.

Jing Ci didn't delve deeper into the topic but instead changed the subject: "Moreover, the Heavenly Person Realm isn't exactly a barrier—because barriers can be broken, but the Heavenly Person Realm cannot. Its essence lies in the forced alteration of natural laws. For Ancient Gods, the inability to escape it spells real danger."

A smile suddenly surfaced on his face, and he said seriously, "The essence of the Heavenly Person Realm is the Breathing Technique."

Gu Jianlin had an epiphany. No wonder when the Heavenly Person Realm appeared, the Black Qilin in his mind immediately fell into slumber, while the Breathing Technique became exceptionally smooth, as if merging into one.

"In the Heavenly Person Realm, the Breathing Technique is enhanced, while the powers belonging to Ancient Gods are suppressed. History records an ancestor who tried to forcibly undergo Ancient God Transformation within the Heavenly Person Realm."

Jing Ci warned, "And then, their body disintegrated, their soul fled and scattered, and they fell into slumber for five thousand years."

Damn five thousand years.

Gu Jianlin found this utterly unacceptable.

Even as the Second Generation Kirin Venerable, his education and worldview remained fundamentally human.

He couldn't stomach the thought of waking up to find five thousand years had passed, the people he cared about reduced to dust in the river of history, their graves long gone. What would be the point of living then?

Although living is an individual's journey, the essence of who you are is shaped by the other people in your life.

"So, in the Heavenly Person Realm, you can no longer rely on Ancient God powers."

Jing Ci admired the rain curtain in the storm and smiled: "And without Ancient God powers, you haven't fully grasped the advanced applications of the Breathing Technique. This means you're currently just a Second Rank Junior Fate Officer. You might be significantly stronger compared to Ascenders of the same rank, but there's still a limit."

"You also have two auxiliary Mythical Weapons. The Lock of Nonexistence is a good tool for disguising yourself, but apart from catching someone off guard in your first attack during battle, it's rather useless."

He chuckled: "The Soul Comforting Bell does have some utility, but its effects in combat are limited as well."

Gu Jianlin had a sinking feeling upon hearing this.

"As for Mrs. Yan, she's still alive but is currently mutating toward the Gu Worm form."

Jing Ci raised a finger, his smile deepening: "This is an excellent challenge. Remember what I told you? Only by placing life and death aside can you truly master the essence of the Breathing Technique."

As his words fell.

Gu Jianlin's phone rang with a chilling voice.

"Dawn Combat Sequence, please be advised. The Nightmare Master has suffered heavy injuries, their rank has plummeted to the lowest point, and they currently pose no threat. All squads should prioritize clearing the city streets of out-of-control Gu Worms to ensure the safety of civilians."

"Those operating in the West Port Forbidden Zone, please simultaneously search for traces of the Ancient God Clan while dealing with the Gu Worms. If anyone spots a Divine Servant, immediately report it. Unless necessary, avoid confrontations with Unclean and Fallen entities within the West Port Forbidden Zone. Especially with the You Ying Group—engage in cooperation unless provoked by them."

"Not everyone in the West Port Forbidden Zone is a criminal. The Horus Eye Satellite has been fully activated, and Taixu will aid you in identifying their identities promptly. Do not commit wrongful killings. Save anyone you can."

"Warriors, please protect yourselves and strive to save every innocent soul."

"We're counting on you!"

The voice belonged to Chen Bojun, resonating in the raging storm.

Gu Jianlin stayed silent for a moment and asked, "This is what the Ether Association should be like, isn't it?"

Jing Ci smiled: "To be precise, this is what Dawn Combat Sequence should embody—they are warriors who defend humanity's borders in the darkness, each deserving your respect."

But at that moment, the communication channel crackled with static noise.

A cold, condescending voice rang out: "All departments, be advised. Receiving Judgment Court's highest directive, confirmed by Saint Li Qingsong. Proceed with indiscriminate cleansing of the West Port Forbidden Zone! Officially declare war on the You Ying Group!"

Gu Jianlin froze briefly, his pupils suddenly illuminated by a sky-piercing blaze.

Boom!

A massive explosion erupted in the West Port's black market district, a mushroom cloud shooting into the sky.

Chapter 236 - 120 Make a Choice

On the rooftop during the storm, Chen Bojun heard the voice over the communication channel, and his face suddenly turned pale, an uncontrollable fury and rage flashing in his eyes. He smashed the phone in his hand!

At this moment, lightning illuminated the stormy world, as if the phantom of a thousand armies flashed in and out of the darkness.

An aura of chilling massacre swept across the heavens and the earth.

However, he quickly coughed heavily, and blood spurted out.

"Councilman Zhang?"

He coldly questioned, "Who the hell gave him the power? To go to war with the You Ying Group now, is he mad?"

On the rooftop, a golden chariot appeared at some point, surrounded by six men in antique official robes, holding simple yet exquisite jade plates with fresh fruits and snacks.

In addition, there were six beautiful maidens dressed as attendants, respectfully surrounding the area.

The man's long hair was flowing, and his black gold imperial robe fluttered in the wind. With a naturally arrogant yet magnetic voice, he calmly said, "If I'm not mistaken, this is another directive obtained by the Judgement Court after consulting with Vice President Lai Yin, which makes some sense in a way."

"After all, the Ancient God's Breath of Divine Servant Level appeared in the West Port Forbidden Zone. It's not unreasonable for them to first suspect that it's the work of the You Ying Group. Over the years, the influence of the You Ying Group in the dark world has indeed been increasingly expanding. And the Judgement Court's attitude towards the You Ying Group is absolutely radical."

He said indifferently, "Director Chen, if you need, I could go and rescue the situation."

This was a young man about in his twenties, with a naturally cold and dignified face, black hair billowing in the wind, and long, sharp eyes shining brightly in the darkness.

Above his head, thirteen golden beams of light hovered in the air, with ancient runes engraved on the metallic sword blades, intertwining like golden dragons, raising a piercing whistle in the storm.

Centered around the rooftop, streaks of golden sword light galloped, diving to the streets below, harvesting the lives of countless Gu worms, the spilled blood splattered in the wind and rain, forming an extremely poignant scene.

Sword Sect Path, Fifth Order Sword Soul, Sword Control Technique!

In today's operation, not only had half of the Dawn Combat Sequence's forces been deployed.

The Omega Sequence had also been mobilized.

However, the Omega Sequence is not made up of the association's investigators; in a way, they are all reserve Holy Land Level, as long as they survive during growth, at least they'll reach the Seventh Rank.

Moreover, most members of the Omega Sequence have their own backing.

And within the same sequence, their competition is intense.

Therefore, Omega Sequence members generally do not act collectively and rarely cooperate with each other.

Chen Bojun looked at him with a blank expression, then said lightly, "Changsheng, you want to go save the situation? I guess it's because you think Li Qingsong's grandson will also come, so you want to fight him, right?"

Ying Changsheng faintly smiled, "Just don't like the look of him. I, a dignified royal descendant, being in the same sequence with someone like that, is an insult to me and an insult to my ancestors."

Chen Bojun said nothing, but couldn't help shaking his head.

In the Transcendent world, there is no shortage of these super clans that have been passed down for thousands of years.

Their ancestors, upon tracing back, are of ridiculously significant origins.

For example, the person before him is a noble from the Pre-Qin era, who later claimed to be part of the royal family after the Emperor unified the six states.

Ying, Zhao clan.

Pre-Qin men used clan names, not surnames.

But today, to conform to the times, they still use surnames.

"Going to war with the You Ying Group at this time and cleansing the West Port Forbidden Zone makes it hard to ensure that no innocents are involved. Leave some people to handle these Gu worms now and head to West Port immediately."

Chen Bojun picked up the radio: "The downtown area is entrusted to you all. Over."

After speaking, he directly boarded the helicopter parked in the center of the rooftop.

Ying Changsheng also looked at his twelve Guardians and said indifferently, "Stay here and remember our mission. Even if all twelve of you die, I do not want to see any ordinary person dead in today's battle when I return. Understood?"

The twelve Guardians bowed and nodded, "Yes, Young..."

Ying Changsheng raised an eyebrow, a glint flashed in his long eyes, "Hmm?"

The twelve Guardians quickly corrected themselves, "Yes, Your Highness!"

Ying Changsheng nodded with satisfaction, adjusted the black gold imperial robe on his body, clasped his hands behind his back, and turned away.

The helicopter's rotor blades stirred up a howling in the storm.

Chen Bojun and Ying Changsheng had just sat in the cabin when they heard a cold female voice on the encrypted channel.

"Old Chen, it's me."

Lu Zijin coldly said, "I just received a message here, Xiao Gu provided very important information. A long-missing member of the Night Watcher in the West Port Forbidden Zone... Fu Qingxuan, he is still alive."

Ying Changsheng's brows faintly trembled upon hearing this name.

Chen Bojun almost lost his composure, "Old Fu? He's still alive? He's in West Port?"

Lu Zijin said solemnly, "Yes, he is still alive, but his identity was erased before he carried out his mission, so he can't be recognized by Taixu now, and the Judgement Court just issued an attack order. I don't trust the Judgement Court, so I can't tell them this news. You must go in person."

Chapter 237 - 120 Make a Choice_2

She hesitated and said, "I can't leave here right now. After the Nightmare Master's rank fell, all the Gu Worms went out of control. There's a hospital and a kindergarten here. If I leave, all these ordinary people are dead."

A flash of lightning briefly illuminated the dark cabin.

"I understand."

Chen Bojun turned off the communicator and said in a deep voice, "Changsheng, let's go."

Ying Changsheng personally sat in the cockpit, his attitude cold as he replied, "Understood, Director Chen."

At the same time, helicopters were landing across the West Port Forbidden Zone.

Councilman Zhang sat in the cabin of one helicopter and spoke indifferently, "Begin. Erase everything for me. The Qilin Immortal Palace's pioneer plan is about to commence, and the Saint does not want any of these pests to remain here."

He paused, then turned to look at the young man beside him. "Hanting, if this operation goes smoothly, it will be your merit. By then, you'll completely surpass Ying Changsheng and Mu Qingyou, and become the rightful first in the Omega Sequence. You understand what that means, don't you?"

Li Hanting, with handsome and gentle features, always had a smiling demeanor that reminded others of a fox. Holding a small ice-blue wolf cub in his arms, he smiled and said, "Don't worry. I won't disappoint Grandpa."

After speaking, he took out a communicator from his pocket.

"Attention all departments, this is a wartime directive from the Judgement Court. The remnants of the Yan family have been largely wiped out, leaving only Mrs. Yan still on the run. Based on divination results, it's very likely that a powerful Gu Worm is hidden inside her body, which could cause her physique to undergo mutations and fluctuate in combat strength."

His voice was gentle yet carried an undeniable authority. "Once Mrs. Yan's whereabouts are discovered, immediately lure her to the Eastern Shipyard by the harbor. I will lead Omega Sequence members to ensure she is killed."

The other helicopters were also landing nearby.

Inside each helicopter was an Omega Sequence member.

The Omega Sequence was currently divided into three factions.

Gold, Silver, and Black Iron.

The three sides formed a tenuous balance of power.

The Gold Faction was led by Ying Changsheng, backed by ancient, prestigious clans.

The Silver Faction was led by Mu Qingyou, supported by ancient legacies like the Sword Tomb.

The Black Iron Faction, led by Li Hanting, was backed by the Judgement Court, which was rising rapidly within the association.

Li Hanting held his talkie and continued, "Meanwhile, all Omega Sequence members, the era of individual combat has ended. Vice President Lai Yin has issued orders. Please cooperate with the Judgement Court's operations and aim to finish the battle before dawn."

The Hunter squad trained by the Judgement Court leapt lightly out of the cabins. They wore iron masks on their faces, long white coats, and carried weapon cases, emitting an aura of cold-blooded death.

The Fallen living in the West Port saw them from a distance and immediately showed alarmed expressions.

"This is bad! The Judgement Court's death squads have arrived! Run quickly!"

"What did you say? Who's coming?"

"We're doomed! Hurry and alert Third Master! G—"

Bang!

A gunshot rang out.

The bullet pierced the skull of a Fallen who was attempting to warn others.

Boom!

A massive arrow screamed as it slammed into the ground, instantly obliterating a dormitory building.

The Hunters moved coldly and efficiently through the West Port, their eyes equipped with lenses that streamed data, accurately identifying targets for a large-scale purge.

"The Ether Association's cleansing has begun! Everyone, run!"

Suddenly, Mr. Liu's voice came through on the speakers, timely warning everyone.

In that moment, the West Port Forbidden Zone erupted into chaos.

The most frantic were those with criminal records. Whether their minds had been infected or not, they were on the kill list. They immediately bolted out of their homes, jumping into cars to flee.

But as soon as they got into their vehicles, a flaming arrow pierced through.

The car exploded, the charred bodies sent flying into the air!

"We're doomed!"

In the Treasure Appraisal Shop, Zhong Guoqing peeked out, saw the massacre on the streets, then quickly pulled back and lowered his voice: "Zhong Li! Take this cash box and find Captain Wang. Tell him you're reserving two spots. All this money is his! I'm going to the warehouse to get gold bars. Hurry!"

Zhong Li took the cash box, instantly realizing the gravity of the situation, her face pale: "Dad, what about Xiao Gu? Xiao Gu will be in danger, won't he? We can't just leave him behind!"

Zhong Guoqing froze for a moment. Normally, his character would never care about a shop employee.

But that foolish kid had helped them out yesterday, unreservedly.

"Damn it, where did that brat go? He's got a Golden Card and is under Mr. Liu's protection, so he should be able to board the ship. But what if he's not at the port? What if there's no time left?"

Zhong Guoqing's face turned pale, stomping his feet anxiously.

Just then, three smugglers silently approached, trying to snatch the cash box.

Zhong Guoqing was prepared, delivering a punch that erupted with Qi Force.

With a loud bang, the three smugglers were flung against the counters, crashing down.

"You bastards, looking for death?"

Zhong Guoqing grabbed a shotgun off the wall and blasted them each in the head.

Blood stained the shop floor.

His expression was fierce as he turned and said, "Zhong Li! Go start that second-hand motorcycle and chain it to the front door with the password lock. If Xiao Gu comes back, he'll have to pass by the shop. If there's no time, he can take the bike and escape. Oh, and cash! We'll need cash for any escape!"

This old man fumbled around, pulling out a stack of bills and a crumpled business card from his pocket. Shoving them into his daughter's hands, he said, "Hide this money in the seat of the bike, especially this card. If he gets out, he can use it to find someone to make him a fake ID!"

Zhong Li froze for a second, quickly took the money and card, then turned to run.

"Hurry up!"

Zhong Guoqing yelled after her, then dashed into the warehouse.

Boom! Another violent explosion rang out on the street as torrential rains poured down, like the end of the world.

In the distance, a Lamborghini was completely stalled.

Chen Qing angrily slapped the steering wheel, her face ashen.

"It's fine, don't worry."

Lu Zicheng, sitting in the passenger seat, softly laughed and said, "We just survived facing the Nightmare Master. Our luck isn't that bad. If things go south, we'll rush to the boats and fight for two spots."

At that moment, the sound of countless worms crawling filled the air.

Chen Qing and Lu Zicheng's expressions both darkened slightly.

Suddenly, the sound of a bike pedaling furiously could be heard in the distance.

A filthy little boy, with an unconscious middle-aged man tied to his back, was riding a bike without brakes through the storm and chaos.

At the grocery store's entrance, Gu Jianlin heard voices coming through the comm channel.

From there, he learned about the Judgement Court's plans.

"The Eastern Port. If they're heading to the Eastern Port, they'll have to pass the Treasure Appraisal Shop, along with the shopkeeper's location."

Gu Jianlin paused. "And here."

Jing Ci smiled beside him. "Do you know why I decided to show up now?"

Gu Jianlin froze, as countless waves of Life Rhythm surged into his awareness.

Amidst the sound of countless insects writhing, there was a thunderous crash!

A grotesque monstrosity—a giant, twisted abomination with a human face and insect body—cut through the storm.

Gu Jianlin's pupils shrank sharply. "Mrs. Yan..."

In the distance, the stalled Lamborghini was visible, with Lu Zicheng and Chen Qing stumbling out of it, supporting each other.

Through the torrential storm, a ramshackle bike pedaled furiously, ridden by a reckless boy with his tied-up foster father on his back.

Farther away, Zhong Guoqing was dragging his daughter, rushing toward the port amidst chaotic crowds, cursing under his breath.

"Alright. If you choose to stay in the shop, this place will be completely secure. No one will see us."

Jing Ci said calmly, "But if you decide to leave, without your Ancient God Transformation, what will you do?"

Gu Jianlin fell into silence.

Jing Ci gave him a deep look and said, "—Make your choice."

Chapter 238 - 121: Aloofness and Arrogance

In the span of this single hour, whatever transpired had completely transformed Mrs. Yan. She was now utterly assimilated by the Gu Worms, mutated into a colossal abomination—a human-faced, insect-

bodied monstrosity resembling a hybrid of centipede and spider. Her entire form was covered in pitch-black shell and coarse fur, with twenty-four steel-like segmented limbs protruding from her body.

At the same time, she seemed to have been modified into some kind of broodmother, continuously spewing toxic fog.

Wherever she passed, countless people's faces turned flush and red, their orifices oozing blood.

Finally, their bodies swelled to the breaking point and exploded!

"Monster! There's a monster!"

"Run! Hurry..."

A crowd surged desperately toward the ships in the harbor, pushing, shoving, and fighting one another along the way. Some, in their panic, even fired bullets to cripple the legs of those behind, determined to get ahead and secure their own survival.

But a massive shadow descended from above—Mrs. Yan leapt directly into the center of the humans. Her razor-sharp iron limbs tore through their bodies, limbs and shredded viscera erupting and splattering within pools of blood.

A scene of unspeakable brutality.

Toxic fog billowed outward, and countless people convulsed violently, collapsing dead on the spot.

Their corpses, contaminated and motionless, trembled and twitched, as countless swarming Gu Worms poured out en masse.

Just then, Gu Jianlin's phone began to ring with the communication channel's voice once again.

The encrypted Omega Sequence communication interface appeared in his view.

Crown Prince: "Order received from Director. Report the situation at the scene."

Nightmare: "Mrs. Yan's soul waves detected—highly likely assimilated by Gu Worms. She exhibits toxin-spewing capabilities. All personnel must avoid approaching casually, as exposure to toxins almost certainly results in infection. If infected, your body will become nothing but an incubator for Gu Worms. The higher the rank, the greater the number of worms that propagate within you! Based on my analysis, this toxin is spiritually-induced and cannot be physically isolated with conventional defenses!"

Jue Jian: "The Gu Worms along the East Coast have already been cleared. I can immediately lead a team and sword-flight over to the scene."

Jizhou: "Do not approach blindly. Focus on evacuating personnel on-site. Kill anyone inside the Forbidden Zone who can feed the Gu Worms. Prevent their growth at all costs. I will immediately

request Barrier-class Mythical Weapons from the higher-ups to try and temporarily contain Mrs. Yan. Poison Master, Dawn, how soon can you analyze the toxin composition and formulate an antidote?"

Poison Master: "You'll need to buy me at least ten minutes; I'm already analyzing samples as we speak."

Dawn: "If you can create the antidote, I can heal."

Nightmare: "Divination results have surfaced—Mrs. Yan consumed a new, never-before-seen type of Gu Worm. She's almost completely irrational and operates on sheer instinct. Hypnosis and Illusion Techniques are essentially ineffective."

Jizhou: "If that's the case, all personnel are ordered to retreat temporarily. Let Mrs. Yan feast on the Forbidden Zone occupants first—they're low-ranked anyway, and this approach minimizes collateral damage. Ensure the battlefield stays confined to the Forbidden Zone. If ordinary civilians die because of this, none of us will escape accountability."

Jue Jian: "A shame my junior sister isn't on-site. Her Extreme Thunder might be capable of generating a sufficiently robust Barrier to temporarily seal Mrs. Yan's movements."

Jizhou: "Where's Thunder right now?"

Jue Jian: "Undergoing a ritual to break through Fourth Rank."

Crown Prince: "Li Hanting, is this your plan? If you're not capable, don't recklessly issue commands. There are still many of our personnel on-site—can you guarantee their survival amidst this chaos?"

Jizhou: "Brother Changsheng, these Gu Worms were cultivated by Nightmare Masters during their Sixth Rank phase. Once exposed to this toxic fog, neither you nor I can guarantee survival. I understand Director Chen won't endorse my plan, but when have any of our operations avoided sacrifice? This isn't the time for a Holy Mother mentality—who's willing to throw their life away?"

Crown Prince: "If I were there, I'd try, instead of hiding like a cowardly turtle from behind the scenes."

Jizhou: "Apologies, but as the highest-ranking officer in charge on-site, I take full responsibility for this operation. If you've got concerns or objections, we can discuss them after it's all over. Over and out."

The communication channel was consumed by silence.

The Omega Sequence members had proposed a containment strategy to minimize losses.

Objectively, it was indeed the optimal solution to the current crisis.

But...

Gu Jianlin pocketed his phone and wordlessly pulled out a vial of Blue Blood from his jacket, tipping it down his throat.

He listened closely to the ongoing conversations over the channel, understanding the situation in full by now.

"Have you made up your mind yet?"

Jing Ci cast him an amused glance, smiled faintly, and asked, "If you go forward now, there's likely no coming back. You need to be crystal clear about the consequences—and about why you're willing to take this step."

Gu Jianlin said nothing; he simply grabbed his metallic black umbrella, stowed the remaining four vials of Blue Blood from his pocket, and drew the golden Desert Eagle from his waist.

Without uttering a single word, he walked out of the grocery store.

Lightning crackled and thunder roared.

The piercing cold storm struck head-on, as if a tsunami were about to swallow the entire chaotic harbor.

Burning ruins, frantic and crowded crowds, yachts and cruise ships bobbing wildly amidst turbulent waters.

Gu Jianlin stared out into the storm, enhancing his sensory perception with Life Perception, and surveyed the chaotic world around him.

In the midst of the tempest, Fu Chaoyang, riding a brakeless bicycle, crashed violently into the ground.

The impact sent him tumbling in the rain for over ten meters, breaking several ribs.

Yet, somehow summoning immense determination, he continued crawling forward, carrying his foster father on his back.

Further away, Lu Zicheng and Chen Qing were mixed in with the crowd, spotting a young girl who had fallen in front of them. Gritting their teeth, they picked her up and rushed toward the rescue yachts.

Chapter 239 - 121: Aloofness and Arrogance_2

Zhong Guoqing and Zhong Li were also in the crowd, drenched to the bone by the rain, glancing back from time to time.

They seemed to be fumbling for something.

The toxic mist spread with the wind, and the monster that Madame Yan had transformed into was slaughtering recklessly among the crowd—an absolute bloodbath.

Suddenly, the roar of car engines echoed from outside the port.

Dozens of nano warriors charged into the chaos fearlessly, as if blind to the peril around them.

These were the warriors of the Dawn Combat Sequence, the true backbone of the Ether Association.

Gu Jianlin silently observed everything unfolding before him.

Water streamed down their rain-drenched faces, but in his eyes, they each wore entirely different expressions.

Some grotesque, some despairing, some ferocious, and others holding on through gritted teeth.

By his estimation, in just ten minutes, this monstrosity could kill everyone here.

Earlier, Jing Ci had asked him why he chose to step forward.

Perhaps it was for Fu Chaoyang and Fu Qingxuan, who were crucial witnesses.

Or maybe for Lu Zicheng and Chen Qing, people who mattered to him deeply.

It could also have been for people like Zhong Guoqing and Zhong Li.

And there was another reason—he needed this trial by life and death to grow stronger.

Fine, courage doesn't need a reason.

—Nor does it need a choice.

The wind and rain recoiled, lightning cut across the sky, and thunder roared, shaking the dark world.

The grocery store vanished silently.

Gu Jianlin stood alone in the darkness, tearing off the human skin mask from his face in silence. His soaked black hair clung to his face as he fiercely gripped the Desert Eagle in his hand.

He raised the gun and took aim.

Bam!

The gunshot tore through the storm, a fleeting line of fire cutting briefly across the dark rain.

The monstrous creature that had been feasting insatiably on the crowd suddenly froze; a bullet had embedded itself in the back of her skull.

Thick, dark green blood dripped down as she turned her head in stunned disbelief.

In that instant, the black-haired boy in the storm leveled his smoking gun at her from afar.

"Do you recognize me?"

He paused, then said coldly: "—When your two sons died, they suffered far more than any of these people ever will."

For a fleeting moment, boundless madness flickered in Madame Yan's mutated blood-red eyes.

In some twisted way, she truly was a great mother—mutated to this horrifying extent, yet she still recognized the one who avenged her sons and let out a bone-chilling roar!

Boom!

The wind and rain scattered as the stench of blood whipped through the air.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Six consecutive gunshots riddled her body, causing foul, dark green blood to splatter everywhere.

His marksmanship wasn't precise.

But it served wonderfully as provocation!

Boom!

Madame Yan leaped into the air with a thunderous crash, lunging toward the distant youth.

A pale Ghost Fire ignited abruptly on Gu Jianlin's forehead, the whites of his eyes swallowed by darkness. He now resembled an Evil Spirit gazing out from the bowels of Hell, his body emanating a chilling ghost energy, ominous and sinister!

At that moment, a massive shadow hurtled toward him.

With a deafening crash!

Gu Jianlin opened the black metal umbrella in his hand. The sheer impact reverberated through the umbrella's surface into his body, leaving his hands trembling with numbness as he slid backward through the storm-drenched streets.

He slid back nearly twenty meters before he barely came to a halt!

So strong!

Madame Yan was a Fourth Rank Ascender, further enhanced by Gu Worms—her physical capabilities completely outclassed his!

Meanwhile, the ghostly green toxic mist surged toward him, and he inhaled it all without hesitation.

"Hah."

Gu Jianlin exhaled slowly, his obsidian-black pupils remaining menacingly cold.

Good. Although the Heavenly Person Realm suppressed his Ancient God abilities, his passive traits remained.

The will of an Ancient Supreme was immune to external interference.

Deep breath. Feel the ebb and flow of the Spiritual Tide.

Do not be afraid.

Do not panic.

Relax.

"Come on, let's play."

He chuckled softly, then vanished in a blur, retreating into the abandoned ship's stern behind him.

Roar!

Madame Yan howled ferociously, her massive worm-like body leaping forward without hesitation, giving chase!

At that moment, the encrypted channel of the Omega Sequence connected.

As did the wartime communications channel for the Peak City District.

Everyone linked to the Deep Space Network heard a singular voice resonating through the storm—aloof, cold, and unattainable.

"The plan was well-crafted. Don't bother doing it again."

In his Ghost Transformation state, Gu Jianlin's emotions plunged into extreme negativity. He said apathetically: "If you're incompetent, then stay out of the way. Useless trash should focus on doing what trash is good for."

He paused for a moment: "I'll buy you fifteen minutes. During that time, no one will become a host for those Gu Worms. Meanwhile, you'd better figure out how to neutralize the poison."

The transmission cut off.

In the storm, everyone fell silent.

They had never encountered someone so chillingly independent and arrogant, speaking in such a condescending tone.

As if to say, "I don't mean to single you out, but everyone here is garbage."

Councilman Zhang's face darkened with suppressed rage as he heard the voice. "Who is this?"

Nie, the Deacon sitting nearby, had gone deathly pale, as if suffering from post-traumatic stress: "Gu... Gu Jianlin. Peak City District. D-rank investigator. Gu Jianlin. The one who killed a Captain-Level enforcer, eliminated the Yan brothers, openly defied the Judgement Court, and joined the Omega Sequence."

Outside the helicopter cabin, Li Hanting stroked his pet softly and asked in a low voice: "What did he just say?"

"Boss, he called you trash."

A woman cloaked in a Wizard Robe, clutching a crystal staff, replied faintly: "Though from his tone, it seems he considers all of us trash."

The voice of Jue Jian broke through the communications channel: "Save it; I think he's specifically talking about your Judgement Court."

No one responded.

Meanwhile, the red dot on the tablet's map began moving rapidly away from the denser areas of the crowd.

That guy—he really went through with it. He was actually drawing the creature away!

This man—is he insane?

The helicopter sliced through the heavens like a streak of black lightning.

Bam!

Chen Bojun slammed his fist against the cabin wall and muttered gravely: "Is this kid out of his mind?"

The tablet showed the red dot speeding away.

Proof that the young man had truly lured the monster away and was now fighting alone.

Ying Changsheng squinted his sharp, narrow eyes slightly as he heard the voice through the channel, raising an eyebrow. "Director Chen, who is this lunatic? He just called all of us trash?"

"A blanket insult; don't take it too seriously."

Chen Bojun hesitated for a moment. "I believe he meant the Judgement Court specifically."

Ying Changsheng nodded slightly. "Quite true. Well said!"

"Faster. I'm worried something might happen to him."

Chen Bojun said in a low tone.

Just then, lightning and thunder roared across the heavens, and a petite black figure dove down from the skies.

Lu Zijin hovered mid-air, her surging psychic influence keeping her aloft. Her black hair danced wildly in the storm, her eyes fierce and unyielding. She didn't so much as glance at the group below as she dove toward West Port.

Evidently, she had heard the voice on the communications channel moments ago.

This was a race against time.

Every second was a battle.

Chapter 240 - 122: A Tribute to the Exalted Hermit (5000)

The cruise ship was overcrowded. When people saw the monster leave, they breathed a sigh of relief.

"Dad, Xiao Gu still hasn't come up."

Zhong Li stood on tiptoe, looking around anxiously in the crowd, her drenched face full of worry: "Can he get out? I saw the Judgement Court's Demon Hunters in action. Will he be alright?"

Zhong Guoqing wiped his face and said, "I don't know. He has a Golden Card. Logically, he should be able to get on Mr. Liu's ship. As long as he's with Third Master, he'll definitely be fine. If he couldn't come over, now that the Judgement Court's attention is on us, he can surely escape on his motorcycle!"

He said confidently, "That silly child is not destined for a short life! He'll definitely survive!"

Under the cruise ship, Lu Zicheng and Chen Qing supported each other. Upon hearing the voice on the communication channel, they felt all the blood in their bodies turn cold, and their eyes met in blankness.

They hadn't expected, right after avenging their great enemy, to hear such terrible news.

Mrs. Yan is Fourth Rank, even without mutation, a Second Rank can't defeat her.

What's more under the premise of body mutation.

In this way, the biggest shortcoming of the Heavenly Master Path is gone!

Meanwhile, Fu Chaoyang staggered towards the barricade carrying his foster father.

He waved his hands anxiously, shouting for help.

In an instant, several beams of bright light shone on his face, blinding him.

The Demon Hunters marched forward with rifles, their trench coats fluttering in the rainy night, and their masks frozen in coldness, showing no trace of pity in their eyes.

Fu Chaoyang instinctively realized something was wrong and immediately thought to turn and run away.

At that moment, he suddenly remembered his foster father was right behind him and forcibly stopped the motion to turn around.

Then he opened his arms wide, shielding the middle-aged man firmly behind him.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

A group of nano warriors descended from the sky, blocking him firmly.

A helicopter descended from above. Ying Changsheng sat in the cockpit watching the boy, commenting indifferently, "Didn't expect to see such a dutiful son in this age! Not bad, truly good!"

Chen Bojun expressionlessly jumped down from the cabin, coldly glancing around at the Demon Hunters, and said indifferently, "Who gave you permission? Do you want to die? Or does Li Qingsong want to die early too?"

The next moment, phantoms of thousands of troops flickered behind him.

The Demon Hunters were all intimidated by the murderous aura, involuntarily stepping back.

Chen Bojun turned to look at the father and son in the pouring rain.

Fu Chaoyang's legs gave way, and he knelt on the ground, gasping heavily.

The rope loosened, causing both the middle-aged man behind him to topple over.

"Child, you did well."

Chen Bojun said gently, "I was your father's comrade; you are safe now."

Hearing this, Fu Chaoyang's eyes instantly turned red. Years of grievance poured out, his small beast-like body trembling slightly, lips quivering: "Quick... save, save my foster father! Save my foster father first!"

With that, he remembered something, struggled to get up, and frantically searched around.

"What are you looking for?"

Chen Bojun asked with a frown.

"Give me a sniper rifle or even a rocket launcher! That naive guy lured the monster away by himself! I know where he's going! Hurry up and give it to me!"

Fu Chaoyang howled anxiously: "He can't hold on!"

The dark rainy night, the howling storm, and muddy puddles.

Rapid footsteps splashed through the rain.

The wind roared.

Gu Jianlin gasped heavily, gulping down another bottle of Blue Blood, then leaped and grabbed the iron fence on the warehouse's exterior, kicking the wall repeatedly and flipping over with effort.

Three minutes and forty-one seconds.

Just at that moment, the wall exploded, a sharp stone grazing past his abdomen, leaving a two-centimeter-deep scar, nearly ripping away an entire chunk of his flesh.

Behind him, the wind roared, the monster howling in pursuit.

Pale Ghost Fire spread across the ground, stripping the life from all insects and microbes.

But that amount of life force was far from enough to heal the wound; Gu Jianlin could only press on the wound, forcing himself to rise, using his strong physique to leap onto the opposite rooftop, rolling to disperse inertia, and diving into the stairwell.

Moving too fast, he crashed through the narrow stairwell, even breaking the walls.

He had no time to retaliate, as the monster followed closely behind.

This was a race for life; even a second could not be delayed.

In her berserk, irrational state, Mrs. Yan stubbornly smashed through the stairwell, relentlessly pursuing him, spewing flaming tongues from her mouth, blazing intensely.

Several times, when Gu Jianlin closed the distance with the monster, he was nearly scorched by the flaming tongues, even singeing a lock of hair, leaving a burnt smell.

One can only imagine how dangerous it was.

Suddenly, the entire stairwell trembled as if an earthquake had struck, dust falling in a flurry.

Gu Jianlin's heart screamed a warning; he smashed through a window without hesitation and leaped from the fifth floor.

He turned over, planting the tip of his black umbrella into the wall, using the friction from the fall to buffer, stepping on the wall edge amid a flurry of falling fragments and dust, tumbling downwards.

When Gu Jianlin landed, the dormitory building behind him collapsed with a crash.