

Ancient 291

Chapter 291 - 153: Charge up, Cast, Unleash the Ultimate!

The deathly silent conference room grew increasingly eerie.

Only the upper echelons of the base had the qualifications to attend this meeting.

As the head of the Omega Sequence, Chen Bojun naturally sat at the very end of the long table.

To his left, Han Jing, the Deputy Captain of the Night Watchers, sat with her arms crossed, her expression as icy as frost.

Beside her was Wang Taisheng, his face dark and grim.

On the right side sat Councilman Zhang from the Judgement Court, his face cold and silent.

Accompanying him was Deacon Nie, whose expression revealed palpable unease.

Aside from these familiar faces, there were also some new ones—likely family representatives and sect leaders who had hurried in from various regions.

The atmosphere grew stranger after Gu Jianlin's question.

After all, the ones missing were the most core members—the brightest and best heirs nurtured by each faction.

Disappearing without a trace—the situation was indeed odd.

The only one unperturbed was Tang Ling. She sat nearby, wearing a sun hat, a long white hoodie, and denim shorts. Her crossed, fair and shapely legs rested lightly as she wore black sneakers.

Despite the seriousness of the meeting, she was engrossed in her phone—a gacha game to be precise.

Repeatedly topping up one "648" after another, her actions carried a hint of mania.

"What about the traces at the scene? Was there any clue left behind?"

Gu Jianlin's voice was calm.

And when he raised his head, revealing his expressionless face for just an instant, the upper echelons present instantly felt an ominous premonition—as though the skill atop his head was actively charging.

The parrot perched on his shoulder screeched, "Oh my God, those were ten Fifth Rank Ascenders! Ten Fifth Rank Ascenders! If ten chickens had gone missing, you'd at least have some leads, right? But you all have absolutely nothing to show, huh?"

It wasn't intentional sarcasm; rather, this mission was truly absurd.

The first-tier members of the Omega Sequence were mostly above the age of twenty-five—all without exception were Fifth Rank Ascenders, skilled in combat and highly educated. Anyone advancing further in rank could easily become department heads.

Even Lu Zijin was just in her early thirties.

If such individuals couldn't handle the situation, sending in second-tier members would be nothing short of serving them up on a silver platter.

Chen Bojun coughed awkwardly as the high-level executives collectively fell silent.

"Currently, we are working with the divination team to deduce the reason for these disappearances."

Chen Bojun said, "And regarding this mission, we aren't sending the second-tier members to their deaths. Appropriate Mythical Weapons will be provided. In the event of a crisis, you'll be able to temporarily open the gates of a time-space corridor. Our higher-level forces will intervene to ensure your safety."

He paused, adding, "After all, Sixth Rank Ascenders are already near the threshold of the Holy Land. Too much activity within could destabilize the dimensions, leading to a host of problems."

Gu Jianlin asked again, "Why choose me?"

This time, Tang Ling—still staring at her phone—spoke in a cold yet melodious voice: "Because I don't trust anyone else."

Chen Bojun nodded, saying, "That's correct. With Omega's top ten members already missing, the rest mostly lack combat capabilities. Only Thunder wields Fifth Rank combat power, so we need to build a team centered around her. However, she's adamant that if you don't participate, she won't either."

The high-level executives exchanged glances and queried, "We'd like to know—why?"

Gu Jianlin was just about to respond when someone lightly kicked him.

"Help me clear the tower. The team is already set up—you just need to tap a few buttons."

Tang Ling casually shoved her phone in his direction, her porcelain-like face expressionless.

The high-level executives shifted their focus to this young girl.

"First of all, the Omega Sequence operates as a competitive sequence. We aren't a cohesive collective. I have no connection to the majority of people here. If all ten of them were to perish, I would become Sequence One."

Tang Ling said indifferently, "Why should I risk myself to save them?"

For a moment, Gu Jianlin didn't know what to say. Her reasoning was irrefutable.

Bang!

"Outrageous!"

A sharp-faced middle-aged man with white hair slammed the table, roaring, "What kind of nonsense is this? Why did the Ether Association cultivate you? Why did the Omega Sequence train you? To represent all of humanity in fighting against the Ancient God Clan! This is a shared endeavor for humanity, a cause demanding faith, fervor, and even sacrifice!"

"You have no sense of collective responsibility, no ounce of selflessness. People like you have no place on the battlefield. Your disdain for your comrades' lives reveals the selfishness and ugliness within your nature."

Angrily, he continued, "You've already been to the Immortal Palace and witnessed the nano warriors fighting on the front lines. Have you seen their determination to charge in despite carrying broken

bodies to rescue their comrades? Have you seen them weep over the corpses of their fallen allies? Indifference toward your companions will only take you so far."

The conference room plunged into silence, save for his outraged shouts.

"If you abandon your comrades today, then when you face danger tomorrow, they will abandon you."

The middle-aged man took a deep breath: "Thunder, I'm deeply disappointed in you."

Gu Jianlin mused that this man's yelling rivaled the class director back at Peak City Second High School.

He then lowered his head, fiddling with the phone as he silently cleared the tower and collected resources.

Tang Ling took the reprimanding in stride, her expression unchanging. She said dismissively, "Instructor Zhu, it's true that I respect those nano warriors I saw within the Immortal Palace. But respect doesn't mean I want to become one of them. If we're talking about contributing to the Human World, I'm more inclined to focus on ascending to Demigod status and killing a Peak Ancestor."

Her sharp, clear eyes turned piercing: "Rather than sacrificing myself for my comrades."

The high-level executives fell into silence.

Instructor Zhu was livid but had no rebuttal.

"To be clear, I understand I'm still young. Even if the top ten were wiped out, I likely wouldn't have enough time to earn the rank of king. But that's still no reason for me to take these risks. As I've said before, this is a competitive sequence."

Tang Ling paused, saying, "I need Gu Jianlin's profile to assess the danger level of this mission. If he doesn't participate, I won't either. The two of us are the strongest among the remaining forces. Moreover, his profile can substantially preserve our safety within the Immortal Palace."

Gu Jianlin lowered his head, continuing to play on the phone. Without making it obvious, he glanced at her.

This woman had sharp judgment.

Total confidence in one's capacity to even subdue a Peak Candle Dragon.

A high-level executive finally spoke up.

"But the divination team can also assess the danger level of this mission."

Councilman Zhang interjected, "They can assist similarly within the Immortal Palace."

Deacon Nie chimed in, "Exactly."

Han Jing crossed her arms, calmly commenting, "Can you really compare profile analysis to divination?"

Wang Taisheng slammed the table, shouting, "This is a major issue—not a game!"

Yet Tang Ling's gaze remained indifferent, her tone flat: "Indeed, they aren't the same. Divination doesn't provide the same reliability as profiles. Furthermore, those auxiliary members—can they fight?"

Gu Jianlin put away his phone, finally grasping her intentions.

This was extortion.

"If you want me to lead the team into the Immortal Palace to rescue people, I'm not entirely opposed. But I need compensation."

Tang Ling stated coldly, "Otherwise, why should we take the risk to save the first-tier members, only to have them survive and compete against us, taking our resources?"

After a long silence, Chen Bojun glanced at the expressions of the high-level attendees.

"What do you want?"

He asked with a faint smile.

Tang Ling scanned the gathered high-level figures, especially those from the Judgement Court and Night Watchers. Her voice carried an icy edge: "I want the SSS-level confidential strategy for Qilin Immortal Palace—the complete report that former Night Watcher member Gu Ci'an compiled during his investigation, as well as the Ether Association's secret archives regarding the history of Qilin Immortal Palace."

Gesturing toward the young man beside her, she said, "Both he and I will share it. The original documents, too."

Gu Jianlin's pupils contracted abruptly as the realization hit him.

Of course.

Old Gu would have had to submit his investigative findings to the Ether Association.

Given its status as the largest Ascender organization worldwide, it was inconceivable that the Ether Association knew nothing about Qilin Immortal Palace. Many secrets buried within the annals of history were likely in their possession.

Including the role Qilin Venerable played throughout history.

What kind of condition had He been in for over two thousand years?

And that enigmatic mask.

The clues—perhaps hidden in those very files.

For a fleeting moment, the temperature in the conference room seemed to drop.

Eventually, Chen Bojun spoke in a clipped tone: "You're saying you want the secrets of Qilin Immortal Palace."

The high-level executives' expressions shifted unpredictably.

Clearly, the initial exploration of Qilin Immortal Palace—presented as an opportunity to share in the spoils—was merely the appetizer.

The real treasure, though, lay in Qilin Immortal Palace's deepest secrets.

Namely, the legacy left by Qilin Venerable!

This was pursued by giants like the Ether Association and You Ying Group, as well as Ascender organizations worldwide.

It was something only a handful—the Peak Transcenders of the world—qualified to vie for.

"True, I might not be suited to compete against you or other Peak Transcenders."

Tang Ling paused, saying, "But even if I can skim just a little soup off the surface, it would still be worth it."

Gu Jianlin was left in awe, thinking, "That's so like you."

The high-level executives exchanged glances.

Ultimately, Chen Bojun spoke: "This matter requires consideration on our part."

"Take your time. But keep in mind, it's not just you who needs to consider—it's us as well."

Tang Ling grabbed the phone back and resumed her gacha game, speaking serenely: "If Gu Jianlin assesses this mission's risk level as overly high, even if you give us the strategy, we'll still abandon it without hesitation."

Gu Jianlin sensed that all eyes were now on him.

At this moment, Tang Ling kicked him lightly once more.

"Xiao Gu, what's your take?"

Chen Bojun locked eyes with him, his pupils subtly oscillating.

The high-level executives failed to notice his subtle signal.

But Gu Jianlin caught it with precision.

Director Chen was suggesting he start negotiation by rejecting.

Understood.

Charging up, process bar filling.

"Sorry—I decline."

Gu Jianlin stood up and said indifferently, "Thinking it over, I've realized that ever since my debut, I've been cleaning up after Ether Association's messes. To some people here, I'm still nothing but a Fallen's son—not exactly deserving to partake in something as honorable as this mission, let alone sacrifice myself for comrades showered in glory, am I?"

With that, he pulled his chair back and turned to leave.

"Unless the Judgement Court is willing to reopen my father's case."

Tang Ling put her phone away, stood, lifted her guitar case, her white hair unfurling, and followed him out.

The atmosphere in the conference room was suffocating.

Bang!

"Outrageous! A pair of absolute scoundrels!"

Chapter 292 - 154 Destiny Mud Tablet

After a long silence, Chen Bojun took a sip of hot water steeped with goji berries and sighed.

"Young people nowadays are truly becoming more and more reckless."

He chuckled angrily and cursed, "A mere Third Rank and Fourth Rank, daring to set their sights on the Qilin Venerable? Are they tired of living? That kind of forbidden power is so perilous that even I hesitate to dabble in it. If I'm not mistaken, those two youngsters are hoping to see the Destiny Mud Tablet, aren't they? Ha, how amusing."

At this moment, Wang Taisheng took a deep breath and said coldly, "But is there a possibility that it's not for themselves? That it's for the factions behind them? One comes from the Sword Tomb, and the other is a favored student of the King of Qing. Hmph, is this because the President's end is near, so they think it's time to stir up trouble?"

Han Jing glanced at him, speaking indifferently, "I'm not sure if the Catastrophes want to break the rules. While they, too, have only a few years left to live, I tend to believe that they're more interested in the Mystery of Immortality within the Immortal Palace. Yet, it can't be ruled out that they may also aim to support certain factions within the association right now.

Undoubtedly, the Catastrophes are the pillars that protect the Human World.

But because their power is excessively strong, it must be restricted.

Otherwise, any move they make could be a devastating thunderclap, unleashing Natural Disasters and Man-made Calamities.

A single thought from them can spark upheaval, potentially overturning the world.

Even if the Catastrophes have no intent to manipulate the world, there will always be those seeking to leverage their influence.

So, the previous generation's President once set a rule:

Catastrophes are forbidden from holding power.

Thus, the Silver King can establish the Sword Tomb, train students, and foster lineage.

But he must never attempt to let his people gain power within the association.

Similarly, should someone defy the King of Qing—even a high-ranking official in the association—if he's killed, it's his own fault for seeking death.

However, internally, there must never be a faction controlled by you within the Ether Association.

Two hundred years ago, during a particular upheaval, the Ether Association even activated the Heaven's Punishment Meteor.

This was done to balance out the influence of the Catastrophes.

That upheaval was initiated precisely because a Catastrophe sought to gain power.

That furious Instructor Zhu slammed the table, roaring angrily, "This is a threat! A naked threat, a despicable act of opportunism! I adamantly refuse to comply. We must uphold our principles and never compromise!"

"This is no longer a matter of compromise or not,"

Nie, the Deacon, turned his head, glancing at the councilman beside him.

Councilman Zhang, as the representative of the Judgement Court, had a status far above his own.

And he represented the will of the Saint.

"Let's wait for the results of the divination first."

Councilman Zhang spoke in a chilling voice, "Currently, we can't rule out the possibility that Thunder might just be fearmongering. If the divination proves that the mission's danger level isn't too high, we can simply send someone else into the Immortal Palace for the rescue. There's no need to insist on those two young individuals leading the team."

"After all, everyone knows that Mr. Han Ting and his party are still alive. I'm more inclined to believe they've merely encountered temporary difficulties and are not in immediate mortal danger, don't you agree?"

He snorted coldly, "Let's wait."

His words were reasonable.

Yet, the slight tremor in his hand betrayed his true thoughts.

After all, the top ten of the Omega Sequence were all individuals with monumental backgrounds.

Any slip-up could become a major catastrophe.

Especially considering that among them was the Saint's own grandson.

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The sea breeze swept across the deck, causing the large parasols to flutter slightly in the wind.

Gu Jianlin sat by the dining table, stirring mashed potatoes. "I haven't congratulated you yet on advancing to Fourth Rank."

Tang Ling responded with a soft "Mm," fiddling with the hot latte in front of her. "Mm, and you're now Third Rank."

She then tore open seven or eight packets of sugar and poured them all into her cup.

The surrounding waitstaff stared, dumbfounded.

The restaurant's music was lighthearted and melodious, as a slanting ray of twilight cast shimmering patterns on the wooden planks.

The restaurant at the Black Cloud City Base had been converted from a massive ancient ship. It was reportedly an artifact accidentally discovered during the underwater exploration of the Qilin Immortal Palace, estimated to be more than six hundred years old.

After thorough examination and verification revealed no significant scientific value, the ship was salvaged and remodeled. After expanding the interior of the cabins, the space became large enough to accommodate up to eight hundred people. The deck also offered open-air dining, and the elegant, refined décor with retro elements allowed patrons to enjoy scenic coastal views, making it especially popular among young people.

Many couples, after returning from the Immortal Palace, loved to come here for dates.

"Are you sure you still want to drink that?"

Gu Jianlin stared at the coffee with its astronomically high sugar content, deep in thought.

The parrot perched on his shoulder seemed equally flabbergasted.

"What's the matter?"

Tang Ling raised her sharp, strikingly beautiful eyes, her expression wary.

Then, as though nothing were out of the ordinary, she sipped the latte, her demeanor utterly relaxed.

"Nevermind, as long as you're happy."

Gu Jianlin was at a loss for words and could only change the subject. "So tell me, what exactly happened today?"

Tang Ling flicked her head of snow-white hair and, after a moment of contemplation, said, "Hmm, roughly speaking, when we were pioneering in the Immortal Palace, we entered a Living Burial Pit. There were many living corpses there, as well as a few surviving Ancient Ancestors. The combat strength on their side wasn't particularly formidable, but they were quite troublesome."

"According to our squad's division of labor, I stayed behind alone to handle dozens of living corpses while protecting the nano warriors from the Dawn Combat Sequence. Meanwhile, the ten of them went to chase down those Ancient Ancestors."

She paused for a moment. "But at that moment, I caught sight of a strange blood mist."

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Gu Jianlin frowned. "Blood fog?"

Tang Ling nodded. "In the blood fog, I saw something indistinct that made me feel apprehensive."

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment. "Something that can make ten Fifth Ranks disappear at once is indeed worth fearing."

Tang Ling pushed her chair back, crossing her long, pristine legs, her voice clear and melodious. "So this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ruthlessly extort the Judgement Court. Although Director Chen is the one in charge of the Omega Sequence, every one of his actions needs to be reported and approved."

"In other words, the real responsibility lies with the Judgement Court. Right now, the Judgement Court is powerful, but that's only because various forces are investing in them. What do you think will happen if the heirs of those forces die?"

She stirred her hot latte and said, "What's more, Li Hanting is also in their team."

Gu Jianlin hesitated for a second. "Li Hanting? Who was that again..."

Tang Ling glanced at him. "The one you mocked as useless trash. He's Saint Li Qingsong's direct grandson, the so-called genius supported by the Judgement Court within the Omega Sequence."

Oh, now he remembered.

Gu Jianlin wasn't in his best mental state today and couldn't think straight.

"The Judgement Court members value their lives very much. They must be praying right now, hoping the divination results come out soon. If the mission isn't very dangerous, they won't need us but can use someone else."

A trace of mockery curled the corners of Tang Ling's lips. She said, "But if we can prove that this mission is indeed dangerous enough, then they'll have no choice but to compromise with us. After all, their remaining forces are severely lacking. Without you and me, the others won't be much use."

"In that scenario, they would have to pick us."

As if recalling something, she added, "And we can further stir things up on the forums, amplifying the eerie and terrifying atmosphere. Nobody will dare take on this mission. I'm the only one from the Immortal Palace's first team to make it back, so if I act like I've been scared out of my wits, who would dare go?"

Gu Jianlin was dumbfounded.

"A woman's heart truly is the most venomous thing!"

The parrot squawked loudly.

With a thud, Gu Jianlin smacked it onto the dining table and stuffed a spoonful of mashed potatoes into its beak. "Shut up!"

Tang Ling glanced at the parrot and murmured, "This parrot matches you perfectly."

Gu Jianlin's face darkened. "What do you mean? I'm not, I didn't—"

Tang Ling pulled out her phone, opened a mobile game, and began topping up her account to draw more cards. "Do you not know? Your reputation and that of this bird have already spread far and wide. The Ether Association launched a mobile game called *Ancient God Chronicles*. You're the newly added Five-star SSR Human Rights Card, 'Chair Assassin Gu Jianlin.' You come with overpowered damage and taunts. If you max out your bonded pet, it unlocks a full-team taunt ability. I've already spent 24,000 to draw your card today."

Gu Jianlin felt his vision go black. "What the hell is this?"

Even the parrot was stunned.

At this moment, Tang Ling suddenly announced, "Got it!"

She handed him her phone, where the screen glowed with a brilliant golden light.

Gu Jianlin glanced at it and saw an anime-style youth in a dusty shirt and slim-fit pants, holding a chair and emanating an ominous ghostly aura.

Notably, a green-feathered parrot perched on his shoulder.

"Who did this?"

He couldn't help asking.

"Taixu, of course."

After pulling the card, Tang Ling's sharp, beautiful eyes softened with satisfaction as she gleefully upgraded and unlocked skills. Then she read the character's backstory. "Hmm, the backstory is quite realistic, almost enviable. In this game, I'm an SSR too, but clearly not as popular as you."

She commented, "Passive skill: Breaking Limits. Active skill: Be Kind to Others..."

Gu Jianlin rubbed his forehead, wondering if he could blow up Taixu's servers.

"Alright, back on topic."

Setting her phone aside, Tang Ling spoke earnestly. "I really need your help with this matter, which is why I sought you out for collaboration. As for the strategic dossier I want, the most valuable item must be the Destiny Mud Tablet."

Gu Jianlin frowned. "Destiny Mud Tablet?"

This was the first time he'd heard of it.

"Yes, it's a tablet passed down from the Ancient Times, inscribed with the secrets of the Ancient God Clan. No one knows how many fragments exist."

Speaking softly, Tang Ling explained, "The Destiny Mud Tablet is engraved with the mysterious script of the Ancient God Clan, which very few people can understand. Many have attempted to decipher it after obtaining it, only to go insane in the end. Legends say the tablet records the true history and secrets of the Ancient God Clan. Your father once retrieved a fragment of the tablet from the Qilin Immortal Palace and submitted it to the Ether Association for expert analysis."

She paused. "What role did the Qilin Venerable play in history? Which number Ancient Supreme was it to descend upon Earth? What authority did it wield? What has its state been over the past two thousand years?"

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes. These were all questions he desperately wanted answers to.

"The Qilin Venerable is shrouded in too much mystery. Perhaps only the Ether Association holds any secrets about it."

Tang Ling's gaze grew sharp. "And they obtained those secrets through their interpretations of the tablet. My mentor once told me that the content deciphered varies based on the individual. Some have even comprehended Forbidden Spells for inheritance paths from the tablet."

Gu Jianlin's heart was shaken. So that's how it was.

He had to admit, this was a crucial lead for him.

He wondered whether the files Old Gu had left behind contained interpretations of the Destiny Mud Tablet.

Knowing Old Gu's personality, they probably did.

"What I want is the original text, the actual Destiny Mud Tablet."

Tang Ling declared, "We can read the results of previous interpretations, but whatever we decipher ourselves doesn't necessarily have to be revealed to them. This could be our private treasure."

Gu Jianlin remarked, "For competition within the Omega Sequence, this is definitely critical."

"After all, if we're risking our lives to save people, we should get some benefits."

Tang Ling lifted her beautiful eyes and extended her delicate right hand toward him. "Now, I need your profiling."

Gu Jianlin stared at her hand, momentarily dazed.

"We can synchronize through a spiritual connection. Haven't you tried it before?"

Tang Ling said calmly, "By holding hands, our spirituality will exchange, allowing you to see images from my mind. There's plenty of time; you can view them repeatedly."

Gu Jianlin thought, So that's how it works. "What about the divination team?"

"I'm a bit shy, so I found a somewhat familiar Fifth Rank Witch to empathize with me."

Tang Ling said nonchalantly, "So it's up to your profiling to find the critical evidence."

Gu Jianlin understood and wordlessly took her soft hand.

Fingers intertwined.

Well, this was his first time holding a girl's hand. It felt nice.

Although she regularly practiced swordsmanship, her hands had no calluses. Must be the effect of secret medicines.

Gu Jianlin started drifting into random thoughts.

Just then, a familiar voice interrupted.

"Yo, Brother Lin. Fancy seeing you here!"

The chubby Cheng Youyu appeared right on cue.

Nie Xiangsi and Zhang Cheng were with him.

In the resulting silence, both Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling turned their heads at the same time.

When Cheng Youyu saw the white-haired girl, he blurted out, "Holy crap!"

Recognizing her, Zhang Cheng immediately bowed in fear. "Senior Sister Tang, good afternoon."

Even Nie Xiangsi gave a slight bow. "Senior Sister Tang."

Suddenly, all three gazes landed on their intertwined hands at the same time.

"Uh, you two are...?"

Instantly, the atmosphere turned awkward.

Like they had just interrupted a date!

Gu Jianlin found himself at a loss for an explanation.

Without batting an eyelid, Tang Ling grabbed her zither case, stood up, and moved to sit beside him, near the deck railing.

Evidently, she was indeed shy around strangers.

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Gu Jianlin noticed the peculiar expressions of the three people opposite him and explained, "We're trying to synchronize. Take a seat."

Tang Ling simply nodded, counting it as a greeting to the others.

"Oh dear, that's a bit embarrassing."

Cheng Youyu, thick-skinned as ever, immediately pulled his two companions down to sit and prepared to observe the situation.

"Synchronization? What's happening?"

Gu Jianlin thought for a moment and briefly summarized the situation.

Unexpectedly, Fatty waved his hand right after hearing him, "Ah, I don't think it's such a big deal. Though I'm not Omega, the rescue operation doesn't involve me, but setting the tone is my specialty. I'm practically the king of the forums. Relax, I'll go post tonight, and I guarantee no one will dare take on Judgement Court's task."

"In that regard, Fatty can be trusted. He has a way of making black seem white."

Zhang Cheng teased, "Even if the Divination Squad determines it's low-risk, it won't help."

Nie Xiangsi commented, "He has over six hundred sock puppet accounts."

Gu Jianlin was a bit stunned. He began to suspect that the infamous nickname "Chair Killing Maniac" was actually made up by Fatty.

But he had no evidence.

"Let's begin."

Tang Ling extended her delicate right hand towards him.

For some reason, it evoked the elegant and dignified grace of a queen extending her hand for a hand-kissing ceremony.

Gu Jianlin reached out and interlocked his fingers with hers once again.

"If you don't want me to see your memories, you can focus your thoughts on something else."

Tang Ling spoke in a calm tone.

Gu Jianlin murmured in response.

In that instant, their spiritualities began to exchange.

Gu Jianlin distinctly felt his own mental fluctuations stir, as an unfamiliar memory surged into his mind like a sea tide—a cascade of fragmented images flashing away in the deepest recesses of his consciousness.

The desolate abyss submerged beneath the ocean, fractured ridges, flowing molten lava.

The sky was filled with undulating seawater.

A decaying colossal ancient tree, with countless bronze Ancient Coffins hanging from its branches.

A thunderous rumble echoed as the coffin lids fell off; pale corpses opened their eyes. Their bodies were wrapped in Mummy Cloth, seemingly fused with their skin, covered in unsightly wrinkles.

Their blood-red eyes opened, their faces distorted into eerie smiles as they landed on the ground.

Crawling on all fours, these living corpses moved in grotesque, contorted postures, yet their speed was astonishing.

Gu Jianlin seemed to transform into a white-haired girl, reversing her grip to stab the Extreme Thunder Great Sword into the ground. With all her strength, she rotated the sword blade, releasing an explosion of crisscrossing Sword Qi!

"Run! We can't stay here any longer!"

The nano warriors roared—a group of over twenty burly soldiers clad in steel armor retreating swiftly with support.

They were carrying a pitch-black stone coffin, which trembled violently.

At the same time, distant explosions sounded, hinting at fierce combat raging in the distance.

Just then, an eerie red mist spread, swallowing everything.

Silence engulfed them; the entire world was stripped of sound.

Red mist, like blood, blanketed everything.

However, amidst the red mist, Gu Jianlin faintly sensed something flash by.

When the crimson mist dispersed, everything had vanished, leaving only faint traces on the ground.

The memory abruptly broke off!

The interlocked hands separated at that moment.

"Phew... Phew..."

Gu Jianlin exhaled deeply. Although looking into someone else's memories felt like watching a movie.

The oppressive immersion was uncannily vivid.

It could easily affect one's emotions.

"Are you alright?"

Tang Ling didn't ask about the outcome but first handed him a cup of cola, her gaze toward him tinged with peculiarity.

It was a straightforward gesture of concern, but the three other individuals appeared visibly shocked.

Cheng Youyu and Zhang Cheng exchanged glances, their expressions tinged with gossip.

Especially Nie Xiangsi, whose delicate sensitivity as a girl led her to widen her eyes in surprise.

Gu Jianlin took a few seconds to steady his emotions.

He shook his head and casually asked, "What did you see in that blood mist?"

Tang Ling replied calmly, "Nothing at all, just a vague sense of something being there. Whatever it was, it made me uneasy. If you couldn't see it clearly, you could look again."

"No need, I've already noted every detail."

Gu Jianlin took a gulp of the cola and asserted, "It was a person."

These words startled Tang Ling: "A person?"

"Although I was peering into your memories, I was observing through your first-person perspective. I could perceive your feelings. It was that sensation of being watched—someone was observing you all

along. Within that red mist, there must have been a person. That person looked at you in the fog before leaving."

Gu Jianlin paused briefly, adding, "But I noticed the tracks they left on the ground."

Tang Ling gazed deeply at him: "Can you profile that person with more specific information?"

"Profiling isn't as miraculous as you might think. At its core, it's about reasoning based on clues, often aided by strong intuition or a sixth sense. Like, for instance, the nano warrior passing by right now."

Gu Jianlin raised his hand, gesturing toward the group of soldiers jogging past outside the restaurant, and explained calmly, "The leader of the group—look at his muscular build, the sharp and efficient posture of his running, his facial structure, hair texture and volume. Then zoom in further: eye contact, wrinkles near the eyes, fingernail length, and so on."

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"I need to observe these external traits to deduce just what kind of person this is. The simplest are age and profession—guessing age from external conditions, and inferring profession based on physical characteristics. Profiling ordinary people is relatively straightforward because they typically don't hide themselves; there's little misleading information."

He said, "But in the Extraordinary World, some people, in order to conceal their identities, deliberately create a plethora of misleading traits. This indeed causes me trouble—it affects my intuition."

Tang Ling was silent for a moment. "So, you can't profile them?"

"Not necessarily."

Gu Jianlin said flatly, "It's a different story if Extraordinary Ability is employed."

Ever since he entered the Extraordinary World, or perhaps when spirituality manifested in his body, profiling had changed altogether.

It was as though his ability expanded its applicable range—not just profiling personality portraits.

He could even sketch their Extraordinary images.

"Do you have paper and a pen?"

Gu Jianlin asked.

Tang Ling froze slightly. "You're sure you want to sketch now?"

Gu Jianlin frowned and asked, "What's wrong?"

Tang Ling glanced at his face. "You don't seem to be in a great state right now."

Gu Jianlin waved his hand dismissively. "It's nothing."

Just the aftereffects of admiring a beauty, that's all.

"Quick, quick, quick—get the waiter to bring over some paper!"

Cheng Youyu said excitedly.

Zhang Cheng took off without saying anything and returned from the reception desk with paper and a pen.

Nie Xiangsi's eyes sparkled brightly.

From a young age, she had heard about the wonders of Professor Gu's profiling.

Now, she had the chance to witness it firsthand.

Gu Jianlin took the paper and pen. To kill time in the past, he had studied sketching for a while.

With the pencil scratching against the paper, a simple sketch was completed.

"Here, this is the person."

He paused. "The expression is drawn purely based on intuition—if you ask for reasoning, I can't give you any. But from the way he looks at you, it feels like he's smiling."

Tang Ling accepted the sketch. Her sharp eyes suddenly turned piercingly intense.

The drawing depicted a man wearing a white robe, with long, pale hair. His facial features were somewhat blurred, revealing only a bizarre smile. Yet behind him was a different figure.

A figure carrying over a dozen rusty iron swords on his back, enveloped entirely in chilling Sword Qi, his body scarred with relentless sword marks, vast beyond imagination. Coiling around him was a pitch-black flood dragon.

"He's exclusively looking at you—it's unclear whether he knows you."

Gu Jianlin paused. "Sword Sect Path, at least Sixth Rank."

Tang Ling studied the sketch for a long time before carefully folding it and placing it in her pocket.

"Understood, thank you."

She reminded him, "If nothing unexpected happens, the Ether Association higher-ups will give us a reply soon. By then, they're likely to select candidates during your second-tier training session. Hmm... Pay close attention to Instructor Wan Rentu—he's already terminally ill, and you should know why."

Gu Jianlin thought to himself that he obviously did; otherwise, he wouldn't have pushed himself this far.

"By the way, I hear you subdued the Little Princess."

Tang Ling said each word deliberately, "Nicely done."

With that, she picked up her violin case and turned to leave.

Gu Jianlin turned to watch her departing figure, lost in thought.

The man in the sketch—if nothing went awry—this woman recognized him.

That's why she didn't question the authenticity of the profile; she simply took it and left.

"Brother Lin."

Cheng Youyu teased, "You still claim there's nothing between you and Senior Sister Tang?"

Gu Jianlin frowned. "What do you mean?"

Cheng Youyu smirked. "Don't play dumb! We all saw it."

Zhang Cheng, his expression full of admiration, gave a thumbs-up. "She's personally chosen by Catastrophe·Silver King as a successor. Don't be fooled by her current Fourth Rank—Extreme Thunder wasted a lot of her time. But now, it's finally her moment to surge forward. Believe it or not, within three months, she'll reach Fifth Rank."

"Senior Sister Tang is incredibly aloof—whether in her white-haired phase or red-haired phase, she's hard to approach. But she seems different with you; she doesn't even mind physical contact."

Nie Xiangsi murmured, "Also, she almost never shows care for anyone."

Gu Jianlin stared at the glass of cola pushed in front of him and fell into deep thought.

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That night, Tang Ling stood on the apartment balcony, staring at the sea with her violin case on her back.

"The information has already been reported to the teacher."

Bai Simu sat on the couch, watching a nighttime variety show, her voice gentle and pleasant: "Junior Sister, don't overthink this matter, and there's no need for you to face him directly. He's someone you cannot handle."

Tang Ling hummed in acknowledgment. "I understand."

"Mm, just keep your emotions in check and get Junior Sister Mu back—that's all that matters."

Bai Simu said softly, "By the way, the teacher is quite interested in that boy."

Tang Ling turned her head slightly, startled.

Bai Simu glanced at her and continued, "Gu Jianlin, like you, has already mastered the Breathing Technique. In less than a month, he's reached Third Rank. That kind of speed is truly astounding, and his profiling ability is immensely valuable. Unfortunately, being cursed by Fusang Divine Palace means he'll only live to forty."

"Still, his talent is undeniably remarkable—so much so that even the teacher is tempted."

She paused. "If possible, the teacher permits you to interact with him more."

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Tang Ling let out a soft "oh," her delicate, porcelain face showing no expression: "Teacher is thinking of..."

"After all, he happens to be at the Third Rank—this is the only opportunity for him to transition."

Bai Simu said, "If he's willing to switch to the Sword Sect Path, Teacher can take him in as the final disciple."

Tang Ling's gaze was doubtful: "Even Teacher can have a change of heart."

Years ago, when Teacher took her in as a disciple, he'd said she would be his last student.

But she wouldn't mind having another junior disciple.

The boy seemed to be three years younger than her.

"If you knew how long it took him to meditate, it wouldn't seem strange."

Bai Simu said in a haunting tone, "Ten seconds."

The fingers gripping the iron rail of the balcony tightened instinctively.

"Is he worth bringing in?"

She frowned and asked.

"It's not entirely without hope, considering the King of Qing... is known to be a lunatic."

Bai Simu said, "That boy likely doesn't yet know what the King of Qing has truly done."

Tang Ling went silent for a moment, then murmured a sound of acknowledgment.

"However, we don't fully understand the boy's character yet."

Bai Simu said softly, "What did you see in his memories?"

Tang Ling didn't answer. She recalled the scene she had witnessed during synchronization.

An empty room.

Desolate moonlight casting shadows across the bed.

The boy sat on the edge, staring blankly out the window.

"Nothing much. I'm leaving."

Since Teacher had already confirmed matters on his end, she needed to submit the sketch to the higher-ups.

She left the apartment, brushing past diverse investigators and nano warriors, heading toward the base's office building.

However, upon reaching the first floor, she was stopped.

Councilman Zhang sat on the sofa with a stern expression, dressed in a white suit, his gaze sharp.

Nie, the Deacon, stood by his side, his face serious.

There was also a vaguely familiar member of the Omega Sequence.

A young man with blond hair and blue eyes wore a black wizard's robe and held a crystal ball in his hand.

Omega Sequence, codename: Nightmare, ranked twelfth.

Behind him stood three Guardians, all Spirit Medium Path users.

Among them was Li Yijie, the investigator who was toyed with the substitute poison during the Yan family's cleanup mission.

"Something you need?"

Tang Ling said expressionlessly.

Councilman Zhang raised his head, fixing her with a cold gaze: "Thunder, I'm here for one reason only—to inform you. The divination group's results are out. As you mentioned, it is indeed dangerous, but not dangerous to the extent that death is guaranteed. If you're willing to participate, we will do everything possible to ensure your safety."

"Including the demands you raised; after deliberation, we've agreed to compromise."

He said, "You'll be given access to the strategy and the Destiny Mud Tablet, but the condition is you must be alone."

Nie, the Deacon, added, "Don't get too close to Gu Jianlin. It will only hinder your future. You need to understand, his father was the orchestrator of the Blood Moon Slaughter Incident. To this day, we don't know what secrets he carries. Moreover, with the King of Qing's protection, our hands are tied in investigating further. And, as a descendant of the Sword Tomb, you should know what kind of person the King of Qing is and the dangerous ideologies he might instill in him."

To put it simply, countless buffs had already stacked on that boy.

A loud *snap* echoed.

A painting unfolded before them—a canvas smeared with red paint.

Red mist, indistinct shadows, and an elusive gaze.

Tang Ling recognized it—it was the same blood mist she had once seen in the Immortal Palace.

"The divination results are in."

Nightmare smiled. "According to Taixu's assessment, the mission indeed reaches S-rank danger levels, but it's far from being beyond our capability to handle, isn't it?"

Tang Ling stared at the painting, suddenly lost in silence.

"Gu Jianlin said one thing that's quite accurate."

She replied coolly, "Trash should stick to doing what trash does best."

Her words stunned Councilman Zhang and Nie, the Deacon, with a sudden change in expression.

Nightmare froze: "What did you say?"

The Guardians behind him also showed signs of displeasure.

Snap.

"Sixth Rank, Sword Sect Path, a Divine Servant from the Candle Dragon Clan."

Tang Ling slapped a copy of the sketch onto the table with a sharp tone: "This is the profile Gu Jianlin created. Tell me, does this sound like an S-rank mission? Who among you will take this person on? And with what resources do you plan to protect my safety? Anyone can draft grand promises—can you follow through? As I've said before, I have only one condition."

She added firmly: "My team must include Gu Jianlin. Without him, I won't go."

It wasn't because she particularly liked the boy.

Rather, compared to him, the people before her seemed utterly unreliable.

Alright, perhaps it was also because he was exceptionally competent.

In short, comparisons were brutal.

Councilman Zhang and Nie, the Deacon, turned their gaze toward the painting, their pupils contracting sharply for a moment.

Nightmare stared in disbelief: "Impossible, absolutely impossible! We couldn't divine anything, so how could a mere profile reveal such information? This isn't real—it's fabricated! It's nonsense!"

The Spirit Medium Path Guardians were equally shocked and furious.

After not sleeping for forty-eight hours, all their divination efforts had only yielded a vague silhouette.

Now they were told someone's profile had directly confirmed the rank and clan of the opponent.

It was an outright insult to them.

"If I were you, I wouldn't make a spectacle of myself here. It's disgraceful."

Tang Ling pointed at the person depicted in the sketch and said icily: "The person in the painting is my great-grandfather. Gu Jianlin has never seen him, let alone knows of his existence. Tell me, how could such details be forged?"

Councilman Zhang and Nie, the Deacon, looked visibly uneasy.

Because they too recognized the man in the painting.

The crucial point was—this was derived from profiling!

Gu Jianlin's profiling turned out to be terrifyingly precise?

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Moonlight cold and bleak, ocean winds howling.

Taihua stood on the shoreline, gazing at the pitch-black sea in silence.

A sketch flew away in the wind, flipping midair.

"Meng Hebo, Tang Zijing... they've both become Divine Servants of the Candle Dragon Clan."

She spoke softly: "How fascinating. It seems the speculation from back then wasn't wrong. Eight years ago, the Nightmare Master defected, and someone surely aided them from the shadows. If that's the case, let's investigate further."

Chen Bojun responded respectfully, "Understood, Teacher."

He asked, "What about Xiao Tang and Xiao Gu's requests?"

Taihua chuckled coldly: "Approve them."

Chapter 297 - 156 Kindness and Love

The air grew warmer as May approached, and the faint sound of cicadas echoed through the park.

It seemed you could already catch a scent of summer in the air.

Gu Jianlin sat at the stone table in the courtyard, gazing outward, where he saw many young people passing by on the streets. Without exception, they were investigators from various districts, occasionally joined by the prodigious seeds of the Omega Sequence.

The girls mostly had switched to skirts and hot pants, while there was nothing much to look at regarding the guys.

Nano warriors patrolled the streets armed with guns and flashlights.

The wailing sirens of ambulances pierced the night, ringing out without pause.

Now and then, medical personnel hustled past with blood-soaked stretchers. Most of the injured were nano soldiers from the Dawn Combat Sequence, with the occasional investigator mixed in.

"Looks like the Qilin Immortal Palace is truly treacherous."

He muttered softly.

Uncle Mu, seated beside him, sighed and said, "Every time the Ancient God Realm manifests, it's usually like this. Especially with such a Supreme-level Ancient God Realm—during the initial exploration, lives are often the primary currency. You send in over ten military divisions, and in the end, only two or three make it out alive."

"But this work is unavoidable. After all, someone has to conquer it. Typically, it's us in the Nightwatch Department who go in first to survey and map out strategies. Once that's done, the soldiers of the Dawn Combat Sequence enter as pathfinders, opening up the Ancient God Realm and modifying its environment to facilitate the establishment of the Heavenly Person Realm."

"And they'll often garrison themselves there. Sometimes, they stay for years. For you in the Omega Sequence, an Immortal Palace might represent training and opportunity. But for them, it's duty."

Gu Jianlin felt stirred inside.

"The peace of this world often relies on someone carrying the burden silently."

Uncle Mu's tone carried a hint of helplessness and regret as he said, "Many soldiers have only two opportunities in their lifetime to see their families: once when they're gravely injured and hospitalized, and the other when they die."

Gu Jianlin thought to himself, no wonder there were so many soldiers' families gathered here.

"Yet, for many, the Ancient God Realm also represents a land of hope."

Uncle Mu sighed and said, "Did you know? Many Fallen or Unclean individuals who find life unbearable in the real world choose to settle in the Ancient God Realm and live there."

Gu Jianlin was stunned. "That's an option?"

"Of course. The Ancient God Realm is vast, beyond even the absolute control of the Ether Association. They just need to find a relatively safe location, harvest resources, hunt living corpses or monsters, and trade with outsiders who enter for the supplies they need to survive. Places like the Fusang Divine Palace, Yun Mengze, and Buzhou Mountain."

Uncle Mu said meaningfully, "You can think of the Ancient God Realm as another world entirely. In fact, I once considered living there too. But most of these people just want to escape the fighting and killing."

Gu Jianlin suddenly understood. "No wonder so many people are gathering here in Peak City. Some are waiting to stockpile enough medicine to hide somewhere, while others are waiting for the Qilin Immortal Palace to be explored so they can move in and live there?"

"Exactly. There are also certain special forces in this world that exclusively do business within the Ancient God Realm. You'll encounter them eventually. When dealing with them, exercise caution."

Uncle Mu added, "Besides that, it all depends on your luck. Just avoid running into Ancestors or the Primordials, and you shouldn't face too much trouble. Especially be wary of the Ancient Ancestors—most of them ventured into the Realm hundreds or thousands of years ago, pursuing longevity or evolution. Many were once legends in history."

Gu Jianlin commented, "They don't sound easy to deal with."

"Not entirely. In their era, the Ancient Ancestors were celebrated cultivators, but after thousands of years of clinging to life, most of their Rank will decline. Only a rare few retain their original power under specific conditions, and those individuals may as well be considered Divine Servants."

Uncle Mu paused briefly in thought. "If you encounter someone like that..."

Gu Jianlin waited silently for the rest. Maybe there was actually a way to handle them.

"Then you can only accept your bad luck."

Uncle Mu said this with a stern expression.

Gu Jianlin held back a laugh. "Uncle Mu, you sounded just like Old Gu for a moment there."

Unlucky.

"Haha, after spending so many years with him, you can't help but pick up a few things."

Uncle Mu said, "But those Ancient Ancestors are just relics of a bygone era. Their minds aren't all that sharp, and they're completely oblivious to how much the times have changed. That goes for many of the Ancient God Clans too. Back when your dad and I ventured into Buzhou Mountain, we fought an Ancient God Seed to the edge of desperation. In the end, we ran out of spirituality, and the Ancient God Seed snatched our last-ditch survival weapon—a massive alchemical nuclear magnetic rocket launcher designed by the Ether Association. A direct hit from that thing could obliterate even Sixth Rank Dragon Slayers on the spot."

As he spoke, Uncle Mu's expression turned strange. "The Ancient God Seed ended up reversing the missile's barrel at the last moment."

Gu Jianlin asked curiously, "And how did you survive?"

Uncle Mu waved his hand dismissively, "Oh, because that Ancient God Seed managed to blow itself up."

Gu Jianlin rubbed his forehead. "Are you saying it accidentally destroyed itself with your weapon?"

Uncle Mu nodded.

Gu Jianlin fell silent.

What else could he say? That was absurd beyond belief.

"That's why when engaging with these strange entities, you must exploit this kind of weakness—use the information gap. You're a modern person; your thinking should be more flexible than theirs. But at the same time, beware—you know less about the past than they do, and they might use things from the old era to catch you off guard."

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Uncle Mu said, "There's nothing more I can teach you. The ecological environment of each Ancient God Realm is different. During tomorrow's training, Instructor Wan will provide you with relevant knowledge. For example, the characteristics of various deformed monsters, how to identify the ancient ancestors of different dynasties, and some recognition of ancient texts and totems."

"Especially this point, since you've been in the Extraordinary World for a short time, you're in the dark about most of this knowledge, so you must listen carefully. If you really can't remember, then store it in your phone and bring several portable chargers in with you."

His expression became serious: "Otherwise, you'll suffer a big loss."

Gu Jianlin pondered: "Lesson learned."

Uncle Mu grunted in agreement, then suddenly said, "I heard you and Tang Ling gave the higher-ups a hard time again today? Because of the mission to rescue those ten Omega members? You two are really lawless."

Gu Jianlin was taken aback: "How did you know?"

"I heard it from the little nurse next door."

Uncle Mu said with a stern face: "The whole building heard Instructor Zhu's roar."

Gu Jianlin thought, what's this got to do with me, I've always been kind to others.

It was Tang Ling who angered people like that.

"You two, you're too arrogant; it's not good for your social relations."

Uncle Mu hesitated for a moment: "Especially now that factional fighting is intense, one of you is a student of the Silver King, the other of the King of Qing. Too many people are watching you."

Gu Jianlin thought that's indeed the case.

However, he also just found out today that Thunder's teacher is also a Catastrophe.

"Many of the Silver King's students have died young, and the King of Qing's students haven't been without deaths either."

Uncle Mu said: "When choosing teammates, be cautious."

Gu Jianlin thought for a moment: "If nothing goes wrong, tomorrow night we'll team up and enter the Immortal Palace to execute the rescue mission. Tang Ling thinks that the right to choose team members should be in our own hands."

"Hmm, reasonable."

"Uncle Mu, do you have any thoughts?"

"If it's about choosing teammates, there is indeed someone good."

"Who?"

"The Little Princess."

Gu Jianlin was struck as if by lightning: "Her?"

This answer was really unexpected.

That mischievous kid indeed has good combat strength.

But her brain is a bit problematic.

Besides, she's just a twelve-year-old brat.

"Though the Little Princess is mischievous, do you think with her intelligence she could betray her teammates?"

Uncle Mu said faintly.

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment: "It seems indeed not."

"Be more confident, remove the 'it seems'.

Uncle Mu said meaningfully: "That kid lacks discipline, but if you can tame her, she'll definitely be a great asset. No need to sugarcoat, do you know how many secret medicines and how much weaponry she has? Not to mention, just look at her use of poison, you barely managed to edge out a win."

Gu Jianlin once again fell into thought.

Since she's the President's granddaughter, she must have plenty of good stuff on her.

"Moreover, I'll tell you a secret. Don't tell anyone."

Uncle Mu said in a low voice: "Guess why the President dares to let her join the Omega Sequence?"

Gu Jianlin seemed to think of something: "Are you saying?"

"Yes, the Little Princess won't die. Since the President dares to send her, it means she will definitely be safe. Trust the President, he can spar with Candle Dragon Venerable."

Uncle Mu said: "Unless the Little Princess threatens the President's reign."

Heh heh.

Gu Jianlin thought that's out of the question in this lifetime.

Better luck next life.

Just then, a message popped up on his WeChat.

Tang Ling: "Good news, the Judgement Court has compromised. The top-secret strategy of Qilin Immortal Palace and the Destiny Mud Tablet will be interpreted for us before entering the Immortal Palace. Prepare well tonight and get some rest."

Gu Jianlin was surprised and replied: "So fast?"

Tang Ling: "Because your profile left them speechless."

Gu Jianlin: "I thought they'd say my profile was fabricated."

Tang Ling: "Of course not, because they... recognized the person from your profile."

Gu Jianlin was taken aback.

Tang Ling: "That's my great-grandfather, Tang Zijing."

Gu Jianlin thought, no wonder.

In Thunder's memory, that person in the blood mist had been watching her.

All top ten Omega had disappeared, only she survived.

Thinking logically, the person in the blood mist must have some connection with her, otherwise, it doesn't make sense.

Gu Jianlin remembered something and placed the sketch on the stone table, curiously asking: "Uncle Mu, you once told me a taboo when we were in the Forbidden Zone. That is, blood mist should not be touched?"

Uncle Mu saw the sketch and was slightly stunned: "This is?"

Gu Jianlin explained: "Tang Ling said this person is her great-grandfather, Tang Zijing."

Uncle Mu was taken aback: "I see..."

Gu Jianlin asked: "Do you know him?"

Uncle Mu shook his head: "To say I know him would be an exaggeration; I've only heard about his legend. Back then, he was still the head of the Tang Family, a high-standing high-level Sword Sect about to break through to the Holy Land Level. Before the Ether Association located the Qilin Immortal Palace, he inexplicably went mad, massacred his clan members, and then fled to the East Sea. We were also tasked to look for his traces while on a mission in the East Sea."

He exclaimed: "I didn't expect Tang Zijong to have entered the Immortal Palace, and if your drawing isn't wrong, he seems to have become a Divine Servant of the Candle Dragon Clan?"

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"Hmm."

Gu Jianlin stared at the painting. "Don't you think this is a bit of a coincidence?"

Uncle Mu glanced at him. "What are you saying?"

"The Nightmare Master also went mad around the time the Qilin Immortal Palace appeared, slaughtering companions, performing sacrifices, and then disappearing. Years later, when the Nightmare Master returned, they had already become a Divine Servant of the Candle Dragon Clan."

Gu Jianlin enunciated each word slowly: "These two events are eerily similar."

Uncle Mu fell silent.

This old man, on the surface, seemed to have moved on, but deep down he had never forgotten what had happened back then.

"The intelligence I have says that back then the Nightmare Master became a Divine Servant for the Candle Dragon Clan to escape the control of a certain organization. The principle involved the Ancient God's control over Divine Servants, allowing the Nightmare Master to break free of that secret organization."

Gu Jianlin mouthed quietly, "Then, could it be the same for Tang Zijing? And both of them share another startling similarity—they were both breaking through a major rank threshold."

This was his deduction, based on the intelligence provided by Hasegawa Shinichi.

Without prior intelligence and information, this conclusion would have been impossible.

Uncle Mu remained silent for a long time before he finally muttered in a low voice, "It's possible. I can smell a conspiracy brewing."

Gu Jianlin stood up and said seriously, "I'll investigate it while I enter the Immortal Palace this time."

Uncle Mu looked at the young man earnestly. "Kid, thank you for your hard work."

"It's no big deal. Since Old Gu is no longer here, I'll finish what he couldn't."

Gu Jianlin prepared to leave. "It's late, so I won't bother you anymore."

Uncle Mu quickly got up. "Let me see you out."

He hesitated for a moment, then reminded, "Xiao Gu, I'm just a useless old man now; I can't stop you. But please, be careful. There's no matter more important than life and death. Otherwise, I won't be able to face your father down below."

"Understood."

Gu Jianlin suddenly asked, "Uncle Mu, have you all been treated well here? Nobody's been bullying you, right?"

The hospital had injured personnel from various factions, including their family members.

Especially those from the Judgment Court, who tended to have extreme views.

Uncle Mu and the others might easily encounter scornful treatment here.

"Not at all."

Uncle Mu replied warmly, "Don't worry so much; we've been doing fine here."

Gu Jianlin replied with a faint hum and then turned to leave.

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Ji Xiaoyu felt like her reputation was about to be destroyed beyond repair.

She had ascended to Fourth Rank Mad King at the age of twelve, boasting an illustrious family background so astonishing it was almost obscene. She prided herself on having the demeanor of a Great Emperor, swearing she would never yield to anyone nor let others trample over her.

That was until she met the Chair Killer.

Only then did she understand the true meaning of brutality and ruthlessness.

Now, she'd been hung here for a full day and a half, strung up like a roasted suckling pig with all four limbs bound. To make matters worse, the ropes were alchemy weapons designed to suppress her spirituality, reducing her to a mere ordinary human.

Strictly speaking, these restraints were usually reserved for living corpses and Ancient Ancestors.

What utter humiliation!

A full day and a half had passed, and still, no one had brought her down.

Every passerby took out their phone to snap pictures of her and then uploaded them to forums.

Some even went a step further—they came over to take selfies with her.

The place had practically turned into a tourist attraction.

And the majority of these people were foes who had been tormented by her pranks.

She felt nothing but disgrace.

Rage.

But there wasn't a single thing she could do about it.

The Guardians and her subordinates stood in a neat line nearby, none daring to rescue her.

This bunch was nothing but ungrateful traitors!

Even with her grandmother's Golden Phoenix Feather hanging over them like a threat, they still stood idly by.

Once she regained her freedom, she swore she'd kick out every single one of them!

"Mmm! Mmm-mmm! Mmm mmm mm!"

Ji Xiaoyu howled like a banshee once again—her only way to protest for now.

The Guardians and subordinates simultaneously covered their ears.

Just then, Gu Jianlin strolled over from the street, yawning with a parrot perched on his shoulder.

Everyone's eyes lit up—finally, he'd arrived!

Ji Xiaoyu's sparkling eyes widened too, filled with a mix of hope and trepidation.

She hoped this demon might unexpectedly show some mercy and let her down.

But deep down, she feared he might unleash more of his beastly wrath and continue persecuting her.

"Everyone's here," Gu Jianlin remarked, scanning the crowd before glancing at the troublemaker dangling from the lamppost.

He then slouched onto the sofa, pulling out the Golden Phoenix Feather from his pocket and slapping it onto his palm.

Everyone's hearts sank; clearly, this wasn't over yet.

Gu Jianlin glanced up and locked eyes with the mischievous brat dangling from the lamp post.

"Done reflecting?"

He stated blankly, "Say sorry, and I'll let you down."

The parrot perched on his shoulder chimed in, "Amitabha. Life is suffering; repentance leads to salvation."

Much to his surprise, even after hanging for so long, Ji Xiaoyu remained feisty, wildly flailing her limbs and glaring fiercely like a little beast. Her muffled cries spoke volumes.

She seemed intent on saying, "Beastmen will never bow to slavery!"

The parrot snapped, "This naughty monkey is beyond saving."

Gu Jianlin was momentarily at a loss—he had zero experience dealing with cheeky kids.

He turned to the side, looking somewhat worn out.

The middle-aged man nearby stood awkwardly, along with the line of punished minions.

"Has this brat always been like this?"

Gu Jianlin asked.

Everyone responded, "Yes."

Gu Jianlin shook his head. "Then there's nothing we can do."

At that moment, the silence was interrupted by a faint, gurgling noise.

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On the streetlight, Ji Xiaoyu's face turned red instantly, extremely embarrassed.

Gu Jianlin understood—it turned out she was hungry.

He immediately took out his phone and ordered a meal delivery service through the Deep Space Network.

At the Black Cloud City Base, services for Omega Sequence members were comprehensive. Within less than ten minutes after placing the order, the server brought a variety of fresh dishes to the door. Each dish was exquisite and delicious, served on silver platters and covered to maintain their warmth.

To tame the brat, Gu Jianlin directly set up a wooden table in the yard.

Shark fin soup with three delicacies, chestnut chicken, saucy carp, stir-fried tripe, roasted liver tips.

The aroma was mouthwatering and hung densely in the air.

Gu Jianlin had already eaten dinner and wasn't about to pick up his chopsticks. Instead, he closed his eyes and began meditating.

All he could think about was the scene of the King of Qing demonstrating combined skills earlier.

Gulp.

A sound of swallowing saliva.

Ji Xiaoyu was clearly famished, her stomach audibly growling.

The Guardians and underlings exchanged puzzled looks—this was truly torture.

After a long pause, Gu Jianlin opened his eyes and said calmly, "Your grandmother isn't coming to save you. She gave me the Golden Phoenix Feather, probably as her way of asking me to discipline you. Now you have two choices: either go head-to-head with me, or we switch things up and coexist peacefully."

"If you don't provoke me, I won't bother you either."

He paused. "But on one condition—you have to apologize."

On the streetlight, Ji Xiaoyu stared at him intently.

To be precise, she was staring at the feast on the table, her eyes practically sparkling.

An expression akin to a ravenous wolf.

But she was still mumbling incoherently, her face plastered with the classic "Beastmen will never bow" look.

"If you agree to apologize, I'll let you down."

Gu Jianlin locked eyes with her: "Our grievances will be written off, and you won't have to continue embarrassing yourself up there, right?"

Ji Xiaoyu fell silent.

The motto: Beastmen will never bow.

Unless... food and lodging are provided!

At that moment, it seemed like she made a monumental decision, letting out a muffled noise and reluctantly nodded her head.

The Guardians and underlings wore utterly perplexed expressions.

True to his word, Gu Jianlin said, "Alright then, let her down."

At this, the underling's expressions shifted to something even stranger.

The Guardians went to cut the rope but smirked inwardly.

The Little Princess wasn't someone to deal with so easily.

She might have agreed superficially, but the moment she regained access to her spirituality, she would undoubtedly bolt.

However, he wouldn't offer a friendly warning.

After all, what Gu Jianlin was doing put them in a tough position as well.

Because of the Golden Phoenix Feather, they didn't dare interfere.

However, afterward, the Little Princess would surely settle scores with these traitors.

No way to win in this situation.

As expected, when the sound of cutting the rope echoed.

A glimmer of cunning flashed in Ji Xiaoyu's eyes.

In the instant the rope broke, she landed nimbly, put both hands on her hips, and burst into laughter.

"Haha, farewell, cage!"

She shouted arrogantly, "Apologize? Maybe in my next life!"

Boom—Qi Force exploded.

Ji Xiaoyu turned on her heel and sprinted away.

Gu Jianlin sneered inwardly, making no move to pursue.

In the next moment: bang!

A cloud of toxic gas exploded, completely engulfing the petite figure.

Ji Xiaoyu let out yet another miserable scream and stumbled out of the toxic cloud, tumbling and crawling, whimpering, "You despicable villain! You actually... ambushed me!"

The Guardians and underlings: "..."

Gu Jianlin sighed calmly.

Having learned from the last attempt, how could he not prepare for it?

To deal with a brat, you have to outsmart her.

Before coming here, he had already laid a trap on the way using a Poison Bag crafted by this little troublemaker.

If Ji Xiaoyu tried to escape, she'd inevitably fall victim to it all over again.

Sure enough, brats aren't too bright.

Stepped on the landmine again, didn't you?

"Amitabha, may peace prevail."

The parrot crooned mournfully, "Such sinful behavior, why bother?"

Gu Jianlin had no intention of persuading with reason—the so-called apology-for-freedom deal was nothing but bait.

He knew the brat wouldn't comply, resisting rebelliously at the first opportunity.

Otherwise, what reason would he have to use this brat as practice for combined skills?

The next moment, Ji Xiaoyu stumbled back into the courtyard, her gaze filled with vengeful fury.

Gu Jianlin turned his head toward the parrot and said, "Go, call Lin Wanqiu over to prepare for healing."

The parrot rolled its eyes. "Sins against humanity."

And with that, it flapped its wings and flew off.

Gu Jianlin remained unsmiling as he grabbed a folding chair and raised his left index finger.

A cross-shaped flash of black light condensed at his fingertip.

Boom!

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At the Black Cloud City military base, there were two instructors—one head, one deputy.

Instructor Wan Rentu served as the chief instructor, responsible for training Omega Sequence members.

Instructor Zhu oversaw all association members while also managing the base's order, discipline, and safety issues.

Tonight, it was destined to be a sleepless one.

The base reverberated endlessly with booming sounds, red alert signals engulfing the security room.

It resembled a full-blown enemy attack.

Instructor Zhu stared at the room painted red with flashing lights, his head pounding like a drum.

Tonight alone, he had received over two hundred complaint calls.

The phone had rung so much it burst; out of frustration, he cut the line altogether.

"Damn brats! Are these two planning to rebel?"

Instructor Zhu roared furiously, waving his huge hand as he led the security patrol team into action.

When they arrived at the Omega Sequence apartment complex, everyone fell silent.

Ruins stretched as far as the eye could see, littered with rubble and fractured steel beams, dust swirling in the sea breeze.

A large portion of the buildings lay destroyed, surrounded by broken walls and remnants.

Only one sofa remained intact, upon which a black-haired teenager sat nonchalantly.

Basking in Holy Light, he looked utterly composed.

Beside him sprawled a brat beaten so severely her own mother would hardly recognize her, lying belly-down with visibly swollen hips.

She slumped lifelessly, gazing emptily, her expression numb.

As if questioning existence itself.

Lin Wanqiu's hands emitted Holy Light, her face still wearing an awkward yet polite smile.

The Little Princess's Guardians and underlings stood by, at a complete loss.

"What's going on here? Starting a rebellion?"

Instructor Zhu's rage almost erupted through the roof as he bellowed, "If you want to fight, take it to the training grounds! This is deliberate destruction of public property! Do you have any idea how much it costs to rebuild these apartments?"

At this point, Gu Jianlin lifted his gaze and said nonchalantly, "The President entrusts me with babysitting their Ji Family. You should go ask the President for the repair funds instead of bothering me and this little brat here."

Such a flippant remark left Instructor Zhu speechless, unable to retort—he could only fume uselessly.

Gu Jianlin turned his head toward the Guardians and underlings.

"Any Poison Bags left?"

He asked.

Everyone shook their heads.

"Gone?"

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes, seemingly displeased.

Seeing his change in expression, one of the Guardians hastily spoke, "There are no more Poison Bags, but the Little Princess's secret manual is still intact."

A Guardian swiftly pulled out a small booklet from his pocket and respectfully handed it over.

After an entire night, none of them dared to underestimate this teenager anymore.

This guy might as well be a werewolf.

Even fiercer than a savage man.

"Hmm, a secret manual, huh?"

Gu Jianlin took it and turned toward the lifeless brat, speaking coldly, "I'll be confiscating this. You'll get it back when you prove yourself. Be on time for afternoon training, or I'll come for you with my chair. Understood?"

Turning away, he instructed: "Captain Lin, make sure you heal her properly."

Lin Wanqiu smiled faintly, "Don't worry, I'm a professional at this."

She smirked inwardly—this teenager seemed to rely on her more and more.

If this continued, she might even qualify to register as his Guardian.

Ji Xiaoyu: "..."

She faintly realized that this time, she might have genuinely encountered an unyielding rival!

That day, the brat felt the cruelty and darkness of the world.