

Ancient 321

Chapter 321 - 167: Hooked

Returning Burial Forest, midnight.

Gu Jianlin leaned against an ancient tree on night watch, toying with the Desert Eagle in his hand.

He was certain that there was a traitor in the team, and they would strike again in a short time. Thus, he decided to act as though he knew nothing, deliberately baiting them to reveal themselves.

This place was the Ancient God Realm, different from the real world; here, he could display his power more freely.

The reason for staying on watch was to show a semblance of vigilance.

After all, everyone here was an elite. Too much complacency could only raise suspicion.

Yet less than half an hour had passed when Tang Ling wriggled out from her solitary tent.

Those starkly black-and-white eyes stared directly at him.

"What's up?"

"Can't sleep."

"Because you're nervous?"

"No, I want to take a bath."

"Mm... and what's that got to do with me?"

"Don't you have the Lock of Nonexistence? Lend me a hand."

Gu Jianlin finally understood—this woman was determined to maximize utility.

Earlier, she'd used his Ghost Hand to help carry her luggage.

Now, she wanted to use his Lock of Nonexistence to erect a Barrier against prying eyes.

It had to be said: Tang Ling truly had a unique way of living. Before bed, she'd head to the river to remove her makeup; though her makeup wasn't heavy—just sunscreen and primer, eyes subtly defined with an eyebrow pencil, lashes curled, and vermillion lipstick—her look was both meticulous and proud.

In her silver-haired state, she exuded an icy, cool demeanor befitting an older sister-type.

In her red-haired state, she radiated pride and domineering allure, with a hint of sensual charm.

If someone married her, it'd be like having two girlfriends.

Silvery chains wove a domain of emptiness.

Gu Jianlin sat by the riverside like a silent monk, unmoving.

"Are you really a man?"

Tang Ling's voice rang out from behind, accompanied by the splashing of water.

Gu Jianlin, expression rigid, replied, "What's your point?"

For the first time ever, he truly hated his profiling ability.

Just listening to the sound of water, he could vividly imagine it flowing over tender, snow-white skin, tracing over graceful curves, cleansing youthful beauty.

Tang Ling's voice cut through the scene: "Righteous men like you are rare even in TV dramas."

Gu Jianlin maintained his stern face: "Have you asked anyone else to stand lookout for you?"

Tang Ling snorted, "Never. My social relations are pretty much like yours."

Gu Jianlin retorted stubbornly, "I think my social skills are perfectly fine."

Tang Ling chuckled coldly, "And yet you're a terror for crying kids. Still think there's no problem?"

Gu Jianlin: "..."

Moments later, Tang Ling emerged, having bathed and changed, her damp white hair draped lazily as she glanced at the boy: "You know, after you gained fame, many people looked into your files—including me. But within the Association, many suspect your records have been tampered with, and aren't genuine."

Gu Jianlin froze, "Why's that?"

"Because you live like a ghost—your profile is cleaner than a paper doll's."

Tang Ling asked softly, "Don't you have any hobbies?"

Gu Jianlin hesitated before replying, "I used to, but they were too simple. I got bored quickly."

"Sounds like a playboy's excuse: bored with it, just toss it away."

Tang Ling teased him rarely, "Never been in a relationship?"

Gu Jianlin shook his head.

"Why not?"

"No desire, and unwilling to trouble others."

"Then has anyone liked you?"

"Seems like there's someone."

Suddenly, Gu Jianlin thought of someone, stroking the Stone Bead on his wrist, falling silent.

"Why ask all this?"

He asked curiously.

"No reason."

Tang Ling pouted lightly.

"You've asked so much about me; why not talk about yourself?"

Gu Jianlin shot her a sidelong glance, "Fair's fair."

By now, he could tell there was a reason for Tang Ling's willingness to converse.

The similarities in their life experiences.

Because of his father, Gu Jianlin had faced injustice and become a target for the Judgement Court.

Tang Ling's great-grandfather had done things even worse than his father.

Back in the Ether Association, surely she also couldn't hold her head high.

Yet her background might've been stronger.

Gu Jianlin had yet to formally apprentice under the King of Qing, but through his actions and strength, he'd earned the respect of most within the Ether Association, with his reputation for kindness also broadly praised.

"Girls' secrets are not for nosy boys."

Tang Ling rolled her eyes at him, "The Barrier can be lifted now."

Saying this, she turned and returned to her tent.

Gu Jianlin casually dismissed the Barrier created with the Lock of Nonexistence, then crossed the river.

On the opposite bank was Jing Shangxiu's territory, whose group had been spooked into staying awake all night.

The old man was drinking sake, visibly startled upon seeing him approach.

"You've come—please, take a seat."

He quickly pulled up a small stool. "What brings you here?"

Gu Jianlin replied expressionlessly, "I want to know about You Ying Group."

Earlier conversations had disclosed the location of the Ancient Ruins—it lay in the deepest part of Returning Burial Forest, in a secluded canyon leading to a prehistoric Ancient God Clan civilization site.

But when asked about further details, this group adamantly claimed ignorance.

Even Nightmare's divination confirmed they weren't lying.

"We truly know nothing."

Jing Shangxiu sighed, "We're just small fries."

Gu Jianlin stared at him coldly, silent.

At the same time, the imagined Gu Ci'an leaned close to his ear: "My dear boy, let me tell you a tip. The You Ying Group is the leading power in the Dark World, but given how mixed they are, it's easy to attract unwanted attention. Hence, they usually carry alchemy weapons that disrupt divination."

He continued, "Or, the adversary themselves might be on the Spirit Medium Path! That's why you need the Golden Card!"

Without hesitation, Gu Jianlin slapped down the Golden Card from You Ying Group.

Jing Shangxiu's eyes widened, "You... you're..."

Gu Jianlin spoke curtly, "Speak!"

He hadn't expected the Golden Card to still be of use here.

As for the risk of exposure, there was no need to worry.

If the Ether Association ever caught wind, he could simply claim the card was war loot.

Spiritual abilities didn't affect him anyway.

A rogue with ultimate Ancient God Power—how could he fear this?

"So, you're one of Third Master's invested candidates!"

Jing Shangxiu's face lit up with familial excitement, lowering his voice: "You're undercover in the Ether Association? Deeply embedded! Yet frankly, the intel I have is limited; I only know that in the depths of Returning Burial Forest, there's likely a fragment of the Wedge within the Ancient Ruins!"

The Wedge!

Gu Jianlin's stoic demeanor betrayed a flicker of inner excitement.

To further harness his Ancient God Power, recovering the Wedge was a necessity.

And if the Qilin Venerable had set a trap within the Immortal Palace, the bait would almost certainly be the Wedge!

"Legend has it that in the battle 2,500 years ago, the Qilin Wedge was shattered by Candle Dragon Venerable's hand. At least one fragment reportedly fell nearby. The You Ying Group's Fourth Master was the first to discover this site. During the struggle over excavation zones, they clashed fiercely with Third Master's candidates."

Jing Shangxiu elaborated, "This feud was intense, and it seems Fourth Master's side had struck a deal with a formidable group. They suddenly showed up and severely injured Third Master's candidates. Despite Third Master's orders to retreat, one candidate refused to withdraw and was nearly hunted down."

Gu Jianlin had a sinking feeling, "Who?"

"The strongest candidate under Third Master—what was her name again?"

Jing Shangxiu thought for a moment, "Ah, Moon Princess! Fourth Master had been trying to win over Miss Yue Ji but ultimately failed. Fourth Master is young, with a formidable family background and immense clout among the six directors. He's known for his domineering personality. What he wants is offered only three times. After three refusals..."

He mimed a throat-slitting gesture.

Gu Jianlin paused pensively.

"Is that all?"

After a while, he raised his gaze to scrutinize the elder across from him.

Jing Shangxiu returned a flattering smile, "That's all I know."

"Thank you."

Gu Jianlin took the Golden Card, turning to leave.

Jing Shangxiu watched his departing figure, the smile on his face unwavering.

Yet the corners of his mouth kept spreading wider.

Within a shadowy tent, a faint cool glow lingered.

Tang Ling tied her snow-white hair into twin ponytails and reclined in her sleeping bag.

The tent's canopy was transparent, revealing the watery expanse above the sky dome, fish gliding through.

Enchanting and dreamlike.

"Are you getting soft?"

A haughty yet sultry voice suddenly echoed.

In the vanity mirror, a light flickered eerily.

Red-haired Tang Ling gazed back at her with alluring elegance and fierce pride: "Still, your choice wasn't bad. His profiling ability is strong—he can deduce the truth from minimal clues."

Tang Ling lay with her hands behind her head, her expression blank and tranquil: "I was just wondering if I shouldn't have asked for his help; this is, after all, my own business."

The red-haired Tang Ling chuckled lightly, "He has his own investigation. You're not unfair to him."

Tang Ling replied impassively, "But I did use him."

"Didn't you reward him in return? You probably just feel sorry for him because you see a bit of yourself in him, don't you?"

The red-haired Tang Ling sneered, "Enough already. If you're really so conflicted, I'll step in when necessary and keep him out of harm's way. Fair enough?"

Tang Ling's eyes turned cold: "You'd better deliver; otherwise, you can forget about ever coming out again."

The red-haired Tang Ling snorted disdainfully, vanishing from the vanity mirror.

Meanwhile, deep within the dark forest.

"Have you gathered everything?"

Amidst the stillness, a raspy, eerie voice whispered: "He's currently Third-Order Fate. If he advances to Fourth-Order Cloud Lord, we won't get another opportunity until he reaches Sixth Rank."

A hunched shadow stood under the tree, their eyes shimmering darkly.

Someone handed him a wooden box, speaking coldly, "This contains his hair and blood—a limited amount collected during battle. He's already suspicious of a traitor, so move quickly this time."

The shadow sneered, "Relax—I never miss."

Chapter 322 - 168 Moon Princess, My Moon Princess

At two thirty in the morning, the teams on both sides of the riverbank had already rested, leaving only the night watchers awake.

Gu Jianlin was in charge of the first half of the night, while Mountain Ghost took over the second half.

Both of them followed the Divine Path and had the versatile passive skill, Life Perception. On top of that, they possessed strong combat abilities, enabling them to respond quickly to danger and avoid instant defeat.

"I still think we should kill that group of people on the other side. You're the deputy leader, and Thunder is the leader. The two of you must ensure the safety of the entire group. Though you're talented, you're both very young."

Mountain Ghost frowned and said coldly, "This isn't the time for your Holy Mother ideals."

Gu Jianlin dismissed him with a wave of his hand. "I have my reasons."

Mountain Ghost took a deep breath, kept quiet, and positioned himself under a tree to stand watch.

Gu Jianlin headed to the riverbank, splashed water on his face, and glanced toward the other camp.

The other side had left only the youngest, delicate-looking boy as the night watcher. The boy squatted alone by the river, seemingly unafraid, his gaze hollow and blank.

The boy's name was Jing Shangsenmu, the old man's grandson.

The two twins, the old man's nieces, were also Ying Province natives.

Gu Jianlin didn't say much, turning to enter the tent and beginning his breathing practice.

"There's a traitor within the Ether Association. That much is certain. Sea Demon is well-hidden, though her situation is precarious. However, the mysterious organization—its rank is undoubtedly higher. They're operating on at least a Sixth Rank level. How are they achieving this?"

"Fine, let's set that question aside for now. What's clear is that the Living Burial Area has problems. More than likely, it's related to the presence of the Wedge. Even Omega's top ten have disappeared here."

"The Ether Association wouldn't be so careless. No matter who the opposing forces are, it's easy to anticipate that rescue teams will eventually arrive here. They're bound to set up an ambush. Which means, the Ether Association's senior officials—their cunning—must be hiding behind the scenes. As for Instructor Wan, while it seems he's acting, who knows what he's truly up to."

"So, this is once again a trial. But I refuse to follow their set rhythm. If the Wedge exists, I must see it for myself. And also, the Youying Association... Master."

His eyes flashed with cold determination, and he took a deep breath.

About half an hour later, a sudden gust of wind began whipping around the tent.

Gu Jianlin opened his eyes to see thick fog blanketing the camp, completely smothering the bonfires.

Mountain Ghost immediately roused everyone: "Something's wrong!"

From within the fog, a terrified scream pierced the air, cracking from sheer horror.

The group awoke, grabbing flashlights as they rushed out of their tents.

The scream had come from the Poison Master, who had stepped outside in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, only to witness the horrific scene.

The river had turned crimson with blood.

The opposite camp was strewn with corpses, arranged into a grotesque Hexagram—like a sinister and bloody masterpiece painted by a devil, saturated in madness and despair.

The bodies of ten mercenaries hung from trees, fresh blood dripping incessantly.

At the center of the Hexagram lay a pale young boy. His throat had been slashed open, yet somehow he wasn't dead. Instead, he faced the crowd with an eerie smile.

This unsettling Sacrificial Array was newly made.

Well, "new" might be an odd choice of word, but it truly had just been set up.

With a loud whoosh, flames erupted, consuming the eerie sacrificial array.

Gu Jianlin noticed the boy's chilling smile and felt as though it was meant for him.

He also clearly saw that the boy was clutching several strands of hair.

The imagined Old Gu blinked at the sight, clearly startled.

This was because certain features of the scene matched details referenced in a particular file.

Which confirmed—Old Gu was also investigating these matters!

"Did you doze off? Didn't Life Perception alert you?"

Tang Ling, carrying an oversized guitar case, approached him and squinted her stunning eyes: "That's not supposed to happen."

Mountain Ghost spoke solemnly from nearby: "The fog earlier was abnormal—it can block our perception. Jing Shangxiu, that old man, and those twins have disappeared. I've been saying all along we should've killed them! Now look where we are—the ritual's been carried out, and no one knows what will happen next!"

His gaze turned sinister: "The decision-making was flawed. Everyone's at risk because of it!"

Blue Whale and Demon Blade furrowed their brows, uneasy about the situation's bizarre nature.

"Making a move earlier wouldn't necessarily have prevented this,"

Nightmare said grimly, his face dark as he continued, "Poison Master, Dawn, you two take a look. I suspect Jing Shangxiu might also follow the Spirit Medium Path, and his rank wouldn't be lower than mine."

"I can only identify a few materials used for the ritual, nothing else."

Poison Master shook her head.

Dawn, as someone on the Priest Path, hurriedly summoned Holy Light to purify everything.

But it was unclear if it had any effect.

"With my understanding of Eastern and Western folklore, I still can't make out what kind of array this is."

He muttered, "Absolutely cursed."

"What's going on? What happened?"

Ji Xiaoyu staggered out of her tent, bleary-eyed—the little rascal had slept the soundest of them all.

Just then, the group suddenly heard a sound—low growls coming from within the mist.

Chapter 323 - 168 Moon Princess, My Moon Princess_2

"What? Not again?"

Suddenly, countless pairs of scarlet eyes lit up from all directions, accompanied by the sinister sound of scuttling.

Someone once said that the sound of these living corpses crawling resembled an author of a broken mind frenziedly scrambling on the floor.

Utterly terrifying.

At first, Nightmare wanted to divine their exact numbers, but he gave up after just two seconds.

Because there were simply too many!

In the next moment, countless pale living corpses roared and charged forward, like a siege of zombies!

"Run! Formation Three! Full retreat!"

The group bolted, "Prioritize protecting the Little Princess and the support!"

Everyone was an elite, and of course, they prioritized the minors.

Although Gu Jianlin was also a minor, nobody treated him like a child.

"What's Formation Three?"

Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling exclaimed in unison.

The crowd collectively facepalmed—it turned out these two had never teamed up with anyone before!

"Run east, to the deepest part of the Returning Burial Forest!"

Gu Jianlin's forehead once again lit up with pale Ghost Fire, his bodily functions and muscle strength drastically enhanced, as if every cell in his body was screaming and roaring, unleashing immense power.

The group was stunned. Less than a day had passed, and he had already used Ghost Transformation again!

Without waiting for any doubts, Gu Jianlin coldly said, "That old man Jing Shangxiu hasn't gone far; the ground still bears traces of his passage. I can profile his escape route. Hah, can divination manage that?"

The parrot squawked rudely, "Manage that?"

Under the negative emotions of Ghost Transformation, the taunting ultimately came out!

The group perked up—they were all genius talents of the Omega Sequence. No way they'd swallow this insult.

They were definitely chasing him down to kill him.

Only Nightmare's face shifted between dark and pale, unable to think of a rebuttal for a moment.

The group was sprinting ahead while increasingly more living corpses gathered behind.

However, the current situation was not yet the worst.

Gu Jianlin led the charge, taking the group in a frantic run.

Then, he suddenly sensed a loud and chaotic Life Rhythm.

"Someone's here!"

From the shadows of the dense forest appeared countless red dots.

The sound of guns being cocked, the clash of ammunition, the rustling of combat fatigues, the unified thud of footsteps.

This was a rigorously trained elite combat unit!

Given their appearance at this time, there was no way they belonged to the Ether Association.

They could only be from the You Ying Group.

Master's people!

"So there's an ambush after all!"

The rescue squad wasn't stupid; they were forced into this mess despite themselves.

The top ten members of the Omega Sequence had disappeared—only idiots wouldn't expect the Ether Association to send in a rescue team.

And wasn't it obvious they'd be ambushed!

"How did they know we'd be here!"

Ji Xiaoyu exclaimed in shock.

The group collectively smacked their foreheads—this little brat's intelligence was truly beyond saving!

In front lay the elite combat team of the You Ying Group. Behind them, hundreds of crazed living corpses.

Between a cliff ahead and a wolf pack behind.

There was no escape.

And they still had to preserve enough strength; otherwise, they'd suffer major losses entering the Ancient Ruins.

Gu Jianlin sank into deep thought.

"What do we do now?"

Tang Ling turned to him, "I feel like you'll definitely have a plan."

The group's eyes lit up—they couldn't fathom why this hot-tempered woman was so certain.

Gu Jianlin decided not to hide anything from them anymore and frankly said, "Believe it or not, there's a traitor among us, from a mysterious organization. Now, this organization is most likely working with the You Ying Group."

Traitor!

The group exchanged grim glances, stunned and horrified.

"I do have a way out, but you're all elites—watch yourselves."

Gu Jianlin said gravely.

As for his way out, it was to seek help!

Old Gu, time to do your part!

Drawing closer to his ear, he whispered four words: "Ancient God's Blood!"

Gu Jianlin suddenly felt enlightened, as if the clouds had parted to reveal the sun.

Old Gu was truly a good father.

Boom!

He stomped forcefully onto the ground, surging ahead.

Using the Lock of Nonexistence, he reduced his presence and, unnoticed by everyone, inserted his forefinger into the ground.

A droplet of Ancient God's Blood oozed out, soaking into the soil.

In that instant, the entire Returning Burial Forest seemed to shift slightly.

The aura of Ancient God's Blood spread, shaking the earth violently—those buried deep in the ground, sealed within ancient trees, infused into sculptures, and countless mutated monsters.

All caught scent of this aura.

In a flash, chaos erupted!

A single droplet of Ancient Supreme's Ancient God's Blood almost woke all the supernatural creatures within Returning Burial Forest!

This was Gu Jianlin's plan.

Since they couldn't escape, he'd make everything spiral into uncontrollable chaos.

None of them would have it easy!

"What are you waiting for? Run!"

Gu Jianlin roared.

The group felt as though the sky was crumbling—the endless living corpses awakened from all directions, breaking loose from their restraints.

In an instant, living corpses surged like waves!

Meanwhile, the combat unit of You Ying Group advanced slowly, fifty mercenaries per battle formation.

Each mercenary here followed the Overlord Path, the epitome of modern warfare teams.

They were well-equipped, their weaponry cutting-edge.

From the dense forest came scuttling noises; twin women emerged first, followed closely by a menacing, eerie old man in a kimono. They moved briskly, with composed expressions.

And in an instant, every red dot locked onto them.

Chapter 324 - 168 Moon Princess, My Moon Princess_3

"Bold!"

The captain roared: "This is Lord Jing Shang. Who gave you the guts?"

Jing Shangxiu was no longer the timid and submissive person of before. Under the protection of two female bodyguards, he displayed the poise of a prominent figure and said indifferently, "Where is Master? Tell him the matter has been resolved. This rescue team won't make any waves. Don't forget his promise."

The captain, wearing a helmet, revealed an expression of relief: "Rest assured, Lord Jing Shang. Master is waiting for you on the outskirts of the ruins. Master's intention is to continue cooperation with The Order of the Hidden. After all, Third Master's people should be arriving soon. Without your assistance, unforeseen circumstances might arise."

Jing Shangxiu raised an eyebrow and said displeasedly, "Unless we can select someone to our liking."

The captain chuckled slightly: "What do you think of Moon Princess?"

Jing Shangxiu narrowed his eyes and pondered for a moment.

"That's not bad. She is equally valuable as Gu Ci'an's son. If she can be controlled, that would be ideal."

He muttered, "It's just that we don't know her true identity."

The captain laughed and said, "Please, take a rest. Leave this to us. Once the Ether Association's rescue team is trapped by those living corpses, that's when we will strike and wipe them out completely."

Jing Shangxiu responded with a soft grunt: "Don't injure my people."

But just then, rustling sounds erupted from all directions in the surrounding bushes.

The soil was split open, ancient trees forcefully torn apart, and countless grotesque shadows emerged from the mist.

In an instant, all combatants felt their ankles grabbed by pale hands.

Jing Shangxiu and his two female bodyguards turned pale.

"What's going on? Where did these living corpses come from?"

In the distance, the thunderous sound of footsteps rumbled.

Yes, thunderous.

It hinted at an enormous scale.

Looking ahead, they saw waves of living corpses crashing through the mist, charging wildly!

And leading the swarm of living corpses was none other than the rescue team from the Ether Association.

Their faces were contorted with madness, wearing savage grins.

"Come on, let's die together!"

The combat team instinctively raised their weapons but hesitated, unsure who to target.

The captain's face turned ashen: "Damn it! This is bad! Everyone, run!"

Jing Shangxiu's old face twisted in terror, as white as a sheet.

The two female bodyguards hoisted him up and immediately fled!

No time for hesitation!

"Haha! Trying to outsmart us? Still running away like scared rats!"

"Chase them down! Lead the living corpses into the ruins! No one is getting out of here unscathed today!"

"Charge! Let's outdo each other in disgusting tactics!"

Ji Xiaoyu led the charge with a sinister grin. Her favorite pastime was sowing chaos, and she raced ahead at the forefront.

Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling followed closely behind.

The two showed no excitement, their expressions growing increasingly grim.

For they knew the traitor within the team was about to act!

The most likely traitor at the moment was Nightmare.

Both of them, thanks to various reasons, instinctively mistrusted the Judgement Court's people.

Just then: "Die!"

A sickening squelch sounded.

Almost every squad member felt blood oozing from their orifices, their vision darkening.

Dawn suddenly spewed a mouthful of blood, pierced through the chest by a pitch-black longsword, a look of bewilderment frozen on his face.

Bang bang bang bang!

Four fierce, sharp gunshots followed.

The Poison Master's limbs were all shattered. He let out a bloodcurdling scream as he collapsed to the ground.

"Sorry, everyone. I had no other choice."

Mountain Ghost was evidently in a state of Ghost Transformation, and his mental stability teetered on the brink of collapse, threatening full corruption.

Yet he still pushed ahead in Ghost Transformation, his back manifesting a massive burning lion Spiritual Body, his voice coarse and indifferent: "Today, you either all perish here, or... become one of us."

After saying this, Demon Blade suddenly sprang into action, thrusting a Tang Blade forward.

The sound of flesh piercing resounded.

Blue Whale stared at her in horror, never expecting betrayal to come so suddenly!

"Give up the resistance; you've nowhere left to go."

Demon Blade sneered coldly.

The traitors weren't limited to one!

Countless living corpses roared as they closed in from all directions.

Two betrayed, leaving seven remaining.

Of the eight people in total, three were support roles.

Two of them had already suffered heavy injuries.

Among the four remaining combat-ready members, one was already wounded and taken hostage.

"You damned traitors!"

Nightmare roared, "Why betray us? Have you abandoned your families?"

Ji Xiaoyu gritted her teeth, glaring at them fiercely, already considering which Mythical Weapon to use.

"You're holding them hostage, and yet you tell us to surrender?"

Tang Ling's snow-white hair abruptly turned crimson.

Her right hand reached for the instrument case strapped to her back.

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes, ready to flee and find a hidden spot to unleash the Ancient God Transformation.

But at that moment, the Stone Bead on his wrist began to tremble violently.

It was as though it felt her presence approaching.

Chapter 325 - 169 Oh, the Thoughtful Little Cutie

"Take action!"

With a loud roar, the battle erupted instantly.

Nightmare, initially the prime suspect, was the first to showcase his abilities. His pupils suddenly rolled back, and his entire body began to convulse as if in a seizure, muttering words under his breath.

The scarce combat ability of the Fifth-Rank Prophet—sensory exchange!

At the same time, Ji Xiaoyu crouched low, gathering a torrential surge of Qi Force, preparing the Wave Motion Fist!

At that moment, Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling sprang into action without hesitation.

However, Mountain Ghost and Demon Blade appeared as if they had suffered a stroke, standing dazed on the spot.

The sword blade radiated searing Sword Qi.

The finger gleamed with an intense black light.

Crossing paths, they launched a calculated strike.

At that instant, Mountain Ghost and Demon Blade regained their senses simultaneously. One shoved out their hostage without hesitation and withdrew violently, while the other vanished instantly from the spot!

"Demon Blade is mine; you deal with Mountain Ghost!"

Tang Ling shouted loudly.

At the same time, a phantom-like shadow flickered behind her.

Demon Blade, aligned with the Ghost Slayer Path, mastered core spatial and temporal abilities. At the Fourth-Tier Shura level, they could effortlessly enhance their speed tenfold, or even directly freeze time and space!

At that moment, the world seemed to sink into a swamp-like silence. Space-time froze in an instant, and the pitch-black forest became deathly still. Only an icy blade's glimmer flashed, slicing across the air!

Beheading!

But at the brink of disaster, an overwhelming Sword Intent surged skyward, countless intertwining sword lights radiating outward!

With a resounding boom, the frozen space-time was torn apart by the soaring Sword Intent, and the sounds of the world returned once more.

In ancient times in the East, there was a mysterious group of cultivators known as Sword Cultivators. They honed their spirit and intent through ancient methods passed down from the primordial era, believing it allowed them to connect with their cherished swords and, using Sword Dao as a foundation, perceive the rhythm of the Great Dao.

Eventually, they perfected unparalleled combat techniques—commanding swords with Qi, forging swords with intent!

Tracing back to Bai Ze Venerable, this lineage evolved into the Sword Sect Path!

At the Fourth-Tier Sword Spirit level, one could manifest their intent into an actual sword.

Tang Ling had prepared this move in advance, specifically as a countermeasure against space-time freezing!

Although Shura's space-time freezing was formidable and unbreakable from within, it could be neutralized from the outside!

As the icy blade approached, Tang Ling turned abruptly, unleashing a decisive sword slash. Sword Qi burst forth violently!

With a thunderous sound, Demon Blade's defensive blade crumbled instantly during her timely block. Yet, she narrowly avoided a fatal blow by virtualizing herself and retreating just in time.

Tang Ling, with her relentless personality, pursued without pause, wielding the Iron Sword in a furious charge.

Scarlet hair flowing, her vermillion eyes burned with unrelenting killing intent.

On the other side, it was now a clash between two Divine combatants.

"Challenging me was a foolish decision. I am no second-rate Divine!"

Mountain Ghost erupted furiously, the entity of a blazing lion spirit roaring behind him, "You stand no chance against me!"

As the soil burst upward from the force, he dove forward like a rampaging demon.

Gu Jianlin's forehead blazed with pitch-black Ghost Fire as four towering golden Ghost Hands, also aflame, materialized behind him.

Bam!

The fists met with an explosive sound akin to clashing steel.

"Impossible!"

Mountain Ghost stared in disbelief at his own fist, unable to comprehend how it was stopped so easily.

The pitch-black Ghost Fire on his opponent's forehead sent a sudden shiver through his soul.

"Keep going then."

Gu Jianlin tightened his grip, the sound of his fingers crushing the fist crackling audibly.

In his Dual Core Drive state, combined with the berserk amplification of Ghost Transformation, his raw power was unyielding.

Simultaneously, the flame-shrouded lion lunged forward but was sent flying by the fearsome punches of the four golden Ghost Hands. The collision of spiritual entities produced a thunderous boom!

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Each fiery strike from the Ghost Hands was suffused with overwhelming force, roaring like cannon fire and scattering embers in their wake, their gale-like fist blows packing an unstoppable momentum.

No matter how ferociously the lion spirit retaliated, it was ultimately battered senseless.

Fists fell like rain, blows overlapping!

Meanwhile, Gu Jianlin's palm suddenly ignited with Divine Sacrificial Fire, burning fiercely!

Mountain Ghost countered without hesitation, his pale Ghost Fire erupting in defiance!

Their life forces began a brutal tug-of-war between the two Divine combatants.

It took only an instant for Mountain Ghost to realize his life force was rapidly draining at an impossible rate!

It defied all sense of reason.

Who exactly was the Third Rank, and who was the Fourth?

The most crucial factor was that as a Fourth-Order Cloud Monarch, his ability to control life and death was now rendered useless.

If this were a battlefield with enough corpses around, a swarm attack could end this quickly!

Boom!

Mountain Ghost stomped on the ground to retreat, his battered lion spirit moving to shield him.

He spread his arms wide, and the lion spirit roared behind him in unison.

Darkness coalesced, with countless black particles gathering to form a flashing black Qi Realm.

At that moment, Gu Jianlin raised both hands, the four flaming Ghost Hands behind him condensing darkness into a void-like vortex, black particles converging and trembling uncontrollably.

A parrot circled above, screeching, "Do it, clash!"

Boom!

The darkness detonated, ancient trees bursting on the spot, wiping out even the charging living corpses in all directions!

Mountain Ghost, the Fourth-Order Cloud Monarch, was blasted into the distance, his body bloodied and mangled, utterly devastated.

The victor of this Divine Path clash turned out to be the Third-Rank Great Fate Master!

At that moment, the hordes of rampaging living corpses swarmed forward.

Ji Xiaoyu, having charged up for an eternity, unleashed her power at last. "Adogen!"

A Qi Gong Wave erupted, obliterating countless living corpses instantly!

But just then, the dense sound of gunfire echoed from the forest.

The combat-trained mercenaries had handled the surrounding corpses and trained countless red-dot sights on them.

Eagle Eyes gleamed razor-sharp in the darkness.

The barrels of their assault rifles roared, enveloped in domineering force as if they were feral beasts.

Damn it!

Most of these mercenaries were Second Rank Hunters proficient in Eagle Eye and Domineering Aura. With the added power of firearms, their bullet storms could wipe out everyone here.

Not to mention, Third-Rank Frenzy Hunters among them were already taking sniper positions.

In the modern era, the Overlord Path combined with firearms always dominates the top tier.

In certain scenarios, it's even the strongest!

At that instant, Nightmare stared at the downed Dawn and Poison Master, his face pale as a ghost.

Ji Xiaoyu drew out a previously prepared makeshift cudgel, ready for a desperate stand.

Tang Ling abandoned her pursuit, turning to position the Iron Sword defensively before her, vermillion eyes brimming with murderous resolve.

Just then, the string of Stone Beads on Gu Jianlin's wrist abruptly stopped vibrating.

At this moment, a familiar warmth and reassurance flooded his heart.

She was here.

In a fleeting instant, time froze once again. The world turned into stark black and white, fragmented like an aged photograph. From the darkness far away, a piercingly cold blade sliced through, like blood-red lightning, disappearing as fast as it came.

Boom!

The frozen timestream shattered.

All the mercenary weapons were cleaved apart, their cuts as smooth as mirrors!

"Butcher!"

Moon Princess's crisp voice rang out like a nimble pixie in the night, quicksilver and lively.

A raucous laugh echoed in reply: "Got it, boss!"

Rumble!

A massive black tire rolled down from the hilltop, carrying a burly man within.

Explosive Qi Force erupted outward, sending the mercenaries flying in its wake!

"I call this move, Meat Bomb Impact!"

Boom!

Another deafening blast sounded as the tire exploded under the wild Qi.

Mercenaries were flung skyward, coughing blood, their bodies shattered and strewn apart.

The hulking figure of Butcher stood drenched in the resulting blood rain, lifting a single finger to the sky.
"Heaven and earth, I alone..."

Before he finished his declaration, a swarm of living corpses overwhelmed him, dragging him to the ground.

Fortunately, his thick skin and brute strength allowed him to punch through the corpses three at a time, scrambling back up in a sorry state!

"Idiot!"

Moon Princess landed lightly. Dressed in a white down jacket and draped in a scarf, her figure seemed slender and petite, concealing her form. Only her black silk-clad legs under the pink skirt remained as captivating as ever.

Scanning the crowd, she spotted the familiar figure she had yearned for and began striding toward him joyously.

Then, suddenly, her steps faltered, halting in place.

Her nimble, clear eyes contracted sharply.

Because Mountain Ghost and Demon Blade weren't dead yet, lunging at her again from both sides.

Of course, that wasn't the main point.

The main point was this:

The black-forehead-flamed young man stood back-to-back with the red-haired older sister, seamlessly understanding each other without needing a single word.

The blood-drenched Iron Sword quivered, brimming with fiery Sword Qi.

A slender finger pulsed with black light.

Boom!

The lion spirit behind Mountain Ghost was pierced through by a fleeting black ray, collapsing into decay.

At the same time, his shoulder was run through, black curses spreading like living tendrils.

His agonizing wails echoed, a scream filled with despair.

Meanwhile, Demon Blade's broken weapon shattered once more, her right arm severed by the scorching Sword Qi, blood spraying out!

At this juncture, Butcher struck decisively, weaving around to land behind the injured woman. His right fist hurtled forward!

One punch, straight through the chest.

Her internal organs burst apart.

Demon Blade perished instantly.

Mountain Ghost, crawling and staggering on the ground, tried to escape but saw a shadow descending from the sky!

A blood-colored blade tore through the air, pinning him firmly to the ground!

Blood spattered outward, painting the night red.

At that moment, Mountain Ghost's eyes widened in disbelief, dead without closure!

Tang Ling lifted her gaze toward the small figure leaping from the hilltop above.

Thump!

Gu Jianlin raised his arms, catching the descending girl in a perfect princess carry.

The cool fragrance of her body, the familiar warmth of her presence.

"Why are you wearing so much?"

He asked in surprise.

"Hmph!"

Moon Princess hid her expression behind a cat-mask, her eyes cold, letting out a haughty "hmph" brimming with grievance.

Gu Jianlin froze, and the parrot screeched, "Ah, the master's beloved little sweetheart!"

Without warning.

A fierce barrage of gunfire erupted in the distance.

Explosions shook the earth.

Mr. Liu's furious voice boomed, "Damn you, Si Wei'an! We're all on the You Ying Group board—if you didn't want me to take my share, fine. But bringing all these corpses to ambush me? They almost bit my behind off! Wait for me to settle this with you right now!"

He roared, "Brothers, charge into the ruins! Take them down!"

Gunfire roared like torrential rain.

Steady, synchronized footsteps echoed.

It felt as if an entire army was marching up the slope!

At the summit of the hill stood two towering cliffs, forming a gorge.

Between the cliffs loomed an ancient, giant stone statue of a monk with a low-hanging head and a tattered crimson robe, its back facing the dim sky.

The monk had no hair, no facial features, and a triangular red cloth covering its face.

On the statue's head squatted a man dressed in a tailored suit.

He peered down over the forest, a twisted grin spreading like that of a Joker, stretching all the way to his ears.

Chapter 326 - 170: Butcher, The Genius

Gu Jianlin looked up and saw the man with the wildly exaggerated smile turn and vanish into the sculpture.

When it comes to suits and refined elegance, he had met someone who was peerlessly perfect.

That someone was Jing Ci.

To be honest, Senior Brother was indeed flawless—his naturally mixed-race features, meticulously tailored attire, devoid of any excessive accessories, exuded an inexplicable elegance and nobility that didn't feel out of place.

While he was undeniably pretentious, you couldn't help but feel it suited him.

But the man they had just seen was likely the fourth director of the You Ying Group.

Si Wei'an.

Unlike Jing Ci, who wore a suit with understated charm, Si Wei'an managed to make his suit feel eerily malevolent—especially with that unnaturally disturbing smile he displayed earlier. It sent chills down anyone's spine, provoking an urge to slap him in the face with a slipper.

"That man is the Fourth Master of the You Ying Group, an out-and-out lunatic. His smile really drives up your blood pressure, doesn't it? Makes you want to take out a shoehorn and smack him in the face," Moon Princess's tone had notably improved, her beautiful eyes no longer frigid but carrying a hint of amusement and satisfaction.

Gu Jianlin might be a cold-hearted iceberg, but this parrot had unexpectedly managed to hit the mark.

"Indeed, quite uncomfortable to look at."

Gu Jianlin said expressionlessly, "What rank is he?"

"Fourth Master isn't like Third Master, who just loaf around. He's a Fifth Rank Star Lord, very powerful."

Moon Princess, lying lazily in his arms, replied indifferently, "Most Divines are clinically insane."

Gu Jianlin suspected she was throwing shade at someone, but lacked evidence.

"How long are you planning to stick to me?"

He asked, looking down.

Moon Princess let out a soft hum, much like a lazy cat, and then gracefully leapt out of his arms.

Butcher scratched his head, only to be intimidated by the girl's icy glare, retreating immediately.

At this moment, Dawn, lying on the ground, suddenly let out a groan of relief.

By all accounts, the Priest class was supposed to be fragile, yet this guy seemed almost completely unfazed after taking a knife to the chest. Right there, in front of everyone, he sat up like it was nothing, nonchalantly yanked out the blade embedded in his chest, and cast a wave of Holy Light.

Everyone basked in the Holy Light, their injuries gradually healing and their spirits replenished.

The only downside was that Dawn himself had exhausted his spirituality and appeared utterly fatigued.

The Poison Master, whose limbs had previously been broken, managed to recover in an instant, even forcing the bullets lodged in her muscles out.

She then pulled out a dose of Spiritual Secret Medicine from her bag and administered it.

Dawn was fully rejuvenated, restored to full health.

This pairing was, indeed, flawless.

Tang Ling turned her gaze toward two corpses on the ground and said calmly, "So these two were the traitors all along? I had suspected the real traitor was Nightmare."

"You can joke about food, but not about this!"

Nightmare's expression changed dramatically, "Who are you calling a traitor here? And these two... Moon Princess? Butcher?"

As candidates sponsored by the You Ying Group, both Moon Princess and Butcher were extremely well-known. Their names were even listed with bounties on Ether Association's wanted list.

Especially Moon Princess—she had become a notorious red-name target, aggressively pursued by the Ether Association.

"They're my friends."

Gu Jianlin replied matter-of-factly, "There won't be any problems."

The crowd hesitated for a moment.

Especially Tang Ling, who gave him a deep, piercing glance.

Butcher sneered, "What's the big deal?"

Moon Princess's gaze turned colder, but she didn't say anything.

"Doesn't matter."

Gu Jianlin said coolly, "Instructor Wan should be nearby, and he's likely watching."

Tang Ling shook her head, remarking with ambiguous intent, "It's not really a big issue anyway. A lot of high-ranking officials within the Ether Association have familial ties to You Ying Group. Though their stances differ, it doesn't always have to result in mortal combat. For example, Chen Bojun's ex-wife is now an executive of You Ying Group."

She hesitated for a moment, "Rumor has it that the two occasionally rekindle their relationship in the Ancient God Realm..."

And when you say rekindle their relationship in the Ancient God Realm... Well, what else could they possibly be doing?

You don't even need to think ***that hard***.

"Ahem, this kind of gossip can really be discussed out loud?"

Dawn and Poison Master said in unison, "We didn't know about this!"

Blue Whale focused his gaze on the ground, avoiding eye contact, "I didn't hear anything."

"Exactly, exactly."

Ji Xiaoyu boldly added, "My grandmother said it best: in the Ancient God Realm, there are no lasting feuds; there's only temporary alliances! Whatever problems there are, settle them after we get out!"

Everyone now decided unanimously to turn their hostility outward.

Given the situation, bringing in two extra allies was like receiving help in a snowstorm.

After all, You Ying Group itself was rife with internal conflict.

The enemy's enemy is a friend.

Especially now, as hordes of living corpses were beginning to riot, the swarm below growing larger and larger.

They were madly surging upward.

After a brief discussion, the group decided to split into three teams temporarily.

Nightmare and Poison Master, neither of whom had combat capabilities, weren't suited to keep fighting. The upcoming battle would be ever-changing, and no one could ensure their survival.

Of course, the two of them alone wasn't enough to form a team.

So the Little Princess had to stay with them, as she was the core of this backup team.

The Little Princess, naturally, was unwilling—her first response was, "Why me?"

As the group hit a deadlock, the parrot swiveled its eyes and spoke first, "Because you're the strongest among us! The most critical missions have to be entrusted to the strongest! Just like ancient wars—what's the most important thing? Logistics, of course! You're pivotal to our success!"

Chapter 327 - 170: Butcher, Great Wisdom_2

The strongest Little Princess's eyes lit up upon hearing this.

She immediately declared confidently that she would take on the task of protecting logistics, ensuring it was foolproof!

Everyone looked at her with pity; what a foolish child.

The second team was centered around Tang Ling, with members Dawn and Blue Whale.

The third team, naturally, consisted of Gu Jianlin, Moon Princess, and Butcher.

The grouping was because the Ancient Ruins were likely occupied by Master's people. Their numbers were large, and they were probably familiar with the terrain, giving them significant home advantage.

If not for the uprising of the living corpse horde, it would be nearly impossible to get a share of the spoils.

Even so, their party was too large, making them a big target.

It's better to scatter them more.

If anything happens, signal flares should be used to communicate.

Ji Xiaoyu led Poison Master and Nightmare in retreat first.

Before leaving, Poison Master distributed secret medicine to everyone, while Nightmare took most of the people's intimate clothing.

In the realm of mysticism, intimate clothing does not pose curse conditions but is used for divination instead.

On the other side, Blue Whale and Dawn gathered their supplies, preparing to head south.

"Be careful."

Tang Ling glanced at the young man and said lightly, "No need to overexert yourself."

Gu Jianlin nodded, "You too, stay safe."

Saying that, he turned and left.

At that moment, Moon Princess observed everything, glanced at the red-haired woman, then silently wrapped her arms around the boy's arm. This gesture was very practiced, as if it had happened countless times before.

Butcher was helping carry the bags and walked behind, clearly unaware of this detail.

However, Tang Ling, as a fellow woman, raised an eyebrow.

"What's the matter, Junior Sister Tang?"

Dawn asked curiously, as the most senior and experienced person present, he quickly picked up on the tense atmosphere.

"Shh, let's not speak of it."

Blue Whale, who previously worked in an office, was all too familiar with this strange ambiance.

"Nothing, just found it quite interesting."

Tang Ling's vermillion eyes showed no emotion; she just keenly sensed the little girl's caution and hostility and found it amusing for a moment before turning to leave.

"Let's go, don't hold me back."

The roars of the living corpses shattered the silence in the dense forest.

Gu Jianlin released Life Perception, observing all paths around.

On the left was the considerate Moon Princess, and on the right was the Tiger General, Butcher.

Tsk, an unprecedeted sense of security.

Speaking of which, this was the first time Qilin Venerable led his subordinates on an offline raid.

It felt like a very magical experience.

"I must say, the Alchemists of the Ether Association are quite impressive, with a total of twelve bottles of Blue Blood, eight Purification Stones, and ten bottles of Life Essence. Whoever marries that Alchemist just now would definitely hit the jackpot!"

Butcher, who had never seen this much secret medicine in his life, cradled it like a treasure.

He was drooling with greed.

Completely unaware of the strange atmosphere between the couple ahead.

Gu Jianlin crouched in the bushes, observing all possible traces to prevent encountering mercenaries from the You Ying Group along the way. Since they were few, they needed to infiltrate as stealthily as possible.

"Who is that woman?"

Moon Princess suddenly asked.

Gu Jianlin was taken aback, "Which woman are you talking about?"

Moon Princess coldly said, "Don't play dumb, that red-haired one."

Gu Jianlin frowned, "Thunder, from the Sword Tomb. You don't know her? She should be quite famous, logically."

Moon Princess puffed her cheeks, "What I mean is, what's your relationship with her?"

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment, "Merely a temporary cooperative relationship. Why are you asking?"

Moon Princess snorted, "I think she takes quite good care of you."

Gu Jianlin kept a straight face, "Don't overthink it. We just have a temporary cooperation because our goals align. Besides, that woman is not simple. I highly suspect she has other motives for coming here. During the earlier discussions, she was the one who proposed splitting into groups."

"Although reasonable, considering my understanding of her, it's somewhat unusual."

He paused, "She must have other reasons."

'According to your understanding of her, huh.'

Moon Princess's eyes turned cold once again.

"Why do you look so upset?"

Gu Jianlin glanced at her, suspiciously asking.

Moon Princess rolled her eyes with a bit of resentment, "I'm wearing a mask, how would you know if I look upset?"

Gu Jianlin said blandly, "I profiled it from your eyes and body language, and from the current atmosphere that indicates you're wearing a long face, quite unhappy."

"Don't mind me."

Moon Princess glared at him, immediately completing virtualization, floating forward like a ghost.

This was a First Order ability of the Ghost Slayer Path, making oneself intangible, resembling a ghost.

Gu Jianlin was full of question marks: what's the matter with this woman, suddenly getting angry out of nowhere.

"Brother Gu, long time no see."

Butcher had no objections to this fierce man. Over the last month, quite a few incidents transpired, and the name of the Chairman Killer became widely known, even in the Dark World. It's often used by the vilest thugs to scare their misbehaving kids; it worked impressively.

Such a ruthless man had once even confronted the higher-ups for the Unclean.

In the Dark World, people's impression of him was mostly positive.

Butcher naturally didn't feel this young man was unworthy of his boss.

"What's up?"

Gu Jianlin sensed there was more than met the eye in the brute's words.

"Although you're already considered a genius among humans, it's still not enough."

Butcher said seriously, "Someone has set their eyes on Boss, coveting her beauty!"

Master?

Gu Jianlin frowned, "What's the big deal? I'll just go and kill him."

Butcher's face changed dramatically, quickly saying, "You mustn't! Look, you probably won't believe it, but this being, you can never imagine, and in your lifetimes, you can't defeat it. Moreover, it's unkillable!"

Gu Jianlin: "..."

"I can't reveal too much, but my point is to cherish the people around you and urge Boss to advance her Rank swiftly. She needs to grow stronger quickly, or else she'll be taken to be a Female Sacrifice!"

Butcher said earnestly, "I'm saying this for your happiness, both of you."

Gu Jianlin held back for a long time, thinking this brute was really a brilliant dumb guy.

Why even talk seriously to this silly person?

"Oh right, this is from Boss for you."

Butcher searched through his bag, handing him a pink box, lowering his voice, "She found it today at the Extreme Cold Cliff. It's the key material for you to advance to Cloud Lord, Corrosive Magma. Originally, she wanted to find you an egg from the Calamity Ruins, but upon hearing something happened to you, she immediately came over. She also specifically told me not to tell you, just say it was picked up by chance."

Gu Jianlin was stunned, looking at the petite and cute figure ahead, feeling a slight stir in his heart.

Chapter 328 - 171: The Lost Ancient City

5:30 AM, Returning Burial Forest.

The barrier of the Lock of Nonexistence unfolded, concealing the presence of three individuals.

This move wasn't used earlier because the Lock of Nonexistence can only shield presence; it can't make you completely invisible. If the living corpses encounter you, they'd still gnaw at the air.

This could even lead to a stampede.

It can only be used to mask presence when the number of living corpses is relatively small.

Gu Jianlin sat under an ancient tree to rest. As long as he crossed the ridge ahead, he should reach the entrance to the ruins.

Although there were intermittent encounters with mercenaries and attacks from hordes of living corpses along the way, as the Second Generation Kirin Venerable, his protection ensured that neither the Female Sacrifice nor the Tiger General would face any issues.

At this moment, he silently held the pink box in his hand.

The box felt cool, yet emanated warmth upon touch.

Because it carried the intentions of a young girl.

Moon Princess sat beside him. Taking advantage of his inattention, she turned slightly and gestured in sign language.

It meant: "You didn't let it slip, did you?"

Butcher also gestured, meaning: "Absolutely not. I said everything according to what you instructed, Boss. I even specifically stressed that you told me not to tell him, just to say I picked it up by chance."

Moon Princess was visibly satisfied.

Gu Jianlin glanced at the two of them, his face devoid of expression.

Ha, these little tricks couldn't escape him.

He had figured it out long ago but had no intention of exposing them. That girl had truly put effort into finding advancement materials for him, a genuinely touching gesture devoid of ulterior motives.

The little scheming afterward only made her seem even cuter.

Listening to the gunfire erupting in the distance, Gu Jianlin suddenly asked, "You two are both candidates funded by Third Master, aren't you? Why aren't you by his side protecting him? Isn't it risky?"

Moon Princess shot him a glance and said, "I'm quite free in the You Ying Group; he doesn't have control over me."

Butcher scratched his head and said, "I'm just out here looking for reinforcements."

Gu Jianlin strongly suspected that the 'reinforcements' referred to were himself.

Judging by the looks in the eyes of these two, he confidently removed the word "suspected."

"The You Ying Group is chaotic and unlike the Ether Association. The six directors never get along, and their various struggles spill over from the real world into the Ancient God Realm. If anyone suddenly gains power, they would definitely consume the others. Master Four has been collaborating with a mysterious organization to try and activate these ruins."

Moon Princess explained, "Master Four might be a lunatic, but his methods are ruthless and resourceful. As for Master Three... you'd just think he's an ordinary fatty with powerful backers protecting him."

Butcher sneakily added, "It's rumored he's at least at the Holy Land level, or possibly even the top-tier Holy Land level."

Top-tier Holy Land? That would mean Ninth Rank.

Gu Jianlin frowned and asked, "Then what is the You Ying Group's ultimate goal? The six directors fighting each other—it wouldn't just be for ruling the Dark World, would it? There must be someone behind it."

Moon Princess nodded slightly, "There are rumors that the true ruler of the Dark World is Dusk, and the You Ying Group's nurturing of various candidates is to supply fresh blood for Dusk. But these are just rumors, never confirmed, and very few have seen them."

She continued, "Dusk and the You Ying Group aren't in a hierarchical relationship; rather, they cooperate. Actually, at the Ether Association's peak—around two hundred years ago during the Golden Age—the Dark World didn't have any large-scale organizations, since no one could unify the Dark World under the kings' violent reign."

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment, "Two hundred years ago?"

That seemed to be the era of the King of Qing.

"The first ruler of the Dark World eventually appeared—the legendary Red King."

Moon Princess whispered, "That king, for some unknown reason, suddenly fell into self-destructive madness. He believed humanity should neither wield powers from inheritance paths nor chase Ancient God Power. He betrayed the Ether Association and fled to the Dark World, single-handedly uniting its forces."

Gu Jianlin hesitated and asked, "What was the relationship between the King of Qing and the Red King?"

Moon Princess said with a peculiar expression, "Allegedly, they were senior and junior brothers."

Gu Jianlin's pupils contracted, suddenly recalling the words Uncle Mu had once spoken to him.

Back then, there were proposals within the Ether Association to collaborate with the You Ying Group.

Taihua could hardly resist this momentum.

Ultimately, it was the King of Qing who decisively intervened and stopped it all.

It seemed the brothers might harbor enmity against each other.

"I heard from Master Three that the Red King initially established the You Ying Group to unify the Dark World, but in the end, it was forcibly shattered by the King of Qing. It caused massive upheaval, spanning both the real world and the Ancient God Realm, with untold casualties. That was the first time people truly witnessed the combat power of Catastrophe-level beings."

Moon Princess said softly, "The Golden Age of humanity came about because the King of Qing and the Red King—not to mention their battles in the Ancient God Realm—possessed the ability to confront Supremes. These brothers were humanity's strongest weapon ever, specifically cultivated to counter the Divine Race."

The ability to confront a Supreme didn't mean defeating one.

Still, it was indeed terrifying.

No wonder the Candle Dragon Venerable hadn't destroyed the world yet.

After all, the King of Qing was still alive.

"These secrets aren't even known inside the association."

Gu Jianlin commented jokingly.

"That's normal because the Dark World is rife with gossip, and the news travels wider."

Moon Princess leaned on her hands and added without concern, "The previous President, Taiqing, alongside the current President, Taihua, were the founders of humanity's peak era. The two students they trained were supposed to carry the mission of defending the Human World, but the outcomes... weren't entirely satisfactory."

Hold on.

Gu Jianlin picked up on a key phrase: "Weren't satisfactory?"

Moon Princess shot him a suspicious look, "No one's ever told you?"

Gu Jianlin shook his head.

"Alright, maybe nobody dares to criticize the King of Qing casually."

Moon Princess cleared her throat and spoke softly, "To the world, the King of Qing contributed greatly to humanity. But his destruction of the Human World was even worse than the Red King's. While no one knows what the Red King intended, one thing's clear—he didn't succeed."

She added with a meaningful tone, "As for the King of Qing, he's the one who personally released the Devil from its prison, opened the forbidden Pandora's Box for the first time, pushing the Human World to the edge of a cliff—extremely dangerous."

Gu Jianlin massaged his brow, somewhat overwhelmed.

Honestly, he couldn't wrap his head around what had transpired back then.

But in this moment, he started to understand.

If the King of Qing was truly so revered, he would have long been crowned the Crown Prince within the Ether Association.

Even though he hadn't formally accepted apprentices yet.

Many in the association, upon hearing he was favored by the King of Qing, only exhibited unease.

Intense unease.

Nightmare Master once said the King of Qing might not be a good teacher.

Even Old Gu referred to him as a madman.

That explained why a meteorite bound him overhead, limiting his movements.

After some thought, Gu Jianlin reached a conclusion: "So, the King of Qing has a strained relationship with this world, yet the world must rely on his existence. What on earth did he do?"

"I don't know either, but it must have been extraordinarily insane."

Moon Princess murmured, "The King of Qing believes humanity's true enemy isn't the Divine Race but an even greater threat lurking in the shadows. Almost everyone alive is clueless, with very few people historically spotting hints."

"Even the Supremes are looking for answers."

She explained, "Sounds terrifying, doesn't it? The Red King, on the other hand, insists on not responding to spirituality's call. He argues that's a power humanity should never touch. Don't respond, don't respond, don't respond!"

Gu Jianlin muttered softly, "No wonder."

He didn't know how to evaluate the Red King.

As for the King of Qing—no wonder the old man said the third lesson was about choice.

After teaching him so much, he left the final decision to him.

If he didn't take him as a mentor, then everything taught so far would count as mere gifts.

If he accepted, he'd likely bear the old man's Karma.

Just carrying that title was dreadful enough.

"In summary, after the battle two hundred years ago, Taiqing, the former President, perished. The Red King also fell, and the King of Qing was gravely wounded, bound by a meteorite, monitoring his every move."

Moon Princess revealed, "That's as much as my teacher told me."

Gu Jianlin thought: So that's it.

"Old Gu is indeed a gossip."

He sighed, "Too bad he never told me any of this."

Moon Princess agreed wholeheartedly, "Yes, definitely a gossip."

Just as she spoke, her body abruptly tensed, her pupils contracting slightly.

"You let it slip, Miss Moon Princess."

Gu Jianlin said coldly.

He could tell the girl had been subtly passing him information all along.

Without exception, it all came from Old Gu.

In essence, she was acting on Old Gu's behalf to train him.

Moon Princess hastily covered her face, "I wasn't! It's not true!"

Butcher, who had been eavesdropping with gusto, curiously asked, "What did you let slip?"

Foolish brute!

Moon Princess retorted icily, "Anyway, that's the gist of things. Master Four's goal is to become the next ruler of the Dark World. He's highly ambitious and has the backing of a particularly mysterious organization. This group isn't as powerful as Dusk but operates with even greater secrecy."

"I've already had dealings with them."

Gu Jianlin remarked casually.

Moon Princess's expression shifted. She quickly grasped his arm, "Are you alright?"

Gu Jianlin looked into her eyes calmly, "My father went through this too, didn't he?"

Moon Princess's gaze turned deep, silent for a moment: "Probably."

"Seems you're not entirely sure either."

Gu Jianlin sighed, "Alright, let's drop it. About Master Four—did he ever send people to hunt you down?"

Moon Princess puffed out her cheeks and said softly, "No."

"I know you quite well now. Let's not lie in front of me."

Gu Jianlin tapped on her feline mask, "Don't do it again."

Just then, a deafening roar shook the forest!

The entire Returning Burial Forest seemed to be trembling.

As the echoing sound erupted, countless living corpses below the hill began roaring and surged upward en masse.

In Gu Jianlin's mind, the Black Qilin suddenly lifted its golden eyes, blazing gold light flashing forth.

"Done resting?"

He dissolved the barrier of the Lock of Nonexistence and said firmly, "Let's move."

Moon Princess and Butcher exchanged glances and quickly followed.

Between the massive rocky walls lay a bottomless gorge, where swirling mist obscured everything.

Suddenly, the mist was blown apart by a fierce wind.

In that instant, whether it was the Female Sacrifice, the Tiger General, or the Second Generation Kirin Venerable.

All wore expressions of shock.

For deep within the gorge was a lost ancient city.

A city that was definitely not made by humans.

But... built by the Ancient God Clan!

Chapter 329 - 172: Su Youzhu (7000)

The deafening roar echoed across the heavens and the earth, piercing the darkness. Thunder fell upon the shadowy world like blades and swords, illuminating the ancient city buried in mist for millennia. It was so desolate and empty, as if forgotten at the end of time.

Abandoned and solitary.

This was a relic of a lost civilization. The desolate city was surrounded by towering cliffs, with thousands of massive rocks carved into eerie human faces that gazed upwards at the sky, their expressions sorrowful.

Main roads stretched in all directions, lined with colossal statues.

Each statue was cloaked in sacrificial robes. Some knelt devoutly like believers, others writhed in agony on the ground, some spread their arms wide as if embracing the skies and the earth, while others hunched in pain, seemingly at their last breath.

Walking through here felt like witnessing the myriad faces of an ancient civilization.

Ancient and peculiar buildings were scattered in all directions, with the city's center hosting a giant altar.

At its heart stood a colossal statue, towering over the desolate city, receiving the reverence of all beings.

It did not have clearly carved facial features, its visage undefined. Its body was as majestic as a giant's, draped in a magnificent golden robe, with hands slightly open, palms holding two spheres that resembled magnetic stones.

A vast halo encircled its head.

It was distinctly from the past, yet seemed as though it belonged to the future.

"Eight years. This is the secret hidden deep within the Returning Burial Forest—a city of the Ancient God Clan. Just as you see it, it's from another world. A mysterious, desolate, and fragmented civilization."

Si Wei'an stood before the statue, his face gradually morphing into an exaggerated smile. His tone was soft and delighted: "To this day, no method exists to precisely determine the age of these ruins. We don't even know what materials these sculptures were carved from. The more mysterious something is, the more fascinating it becomes."

"From our studies, this is very likely from the Ancient Times. The Ancient God Clan built this statue to commemorate the birth of Qilin Venerable. They witnessed the demise of an entire planet and the birth of perfect life."

Mercenaries armed with firearms encircled the area.

Behind him stood eight identical burly men, all bald with shaved scars on their heads, clearly of monastic origin. Their faces bore expressions of Vajra wrath, exuding authority without needing anger.

"Sometimes I wonder, wouldn't it be great to bring this statue into the real world? Once I fully control You Ying Group and become the new king of the Dark World, I'll present this statue to the President."

Si Wei'an's smile grew wider: "On the day she's buried."

BOOM!

The intangible Qi Realm quaked violently.

"Ji Ye, stay calm!"

A young man in a gray suit lowered his voice in a commanding tone: "Don't lose control."

Ji Ye's face was cold and severe, his body drenched in blood. He crossed his arms and replied icily, "How am I supposed to stay calm? Ji Han, did you hear what he said earlier? He insulted Grandmother!"

They ranked among the top ten of the Omega Sequence, the Ji Family's twin stars.

Despite the enemy's provocation, the siblings maintained remarkable restraint.

Because beneath the Qi Realm controlled by them lay eighteen unconscious nano warriors and two unexpected Independent Awakened who had been transported into the Immortal Palace—all gravely injured.

If not for these people, the siblings would have charged out to fight to the death long ago.

"It's been three days since you've been trapped here. Haven't you given up yet? If you keep overdosing on Spiritual Secret Medicine, you'll lose control eventually. Or perhaps you're still holding out hope for rescue?"

Si Wei'an's gaze turned mocking as he chuckled: "In the Omega Sequence, one of you ranks fifth and the other sixth. It would be such a pity for you to lose control like this. Just tell me where the top three are hiding, and you can work for me instead of the decaying Ether Association."

He shook the remote control in his hand.

Around the edges of the Qi Realm, advanced electromagnetic mines flickered with red lights.

Once the Barrier shattered, the bombs would instantly pulverize everyone inside.

"That's possible."

Ji Han responded coldly: "But first, tell me who the traitor among us is."

Ji Ye added sarcastically: "Exactly, since we're already trapped here."

Even without the electromagnetic mines surrounding them, they dared not act rashly.

Because the You Ying Association's Master facing them was not only a Fifth Rank Star Lord but also had mastered several unique techniques from these Ancient God Clan ruins—tricky and formidable.

Especially those eight Vajra Arhats behind him, who were all Ancient Martial practitioners with specialized Combat Skills.

Together, their combined strength was overwhelming.

Si Wei'an's eyes flashed with a strange light at these words, and he turned away with his hands clasped behind him.

At this moment, a group of mercenaries escorted an elderly man in traditional Japanese attire to him: "Master."

Si Wei'an raised an eyebrow: "Mr. Jing Shang, you've arrived."

Jing Shangxiu appeared with two female bodyguards by his side, his expression visibly grim: "Something's gone wrong."

Si Wei'an frowned: "What happened?"

Jing Shangxiu's gaze turned dark: "Why did you awaken so many living corpses at once? The sentries you stationed outside have been nearly wiped out. If not for that, Third Master's men wouldn't have broken through, and now he's here, furious, demanding answers. Our plans are at serious risk!"

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"I wasn't the one who woke it up," Si Wei'an said, stunned for a moment.

"What did you say?" Jing Shangxiu was taken aback. "Who else could it be besides you? Unless someone like us has mastered a method to control this ruin, it's absolutely impossible!"

The smile on Si Wei'an's face gradually froze.

BOOM!

A deafening explosion erupted outside the ancient city, and in an instant, gunfire roared like thunder!

"Damn that meddling fat bastard, Mr. Liu!"

Jing Shangxiu cursed angrily, "Baka!"

Si Wei'an said coldly, "Bring those things out and prepare for battle."

The eight Vajra Arhats nodded slightly and turned to leave.

When they returned, each of them was carrying a silver coffin, bound tightly with iron chains.

"Prepare to open the gate to the underground ruins. This time, we must locate the fragments of the Qilin Wedge!"

Si Wei'an said in a deep voice, "Eight years cannot go to waste."

He turned around and said coldly, "Two Omega-class individuals, I'll ask you one last time. Since you're unwilling to reveal where your companions are hiding... then tell me, what's with that blood mist?"

Ji Han and Ji Ye exchanged a glance. "That's not one of your people?"

Si Wei'an's pupils constricted sharply.

"No time! Move faster!"

Jing Shangxiu urged, "They're about to breach!"

Si Wei'an turned around, pulling out an ancient bronze compass, and pressed it against the sculpture.

For a moment, the halo atop the massive sculpture's head lit up, emanating a brilliance as radiant as the sun.

The dilapidated city began to tremble violently.

Deep within the desolate ruins, a pitch-black void materialized out of thin air, resembling a beast awakening in the abyss. It exuded a primal, ancient aura, expanding relentlessly!

Meanwhile, the explosions outside the ancient city felt as though they were drawing closer!

The thunderous roar of assault rifles and sniper rifles blended with the explosive blasts of grenades and the chaotic rumbling from elemental turbulence.

The area ahead was shrouded in thick smoke, intermittently pierced by blood-curdling screams.

Gu Jianlin gripped a Desert Eagle, casually shooting a living corpse behind him in the head before bellowing, "Stay close to me! Don't wander off! Butcher, protect the Moon Princess. Leave the fighting to me!"

It was his first time in these ruins, but there was no time to marvel at the grandeur and ancient majesty of the Ancient God Clan's city. The sheer chaos of the situation allowed for no distraction—zombies were closing in from the rear, while ahead lay a massive melee, with explosions ringing out incessantly.

He was clearly in berserk mode, the black Ghost Fire on his forehead roaring like an enraged Evil Spirit. With four blazing golden Ghost Hands paving his way forward, he could attack or defend at will, smashing through everything violently!

BANG!

He caught a grenade thrown towards him with one of the Ghost Hands.

Before it could even explode, the hand squeezed it flat!

"Did you remember everything I just told you?"

The Moon Princess once again virtualized, slipping behind a mercenary. With a swift slash of her blood-red Tang Blade, she severed his head. "I warned you earlier to avoid mingling with the You Ying Group. Since the King of Qing has taken an interest in you, there's a label on you wherever you go. And within the You Ying Group, there are many fanatical believers of the Red King. They'll come for you, trying to defeat you and prove something."

"Got it."

Gu Jianlin lifted a finger, unleashing an explosive surge of intense, pitch-black light!

BOOM!

Five First Order Samurai mercenaries from the Ancient Martial Path were blasted into fragments, leaving not even ashes behind.

At this point, such low-level lackeys were no threat to him at all.

"Back then, the King of Qing wanted your father as a student, but he disapproved of his methods. So, the King turned his attention to you. You should think carefully about whether you want to be his student," the Moon Princess said, retreating behind him. She pulled out a Guqin from her back and plucked the strings.

ZHENG!

A penetrating rift tore through the Void, annihilating countless living corpses and mercenaries on the spot.

"So, you're admitting you were my father's student, huh?"

Gu Jianlin glanced at her. By now, the profile of this girl's personality was complete in his mind.

But there was one thing he couldn't quite figure out—it was likely some kind of Mythical Weapon's effect.

Since she didn't want to talk about it, he had no intention of pressing further.

Because no matter who she was, she was someone very important to him. Protecting her was enough.

"No, I'm not! I didn't!"

The Moon Princess mumbled softly.

"Die, you bastards!"

Butcher, carrying a colossal backpack, crossed his arms in front of him, charging up wildly. "Ha Mei Ha Mei... Ha!"

The Ancient Martial Path was notorious for its long survival, due to its diverse and creative uses of Qi. You could essentially simulate most anime-style skill effects, catering perfectly to those with delusions of grandeur!

With a thunderous blast, a violent shockwave of Qi erupted, sending countless enemies flying.

Amid the smoke, someone laughed arrogantly. "Hahaha, Si Wei'an, you sneaky bastard! My reinforcements have arrived! Moon Princess! Butcher! Take those guys down for me!"

A fat man emerged from the haze, exuding unstoppable arrogance.

While others were either dressed conventionally or fully armed, this guy had on a safety helmet, was covered in dust and dirt, and conspicuously had half his butt sticking out. "Si Wei'an, unleashing so many living corpses on me? Mark my words, we are irreconcilable enemies!"

Ning Chen, acting as his bodyguard, was relentlessly punching enemies away at his side.

However, neither the Moon Princess nor Butcher showed any interest in paying him attention.