

Ancient 351

Chapter 351 - 181: Candle Dragon Bone, The Second Path, Ghost Slayer!_2

And his face was eerie and bewildering, with a beauty so sinister it was almost otherworldly.

Gu Jianlin froze, utterly stunned. He hadn't anticipated that devouring the Dragon Bone would bring about such a transformation.

If his guess was correct, he had unexpectedly acquired a second Inheritance Path!

A second Inheritance Path—Ghost Slayer!

In the next moment, a deafening roar reverberated, jarring his head into a frenzy.

He glanced towards the molten lava within the Mo Jade Coffin, where the black-gold Dragon Bone had vanished.

In its place stood a woman of unparalleled beauty.

She was enchantingly stunning, her cascading black hair falling like a waterfall, a blood-red gown clinging to her enchanting and delicate figure. Her porcelain-like skin was so flawless and radiant, it seemed almost unreal.

Yet her blood-red slit pupils glimmered with a cruel edge, and the teardrop mole at the corner of her eye was bewitchingly tantalizing.

Gu Jianlin's heart quaked violently—an old monster!

"Qilin."

The voice of the Candle Dragon Venerable was icy and hollow, echoing like a ghostly wail from the desolate depths of the Universe.

"—Do you want to die?"

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A thunderous boom.

Gu Jianlin regained his consciousness, still shaken.

Maintaining his prior stance, he pierced the fragment of the Qilin Wedge into the blood-colored Crystal Stone.

The stretch of time that had just passed felt as if it had lasted only a fleeting second.

Meanwhile, he heard the collapse resound inside the cavern.

This was the aftermath of him forcefully reversing the Spiritual Domain with his own will, stirring such chaos in the process.

Somehow, he could sense that the overwhelming aura of death shrouding the Ancient God's corpse had suddenly dissipated, replaced by an unprecedented surge of boundless vitality. The laws had been completely overturned.

The girl in his arms, who had hovered on the verge of death, finally relaxed her soft and fragile body in silence. Her bloodless, paper-pale skin began to regain a faint flush, and the vine-like blood vessels on her body disappeared as well.

He didn't have time to dwell on the Ancient Supremes' tangled affairs. Lowering his head urgently, he asked, "How are you feeling?"

Su Youzhu curled up in his embrace, her long, curled lashes fluttering as she gazed up at his face. In a soft voice, she said, "My main body is fine now. Your senior brother has already taken me to Northern

Europe and brought in a Great God to heal me. It's the pinnacle of the Priest path—the most skilled doctor in the world."

Gu Jianlin blinked in surprise: "Senior brother? Took you from Peak City to Northern Europe?"

"Mm."

Su Youzhu uttered a gentle sound of affirmation: "It only took him five minutes."

Gu Jianlin fell silent.

Thinking back, since stepping into the realm of the Transcendent, the greatest sense of solace he had found didn't come from the Qilin Power.

It came from the mentor-and-disciple pair running the grocery store.

His teacher and senior brother had been so good to him.

As long as they were around, nothing terrible would happen.

"The aura of death has now been balanced by this life force. After the mix cancels itself out, there'll no longer be any life-threatening danger."

Su Youzhu murmured softly, "That Great Priest is very capable. Once the vitality surged into me, they severed the link between my main body and my avatar. Even if the Alchemy Matrix gets reversed again, it won't be an issue."

Gu Jianlin gazed at her face, which was gradually regaining color, and felt a weight lift off his chest.

He knew that, this time, every word she said was true.

"How did you do it?"

Su Youzhu's beautiful eyes, like mirrors of obsidian, reflected the young man's face as she asked softly.

"How I did it doesn't matter."

Gu Jianlin replied, "As long as you're alive, that's enough."

Su Youzhu smiled softly without a sound. She wasn't trying to pry into the boy's secrets, only worried about whether or not he had overextended himself.

Just as Gu Jianlin was about to speak again, he suddenly noticed the girl's body beginning to become translucent.

In the blur, he glimpsed a creeping vine.

"The connection between the avatar and the main body has been blocked, so this body is going to vanish, too,"

Su Youzhu cupped his face with both hands and said softly, "I can't stay here with you any longer."

Gu Jianlin hesitated for a brief second: "After the domain reversal, what will happen if your avatar dies?"

"There'll be some side effects, but I won't die."

Su Youzhu snuggled into his embrace, finding a comfortable position. In a serious tone, she said, "Though I want you to miss me forever, I still think... it's better if I can stay by your side."

Gu Jianlin's arms instinctively tightened around her body.

"That old devil Jing Shangxiu is already dead."

He paused: "And did Master target you as well? I'll hunt him down."

Su Youzhu hummed softly, cautioning him, "Be careful. Master didn't just partner with The Order of the Hidden, he's likely gained Dusk's protection as well. If you encounter danger, don't overexert yourself."

In truth, she already had a vague guess: the teacher must have left this boy with something.

Otherwise, his combat power truly defied explanation.

"Don't worry."

Gu Jianlin thought about the Dragon Bone he had just consumed: "I should be pretty strong now."

Su Youzhu pursed her crimson lips and whispered, "Then remember the promise you made before. No matter what, I've survived, so going forward, you have to smile for me every day. And nothing bad is allowed to happen."

She raised both arms, gently wrapping them around the young man's neck.

In her beautifully contrasting black-and-white eyes, only his face was reflected.

"Mm."

Gu Jianlin replied quietly, "Wait for me—I'll find you in the real world."

For just a moment, Su Youzhu tilted her head, her cool crimson lips brushing lightly against his earlobe.

Amid the cavern's collapse, a gale swept through.

And the girl shattered abruptly into glimmering fragments scattering in every direction.

In Gu Jianlin's arms, all that remained was a withered vine. He watched the glittering shards vanish into nothing.

The deafening roar was relentless.

The cavern, however, sank into a deathly quiet.

"Brother Gu."

The Butcher propped himself up against the cave's roof, his voice trembling: "Boss... Boss isn't dead, is she?"

The burly man's voice wavered unnaturally, clearly gripped by fear.

"I don't know."

Gu Jianlin silently clenched his fist, leaving deep grooves in the ground: "But when it comes to matters of life and death, she hasn't lied to me."

Even so, it was impossible not to worry.

A feeling he'd never experienced before—a desperate yearning to return to the real world.

To return to her side.

The Butcher fell silent, uneasy and apprehensive.

"Let's go. It's not over yet."

Gu Jianlin stood, stepping into the dark.

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Northern Europe, Greenland.

"Urgh."

Blood painted the walls of the igloo in red.

Su Youzhu lay on a crude wooden bed, her short light-green hair falling messily, half-veiling her delicate eyes.

"That's it—no more mortal danger. But every injury your avatar sustained over eight years will now rebound to your main body with nearly tenfold the pain, and there's nothing I can do about that."

A cold and stern woman in a fur coat, speaking halting Mandarin, said icily, "You'll need to bear this yourself. Don't fight anyone or use any Extraordinary Ability in the short term. If you endure through this, it'll actually be good for your future ascension."

She raised her hands above her head: "Now, can you kindly remove the blade from my neck?"

Jing Ci smiled slightly, smoothly withdrawing the jet-black Tachi, returning to his gentlemanly demeanor.

"My apologies, Judith."

He said coolly, "After all, this is my junior's sister. Forgive me if I've offended you."

Judith, the Ninth Rank Great God, merely snorted coldly: "Huai Yin took another disciple? What a calamity."

Jing Ci remained unbothered, chuckling as he said, "You've saved this young lady, so my junior will visit one day to thank you. If you ever need anything, consider him indebted to you—just say the word."

At these words, Judith's previously grim expression brightened considerably: "That's more like it."

Jing Ci turned and placed a hand on the girl's shoulder, "Get ready. Time to go home."

"Wait."

Su Youzhu, her fair face still pallid, was illuminated by the auroras shimmering outside the igloo.

It was now the polar night, and the vast black sky whirled with breathtakingly vibrant light, like turbulent seas swirling above.

The icy wind swept up frosty flakes, launching them skyward like a flurry of snow.

Her crystal-clear eyes blinked as she remembered something he had said before.

Being alone isn't lonely.

Missing someone is.

But now, she thought, longing for someone could actually feel quite sweet.

"Someday,"

Jing Ci glanced at his watch and smiled, "Have my junior bring you here again."

"Your parents are probably waiting anxiously at the school gate by now."

Chapter 352 - 182: The Rage of the Candle Dragon

Qilin Immortal Palace, first level, Dawn City.

The nano warriors had already gathered at the gates of the ancient city, each carrying a heavy metal case. The armored vehicles roared as they headed into the wasteland, and helicopters howled as they soared into the sky.

Escorted by high-order Transcenders, the combat formation of 3,000 nano warriors was equipped with highly precise alchemy technology and large-scale destructive weaponry—even carrying alchemy nuclear warheads.

The current President has a famous saying: All fears in this world come from insufficient firepower.

In the 21st century, where alchemy technology is highly developed.

Humanity has gained a considerable advantage in the war against the Ancient God Clan. No longer blindly filling pits with human lives like in ancient times, humans have cleverly utilized modern weaponry, maximizing the advantages of their civilization.

Alright, the word "clever" might not be entirely appropriate.

After all, tossing nuclear bombs in the heat of battle can't really be described as clever.

But the beauty of it is that the Ancient God Realm isn't the real world!

Build as you please!

Legend has it that the first nuclear bomb in human history was actually detonated in the Ancient God Realm, and it happened right on top of a peak Primordial's head, triggering a catastrophic war.

If not for this, that Primordial would probably have planned to sleep for another few thousand years.

The Ether Association, as the largest alliance organization on a global scale, inevitably leads Transcendent armies into every Ancient God Realm that manifests in the real world, expanding territories and stabilizing dimensions.

The Buzhou Mountain of the Pamir Plateau, Yun Mengze of the Jiang Han Plain, the Gate of Hell in Kunlun.

And the recently descended Fusang Divine Palace and Qilin Immortal Palace.

The five Supreme beings currently present, along with the worlds they belong to, have all manifested in the real world.

Although studies of Super Ancient Ruins have essentially confirmed that there are far more Ancient Supremes than just five, the ones that have ultimately arrived on Earth seem to be limited to that number.

The invasion of the real world by the Ancient God Clan.

In turn, humanity doesn't sit idly by and charges into the Ancient God Realm to wage war with them.

The passage of the Heavenly Person Realm is marked entirely by human territories.

The city on the first level of Qilin Immortal Palace was adapted from an Ancient Ruin. A Heavenly Person's Wedge hovered a thousand meters above, its brilliant Golden Realm enveloping the entire city, turning it into a forbidden zone for the Ancient God Clan.

A tall structure known as the Guard Tower rose from the ground, serving as the strategic command center for Qilin Immortal Palace.

If the Ancient Ancestors here could retain their memories and rationality from life, they would surely feel a complex mix of emotions.

Modern humans have indeed made remarkable progress.

They've even managed to develop human civilization in the Ancient God Realm, complete with electricity—and even the internet.

The prerequisite being, of course, that they understand what electricity and the internet are.

The very top of the tower housed the highest conference room.

At this moment, the room was shrouded in darkness, with only a three-dimensional holographic projection speaking eloquently.

"In summary, my suggestion remains the same. Regarding the matter of Qilin Immortal Palace, I warned you many times while I was alive—this is absolutely not as simple as it seems. This is an exceedingly rare scenario: two Ancient God Clans slumbering within the same Ancient God Realm. The situation with Qilin Venerable is even more bizarre."

"Qilin Venerable's urgent use of his Spiritual Domain to erode Qilin Immortal Palace, forcing its descent from the dimensional turbulence to Earth, is not without reason. If my intuition isn't mistaken, something major is about to happen."

"Unfortunately, those fools in the Judgement Court stubbornly insist on their own course of action. What else can I do?"

As these words fell, the temperature around the conference room's round table suddenly dropped several degrees.

Everyone in the room was familiar with this refined yet weathered-looking middle-aged man.

Gu Ci'an.

Although Gu Ci'an had been branded as a Fallen for orchestrating the Blood Moon Slaughter Incident, the contributions he made and the glory he achieved during his lifetime were indisputable facts.

Especially his research on Ancient God Clan civilization, which made him the unparalleled authority in his time.

Thus, when needed, the supercomputer Deep Space would combine the data and thought patterns he left behind during his life to simulate a virtual personality for reference.

God knows, whenever this man appears, he unleashes a tirade that essentially boils down to a few key phrases.

You're incompetent, you're useless, you're idiots.

The Judgement Court is the idiocy of all idiocies.

Of course, useful strategies do emerge from time to time, but those opening remarks are glaringly disruptive.

An elderly man with snow-white hair and a deeply furrowed brow spoke with an icy demeanor: "That's quite enough."

He sat in a wheelchair, attached to an IV, looking severely ill and near death's door.

One of the nine great saints of the Judgement Court, Li Qingsong.

"The current issue is that You Ying Group has already entered the underground ruins ahead of us. They are highly likely to find the sealed Qilin Wedge. And that crucial piece of intelligence? We didn't know about it at all."

He coughed heavily: "This is a serious mistake."

Councilman Zhang, standing beside him, directly turned off the holographic projection.

Han Jing, clad in camouflage military attire, crossed her arms and sneered faintly: "Exactly. After all, you've issued a kill order for the guy; yet you're expecting him, while being hunted, to share intelligence? Even after his death, needing to simulate his personality for help is already disgraceful enough."

At this moment, Wang Taisheng tapped on the table: "Deputy Leader, avoid mixing personal emotions."

Chapter 353 - 182: The Rage of the Candle Dragon _2

Chen Bojun glanced at them and said, "The situation hasn't reached its worst. If the sky falls, the tall ones will bear it. Matters concerning the Ancient Supremes will be resolved by the Catastrophes."

"As for the Qilin Wedge, there's still hope for now."

He reminded them, "Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling have not been found yet."

Instructor Zhu, sitting beside him, still wore a face as grim as if someone had killed his mother. In a cold tone, he said, "These two young people are undisciplined and unorganized, acting alone after leaving the team. I just hope that when we find them, they're not half-dead. Counting on them? Keep dreaming."

A moment later, the door of the conference room was suddenly pushed open.

Hua An, the President's secretary, rushed in with an extremely grim expression.

Everyone glanced at him, puzzled as to what could have caused such distress.

"Something has happened."

Hua An walked to the projector, inserted a hard drive without greeting anyone, and said, "Five minutes ago, a violent tectonic movement occurred on the Pamir Plateau. An earthquake phenomenon was observed at an altitude of six thousand meters. Yes, you heard that right—an earthquake, at a height of six thousand meters in the air!"

"Buzhou Mountain, dormant for 2,500 years, has awakened again. The fractured Heavenly Pillar emerged among the clouds, plunging the entire western region into eternal night. Extreme weather swept across three neighboring countries."

The Pamir Plateau is located in the far west of our country, in the southeastern part of Central Asia, spanning three nations.

It is also the location of Buzhou Mountain.

The Netherworld of the Candle Dragon Clan!

Upon hearing this, everyone turned pale with shock!

Within the holographic projection, the sky resembled the primordial darkness of the universe, filled with burning meteors suspended above. The clouds were scorched a crimson red, as if the world had lost its gravity.

The inverted fractured Heavenly Pillar pierced through the heavens and the earth, its inky blackness spreading like ink bleeding across paper.

Scarlet rain, a roaring Nether River, and a boundless mountain of white skeletal remains.

Lightning flashed and thunder roared, and the heavens were torn apart.

Even through a mere image, the oppressive force almost stopped their hearts from beating.

This level of disaster was enough to make even Holy Land Level experts tremble in fear.

"Headquarters just received warnings from the Golden King and the Silver King."

Hua An said gravely, "After 2,500 years, the Candle Dragon Venerable has returned to Buzhou Mountain and merged with the Candle Dragon Wedge. It's highly likely that it has undergone a Primordial Return, manifesting its true Supreme form."

"And this... this is just one of its Breaths."

He extended his trembling hand. "Do you feel it? Such terrifying power. It didn't even intend to invade reality, yet its power has already interfered with this world through dimensions. Fortunately, Buzhou Mountain is too dangerous for anyone to inhabit permanently. Otherwise, the casualties would have been unimaginable."

At that moment, whether it was Chen Bojun, Li Qingsong, or Han Jing,

they all fell silent without exception.

Because they all understood the implications.

If that most powerful Venerable truly acted without restraint, it could destroy the entire Earth.

Though in the end, it would gain nothing from it.

"How is that possible?"

Li Qingsong's aged voice broke the silence. "The President once said that ever since the Candle Dragon Venerable's battle with the Qilin Venerable, its condition had been unstable. Over the last 2,500 years, it has constantly sought a method for some kind of transformation. That's why the real world has been peaceful for 2,500 years. What does it want now?"

"Is it possible," Han Jing narrowed his eyes, "that it has already found that method?"

"But the King of Qing is still alive," Chen Bojun said, fiddling with a pen and furrowing his brows. "And the few at the Lishan Tiyan Pavilion have issued no warnings. If a Supreme were to change in any way, they would be the first to know."

The next moment, all eyes once again turned to the Secretary-General.

"The President just returned from Laojun Mountain with the conclusion that some kind of upheaval occurred at the Qilin Immortal Palace, which enraged the Candle Dragon Venerable. We must determine the nature of this upheaval."

Hua An said solemnly, "As for Buzhou Mountain, don't even think about it. Half of the Pamir Plateau's space-time has been frozen. No one can approach. Vice President Rhein has already made several attempts, all in vain."

"Regarding the members of the Heavenly Destiny Pavilion, they've descended upon the Qilin Immortal Palace to stabilize the situation for us."

He paused for a moment. "But the bad news is that they, too, are about to fall into slumber, likely after helping the President recover the body, with a margin of error not exceeding half a year."

Silence enveloped the room once again.

"What about the President?"

someone asked.

"The President's message was clear: the era of peace is over. Prepare for war."

Hua An scanned the crowd and continued, "Meanwhile, the younger generation no longer has time. Headquarters has decided to open the Cloud Bright Secret Treasure to boost their combat power."

He switched the holographic projection to display a list of names.

Every one of them belonged to members of the Omega Sequence.

Two names were particularly highlighted.

Tang Ling and Gu Jianlin.

"The President has decreed that these two acted on her orders to operate independently. If they survive this mission, they will be priority candidates for commendation. Whether or not they acquire the Qilin Wedge, merely determining whose hands the Wedge ends up in will be critical intelligence."

Hua An declared, "Lives hang in the balance, so rescue will take precedence during the mission."

Chapter 354 - 182: The Rage of the Candle Dragon _3

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The helicopter roared through mid-air, and the masked Demon Hunters murmured among themselves.

"You guys should have seen the look on the Saint's face just now."

"It was terrifying, honestly. I even suspected he was about to explode in rage, but he managed to hold it in."

"He had no choice—it was the President's order, after all."

"The Cloud Bright Secret Treasure... wasn't that under the Judgement Court's control? No wonder the Saint lost his composure like that."

Back during the Black Cloud City incident, that teenage boy named Gu Jianlin openly defied the Judgement Court.

Right on the spot, he killed the Yan brothers and even took out several captains who were already gravely injured.

Though those people were Fallen, his combat capabilities were clearly abnormal.

For so many years, the Judgement Court had never failed to investigate anyone.

Only he was the exception.

He openly challenged the Judgement Court, refused all investigations, and forcibly protected a group of Unclean.

All because the King of Qing had his back.

Against a Catastrophe, even the Saint wouldn't dare utter a word.

Then came the West Port incident, and that guy mocked them all over again.

The Saint's dignity had been utterly trampled.

And now, it was even worse—an old man's pride was completely shredded.

At that moment, the Demon Hunters noticed that Councilman Zhang, leading the group ahead, was oddly smiling.

Nie, the Deacon, also remained expressionless.

"Shut up! Are you all insane, speaking such blasphemy about the Saint?"

Nie, the Deacon, turned coldly to reprimand them.

Councilman Zhang sat comfortably in the cabin, adjusting his immaculate suit, his eyes behind the glasses inscrutable: "Do not make any rash moves. This is the President's direct order. If you find Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling, inform me immediately."

He paused: "Not a hair on those two is to be harmed."

The Demon Hunters froze for a moment, puzzled by the sudden shift in their leaders' attitudes.

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Deep underground, the ruins collapsed amidst deafening crashes, as dust billowed skyward like a tsunami.

"Cough, cough, cough—what the hell!"

The Butcher rubbed at his dust-filled eyes, looking disheveled as he muttered, "This is insane. What just happened? Wasn't it supposed to be the Ancient God's corpse? Then why did everything collapse?"

In Gu Jianlin's hand, the bronze compass crumbled into ash. He turned back to gaze at the rising dust cloud, shaking his head: "This must have been a safeguard left behind by the Candle Dragon Venerable. Once the Wedge was removed, this corpse of the Primordial would collapse, crushing anyone still inside. Without this bronze compass, none of us would have made it out."

He studied the grains of dust slipping through his fingers, lost in thought.

If he wasn't mistaken, this ancient bronze compass should belong to the Kui Dragon Ancestor.

After all, the Kui Dragon Ancestor was the old monster left behind to guard the Qilin Immortal Palace.

The bronze compass was the key to unlocking the Seal.

But for reasons unknown, these keys had been scattered.

"Such treachery—almost got killed in there,"

The Butcher shuddered at the memory.

"Yeah, that's what happens when dealing with an old monster who's lived for who knows how many years,"

Gu Jianlin mused, thinking how terrifyingly powerful that Supreme must have been to leave behind such an impenetrable Seal.

It hadn't decayed in two and a half millennia.

And the Seal buried deep within the tomb of the Qilin Immortal Palace must have been worn down by the First Generation Qilin Venerable to even make escape possible.

Otherwise, Gu figured, the chains wouldn't budge an inch even today.

The Butcher spat a few more times before exclaiming: "But don't worry, Brother Gu! Now that the boss is back in reality, I've got your back! You may not believe this, but my big daddy's seriously badass!"

Gu Jianlin fell silent, rendered speechless by this fool.

"Though I did call out to Him earlier, and He didn't even bother responding,"

The Butcher scratched his head, looking a bit deflated: "Hey, Brother Gu, earlier—how'd you do it? You pulled out that broken sword and just reversed the Alchemy Matrix on the spot. Does that mean there's something other than the Qilin Wedge in this world that can reverse a Primordial's domain?"

Ha, or is it possible that the broken sword you saw **is** the Qilin Wedge?

Gu Jianlin ignored him. Let this blockhead stay clueless—it was probably for the better.

Not that it was his fault.

No one would have expected that the young man before them was actually an Ancient Supreme from the Ancient Times.

As for the true form of the Qilin Wedge, none of them had ever seen it.

"Where are we?"

Gu Jianlin scanned his surroundings.

The Butcher froze too.

After escaping, they now seemed to be just outside the ruins of the ancient city.

They stood in a dark forest, with a massive lake gleaming with cold, eerie light in the distance.

And deeper within the woods, they spotted a tall Iron Coffin, its lid ajar and the interior empty.

The coffin was clearly not an ancient relic—it was of modern craftsmanship, intricately engraved with countless runes.

And there were distinct footprints pressed into the soft earth below.

Someone had just climbed out of that coffin.

"Master Si Wei'an,"

Gu Jianlin recalled the sight of that man turning into a skeleton and committing suicide—it had been a deliberate deception.

"Ah, the boss did mention something like this to me before. It's a special alchemy secret method called the Sorrowful Corpse Cycle!"

The Butcher's eyes widened.

Gu Jianlin frowned: "What's the Sorrowful Corpse Cycle?"

The Butcher paused to think, then finally admitted, "Uh... I forgot!"

"You absolute idiot!"

The Parrot Emperor on Gu Jianlin's shoulder suddenly sprang back to life, majestic and domineering.

"Forget it. Not important."

Gu Jianlin shook his head, scooping up some soil and rubbing it between his fingers: "Since he showed up here, it means he must have others stationed nearby. This was his pre-arranged escape route, in case he got killed inside. Judging by these tracks, he left just minutes ago—no more than five."

Years ago, Mr. Liu had been shot dead, only to inexplicably come back to life.

So this wasn't all that surprising to him.

Five minutes wouldn't let him get far. He could absolutely catch up!

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes, his mind racing.

The Butcher caught on quickly, grinning wickedly: "Master Si, prepare to meet your end!"

Suddenly, Gu Jianlin's expression shifted, a surge of countless life rhythms flooding into his perception!

One of those rhythms struck him as especially familiar.

He spun around, fixing his gaze into the distance.

In the dim twilight, someone stood atop a massive stone face on a cliff wall, the wind tousling her long red hair. Behind her, an oversized instrument case sat open, revealing a rugged, thunder-lit Iron Sword within.

Boom.

The heavens above reverberated with the roar of thunder.

As if sensing his gaze, she blinked her vermillion eyes, a sly smile flickering within their depths.

"He actually made it into the underground ruins and came back alive. We'll need to reevaluate his combat strength."

From the dressing mirror came an arrogant, icy voice, tinged with astonishment.

Tang Ling retracted her gaze, her eyes gleaming with mischief: "Indeed, he's full of surprises. He's strong enough; it seems you won't need to step in after all."

Chapter 355 - 183: The Ability of Ghost Slayer, The Inheritance of the Candle Dragon

Gu Jianlin gazed at the towering cliff face, the red-haired woman under the moonlight looking at him with an inscrutable glint in her eyes.

So that's it. Tang Ling must have taken on this mission for her own reasons. That's why she broke away from the team halfway through. At her core, she's a lone wolf—never fond of cooperation.

It seemed she didn't enter the underground ruins at all but instead arrived here in advance.

Lying in wait!

"What the hell, Brother Gu, isn't that your teammate?"

The Butcher was utterly shocked: "The Extreme Thunder Great Sword from the Sword Tomb is in her hands!?"

Gu Jianlin glanced at him. "So?"

The Butcher's expression stiffened as he said, "I've been beaten up by that sword before. It's a growth-type Mythical Weapon from the Sword Tomb. Back then, though, it wasn't in her hands. It was wielded by her grandfather, Tang Zijing, and its codename was Wang Gu. But for some unknown reason, Wang Gu went rogue, and Thunder emerged out of nowhere, claiming the sword's authority."

"Thunder is targeting Si Wei'an?"

Gu Jianlin suddenly asked, "Can that Sorrowful Corpse Cycle still be used indefinitely?"

The Butcher froze for a moment. "It shouldn't be possible. The boss said that if used a third time, it would turn someone into a complete lunatic. Master Si has already used it once, and now this makes it twice in total!"

Gu Jianlin couldn't help but think it was an interesting mechanic.

Above the heavens, muffled thunder rolled, birthing intense arcs of electricity that illuminated the dark forest like a blank canvas.

The night air was heavy with overwhelming killing intent.

Yet no one knew who this murderous air was directed at.

Tang Ling withdrew her gaze and lifted her hand to grip the coarse iron sword crackling with lightning. The skull embedded in the sword's hilt had hollow sockets glowing with electric light, and the pale blade seemed to roar as if summoning boundless lightning.

In that instant, her vermillion-red eyes became shrouded, faint clouds swirling in their depths. Silver-white noble markings emerged across her cheeks, and horns sprouted from the top of her head.

Even ethereal, translucent wings flickered into existence behind her!

Controllable deformation!

No, strictly speaking, this was no deformation.

It was perfect evolution!

The pinnacle of the Sword Sect Path originated from Bai Ze Venerable, another Ancient Supreme from the Age of Antiquity.

No wonder she never teamed up with others.

Because this was her secret, something that couldn't be exposed to the Ether Association!

With her crimson hair fluttering in the wind, Tang Ling gripped the boundless lightning in both hands.

Amid the deafening thunder, the world turned blazing white!

At the same time, deep within the shadowy forest.

Si Wei'an stood with his arms spread wide, as nearby attendants finished donning him in a white suit and expensive crocodile leather shoes.

With the alchemy secrets mastered by the You Ying Group, he completed a Sorrowful Corpse Cycle, shedding his former flesh and being reborn anew. His skin was pale as a living corpse's, but his aura hadn't diminished in the least.

"Master Si, was the process a success?"

The attendants asked respectfully.

Si Wei'an's expression remained indifferent. He didn't answer but raised a hand instead.

Dark Shock!

With a booming sound, the darkness shattered, reducing the heads of his attendants into fine dust.

Yet these bodies didn't collapse; instead, their forms hummed with black talismans, continuing to serve him loyally.

The Fourth-Order Cloud Monarch's ability—the Corpse Control Technique!

"Compared to the living, I much prefer the dead."

Si Wei'an sneered coldly and strode deeper into the forest.

But just then, a scarlet blood mist whipped up on a wild gale, roaring toward him!

Within the veil of blood mist, a sinister figure came into fleeting view, unleashing a brutal flash of blood-red light!

Simultaneously, roaring lightning tore down from the heavens, a searing bolt piercing through the night!

The mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind!

Sure enough, Tang Ling was the ultimate safeguard in this operation. Should someone else seize the Qilin's Wedge Fragment from the underground ruins, she, lying in wait here, would be the final act of obliteration.

Yet no one knew how she preemptively foresaw all this, calculating both time and place with precision.

The Kui Dragon Ancestor, as an Ancient God guarding the Qilin Immortal Palace for countless years, likewise had means of discerning the You Ying Group's plot. It had preemptively stationed someone to intercept them halfway.

A scarlet sword light.

Furious thunder.

The two contrasted sharply in the dark, forming a macabre cross of death.

Si Wei'an's pupils caught the gleam of those twin sword lights. For the first time, his face darkened. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a golden pocket watch, turning its dial before him!

"Time, halt thyself!"

He softly chanted, "Come to a standstill by my side!"

A massive, golden clock materialized behind him, its hands freezing abruptly.

An invisible domain spread outward, nearly suspending time and space itself!

Mythical Weapon—Doomsday Pocket Watch!

The blood-red sword light and the crashing lightning both froze in the stillness of halted time.

Si Wei'an strode out leisurely, fingers weaving seals across his chest!

Starlight burst forth in the dark sky, as countless stars came together, forming a radiant galaxy!

The Fifth Rank—Star Lord's ability!

Above, the gathered stars brewed a destructive force like that of an impending supernova!

In a flash, a streak of lightning blazed downward.

Tang Ling leaped from the cliff face, bolstered by her evolved state. She dashed with frightening speed through the dense forest, the Extreme Thunder Great Sword roaring with thunderous force, cleaving trees like dry wood.

Elsewhere, the man cloaked in blood mist also surged forward—a silhouette of blood-red lightning.

The spiritual fluctuations exuded by the three individuals all reached the Fifth Rank.

If they went any further, they would risk being expelled into chaotic dimensional turbulence, foiling their plans entirely!

Boom!

Tang Ling's sword struck the boundary of the frozen-time domain, electric arcs exploding outward as thunder rumbled through the heavens!

Accompanied by torrents of blood mist, the mysterious figure also unleashed a blood-red slash, its blade's cry piercing the skies.

The two Sword Sect practitioners' strikes failed to break the frozen-time domain!

"This Mythical Weapon of mine may look unassuming, but in the Ancient Times, it belonged to the Candle Dragon Clan. Known as the Dragon's Eye, its spirituality has long transferred through history, eventually taking the form of a pocket watch."

Standing in the frozen stillness, Si Wei'an chuckled coldly. "Even the virtualization ability of the Ghost Slayer Path wouldn't penetrate my barrier. As for the two of you? Unless you wield a power exceeding this Rank, you'll simply wind up sucked into dimensional turbulence. You're far from enough to stop me."

The starry galaxy above him intensified, blazing with stellar light as if a supernova were about to erupt!

"Hah."

Tang Ling sneered coldly. "Then let's see you try."

She tilted her head slightly, casting her gaze toward the enveloping blood mist.

The mysterious man's voice sounded hoarse. "You've grown, child."

The unlikely pair—a grandfather and granddaughter—simultaneously stepped back half a pace. Their swords roared to life, their Sword Intents tearing heaven and earth as they blasted apart the gathered nebula in the heavens!

A resounding boom erupted, gravel and wind scattering as destructive light raged through the battlefield.

At that moment, Gu Jianlin, observing from the sidelines, suddenly conceived a daring idea.

As this notion took form, the phantom of the Divine in his consciousness fell into slumber, vanishing into the darkness.

In its place emerged the Ghost Slayer phantom!

Gu Jianlin's eyes glimmered with eerie light, as though he was peering through the torrents of time. He glanced down at his phone, its black screen reflecting his visage, body riddled with grotesque scars and pierced by bladed edges—his back bearing the ominous image of a colossal black Qilin!

No, it wasn't a Qilin.

It resembled a dragon ascending to the heavens!

In that instant, his Inheritance Path shifted from Divine to Ghost Slayer!

Ancient whispers echoed in his mind as abstruse, arcane knowledge coursed into his brain, as natural and fluid as a memory long forgotten.

Gu Jianlin grasped two core abilities.

First, Divine Speed Force.

A power that allowed traversal through the currents of time, exponentially accelerating his movement speed!

Second, Time-Space Gap.

A perceptive ability to discern the fabric and structure of reality, identifying its weakest points and tearing them asunder!

At the same time, Gu Jianlin felt his Rank plummet—from Third Rank back down to Zero-tier.

Yet this did not concern him; after all, he was never lacking in Spiritual Secret Medicine.

He retrieved three vials of Fallen Angel Blood from his pocket, downing them all in one gulp. A surge of spiritual energy coursed through him.

For a brief moment, the spirituality belonging to the Ghost Slayer Path surged explosively!

——A temporary breakthrough!

With a tearing sound.

The wind screamed, silence shattered, as a fleeting shadow darted through like a wraith.

"You just mentioned that your Mythical Weapon is so powerful that even the Ghost Slayer Path's virtualization wouldn't penetrate it?"

A ghostly voice whispered behind Si Wei'an.

Unpredictable.

Utterly terrifying.

Chapter 356 - 184 I Really Didn't Take the Qilin Wedge!

Gu Jianlin attempted to switch to the Ghost Slayer Path for the first time. In the state of Divine Speed Force, he could seemingly feel the torrent of time rushing past him, while the world before his eyes shattered into pieces, riddled with ghostly fissures.

This was the blessing of Divine Speed Force, allowing him to perceive the fractured world.

It felt as though he had been reborn, with a spiritual awakening that transformed his very essence—a brand-new experience.

When the spirituality within him broke through its shackles, he ascended to the First Order within the Ghost Slayer Path.

First Order Ghost—his awakened extraordinary ability was Virtualization.

As the name implies, he could consume spirituality to virtualize his own existence, making him immune to physical attacks and allowing freedom to traverse the material world, albeit with certain time limitations.

However, his Ghost Slayer Path was naturally different. The power he gained was from devouring the Candle Dragon Bone, which inherently set his potential apex at its peak—the extraordinary ability had the capacity for evolution.

This phenomenon mirrored his experience as the Qilin Venerable: during every human state advancement, his extraordinary abilities evolved similarly.

After ascending to First Order Ghost, two passive abilities were strengthened. The fractured world before him appeared incredibly clear, down to the most minute details. Meanwhile, his speed accelerated further under the Divine Speed Force state, with the roar of the rushing torrent of time echoing in his ears like a flood.

Simultaneously, his body became ethereal like an illusion, resembling a transparent soul spirit!

In that moment, Si Wei'an shuddered inwardly, abruptly turned around, and raised his hand to condense Negative Energy.

But it was already too late.

Amidst the uproar of fleeting time, Gu Jianlin stepped into the domain of time stoppage without hindrance!

This was the gift brought by Candle Dragon Venerable.

Thank you, good sister.

In the Virtualization state, the Doomsday Pocket Watch's domain had no effect on him!

Si Wei'an's gaze nearly exploded!

He's come in!

How did this person get in!

A Third Rank Great Fate Master—how did he achieve this!

In a flash, Gu Jianlin extended his hand.

His virtualized finger landed on the Doomsday Pocket Watch.

At the same time, the virtualization dissolved, and spirituality was infused.

The Doomsday Pocket Watch suspended mid-air was infused with his spirituality, and the barrier of time stoppage collapsed with a thunderous roar!

"Strike!"

Gu Jianlin shouted lowly.

At the moment the time stoppage barrier shattered—

Tang Ling swiftly blocked in front of him, flipped her hand, and gripped the White Bone Great Sword as a streak of thunderous lightning flared to life!

Meanwhile, the mysterious man unleashed countless streaks of blood-red light that tore through the void with piercing shrieks!

With a loud explosion, an immense pitch-black skeletal spiritual body materialized in front of Si Wei'an, only to be shattered beyond recognition by the charging blood-red light, before being ripped apart into fragments by a streaking thunderbolt!

The blood-colored sword radiance and scorching lightning struck again!

Crack!

Si Wei'an's hands were severed simultaneously, and blood spurted wildly!

The overwhelming pain elicited an unwilling and furious howl: "Why ambush me here!"

Pale Ghost Fire erupted, ravenous as it devoured the Life Force of the earth.

Under his command, a swarm of headless corpses surged forward to buy him time!

"Hand over the Qilin Wedge and I'll spare your life!"

Tang Ling performed a Thunder Slash that resembled a thousand chirping sparks, obliterating the headless corpses with bursts of flashing lightning!

"The Qilin Wedge isn't in my possession!"

Si Wei'an roared furiously and angrily: "Damn it!"

"You've been plotting for eight years; how could you possibly fail?"

The mysterious man pursued relentlessly, stabbing a sword through his abdomen!

Si Wei'an spat out a mouthful of blood, but the most agonizing pain was not from the wound piercing his abdomen.

It was an unprecedented sense of frustration and wrath.

Because the Qilin Wedge truly wasn't in his possession, yet these people camped out at the underground relics' exit, accusing him of taking the treasured artifact. He couldn't clear his name, even if he had a thousand mouths to explain!

This humiliation and anger felt like a powder keg ready to explode!

"Damn it! The Qilin Wedge is not with me! As soon as Jing Shangxiu from The Order of the Hidden touched that artifact, he died. I suspect it was the Qilin Venerable who took it—you've killed the wrong person!"

His enraged shout shattered the night as he turned to flee towards the lakeshore.

A streak of blazing lightning slashed behind him, leaving a horrifying burn mark on his back!

"Oh? Then how did you survive? The Sorrowful Corpse Cycle is merely a trivial trick—a child's toy before an Ancient Supreme. You have absolutely no reason to still be alive." Tang Ling sprinted swiftly, gripping the White Bone Great Sword tightly in both hands, summoning boundless lightning with grandeur.

"Unless that Ancient Supreme's mind was addled."

The mysterious man sneered coldly: "But clearly that's not the case. I'm more inclined to believe you defected to the Qilin Clan and conspired to kill The Order of the Hidden. Facing death, why not Qilinize already?"

Gu Jianlin: "..."

Wait a moment, who's being insulted here?

I haven't provoked any of you, and yet somehow now I'm being dragged into this mess.

In that instant, he once again realized the vast gap between himself and a true Ancient Supreme.

Knowledge!

Knowledge is power.

Still, this turn of events exceeded his expectations. He had been fretting about the aftermath concerning the Qilin's Wedge Fragment, but now someone had already taken on the blame for him.

Si Wei'an spat out another mouthful of blood—this time, not from an injury, but out of sheer anger.

His mind buzzed furiously—this was an outrageous miscarriage of justice!

"This is your last chance. Hand over the Qilin Wedge! Or reveal its whereabouts."

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The mysterious man advanced swiftly, slashing through his legs with one sword!

With a heavy thud, Si Wei'an collapsed onto the muddy ground, writhing in pain!

At that moment, Tang Ling surged forward, shrouded in ten thousand bolts of lightning.

Just as her sword was about to fall, she suddenly turned around, her beautiful eyes brimming with murderous intent!

Boom!

The mysterious man raised his iron sword to block, but the scorching lightning erupted, roaring without end!

It turns out that these two were never allies to begin with. Their objectives were merely aligned, hence they refrained from attacking each other earlier. But now, with their enemy effectively incapacitated, naturally, they turned on one another.

"Tang Zijong."

Tang Ling pressed down on her lightning-encased blade with all her strength, taunting, "Eight years have passed, and you're still alive?"

Crack.

As Tang Zijong stood against her, a slight fissure appeared on his iron sword. Yet, he betrayed no hint of emotion, merely saying indifferently, "Child, you've grown a lot. I almost didn't recognize you. How have you been all these years? Did anyone bully you in the Sword Tomb?"

Tang Ling replied coldly, "Did you consider any of that when you sold me to the Sword Tomb?"

The reflected lightning made her gaze seem frozen in place.

Thunder rumbled overhead, resonating through the skies.

Tang Zijing glanced up at the dark heavens and chuckled, "Extreme Thunder was once my Mythical Weapon. I know it too well. In ten seconds, lightning will strike me, won't it?"

In that instant, he retreated half a step, crimson mist spreading around him.

Wherever the red fog stretched, ancient, robust trees abruptly withered, weeds in the soil shriveled, and insects on both the ground and in the trees perished—all as if an oil painting of despair were unfolding!

Bolts of lightning struck furiously, yet the moment they touched the crimson fog, they vanished completely, as if swallowed whole.

Tang Ling stepped into the red fog, her body shimmering with an eerie metallic hue, surrounded by countless strands of sword light.

In an instant, the sword light that enveloped her dissipated abruptly, and the metallic sheen on her skin seemed to rust and decay rapidly, gradually fading away.

The fog surged, as if intent on engulfing her.

Tang Ling narrowed her beautiful eyes and said indifferently, "Come, let's see who survives."

Her breathing grew shallow and rapid, as though the void itself trembled!

Breathing Technique!

She too was adept at the Breathing Technique, but clearly intended to risk mutual destruction!

At that moment, Gu Jianlin flashed before her, connecting with the rhythm of nature through his breath. A domain as cool and serene as moonlight swiftly materialized.

Breathing Technique, Realm of Freedom!

Boom!

A brilliant radiance burst forth, cleansing the red fog like moonlight washing over it. Within the domain, all extraordinary abilities were thoroughly purified.

Tang Zijong, clearly the battle-hardened type, had anticipated this domain beforehand and withdrew dozens of paces to stand alongside Master.

His ultimate target, unquestionably, was Master.

Or rather, the fragments of the Qilin Wedge.

Seeing this, Gu Jianlin's expression grew increasingly peculiar.

"Freedom Realm? Thank you."

Tang Ling squinted her beautiful eyes amidst the sudden radiance, intending to seize the chance while the mist dissipated to pursue. But suddenly, a hand rested on her shoulder from behind.

"Don't go after him."

Gu Jianlin said in a low tone, "Trust me, don't go near that fog."

A sliver of hesitation flashed through Tang Ling's pair of vermilion eyes.

Roar!

From the scarlet fog came the chilling sound of a monster's growl, seizing the soul.

Tang Zijing stepped back, grabbed Master's head, and plunged a rustic copper nail into his skull!

Si Wei'an let out a harrowing scream, black mist billowing violently from his body.

"It's not on him?"

His face turned gloomy in an instant, taken aback that the Qilin Wedge was truly absent from this individual.

Then, where was the Qilin Wedge hidden?

"You all, just you wait for me."

Si Wei'an, amidst excruciating pain, broke into a maniacal, sickly grin and shouted hoarsely, "You've offended You Ying Group, offended Dusk. I'll make you... regret stepping into this world."

He crushed the micro-explosive lodged in his back molar, detonating his own head instantly.

Bang!

Tang Zijing was splattered with brain matter and blood as he watched the corpse collapse before him. "What a shame," he murmured regretfully.

It was unclear if he mourned the fragments of the Qilin Wedge.

Or something else entirely.

The scarlet fog grew thicker, contracting like a living entity, utterly consuming Master's corpse.

In merely a second, the body turned to eerie white bones.

This sight left Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling utterly stunned and horrified.

Meanwhile, the crimson mist churned like a sentient being, abruptly rushing toward them.

Both recoiled in terror simultaneously!

"Your Ether Association reinforcements have arrived."

From within the blood mist, Tang Zijing cast them a profound glance, the corners of his mouth curling into a mischievous smile.

"Let's play again next time, kids."

With a deafening boom, the rushing red mist abruptly dissipated, taking the figure within it along.

The shadowy forest plunged back into silence.

A gentle breeze swept past, the sea in the heavens flowing faintly, casting a dim celestial glow.

In the tranquility, it was as though nothing had occurred.

"It's over now."

Gu Jianlin said calmly, "Si Wei'an has already cycled through the Sorrowful Corpse Cycle three times; even if he hasn't died, he's turned into a madman. As for Tang Zijing, there's no trace of his Life Rhythm within a hundred meters. He's gone."

With a subtle thought, the Ghost Slayer phantom in his mind gradually retreated, vanishing without a trace.

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The shadow of the Divine once again materialized, its rank surging back to the Third Rank.

Tang Ling silently gazed in the direction where the blood mist had dissipated. The Extreme Thunder Great Sword in her hand gradually quieted down, the lightning dimmed and vanished.

"Hmm, I understand."

She nodded slightly and then suddenly said, "Thank you."

Gu Jianlin raised an eyebrow, "Thank me for what?"

Tang Ling's fiery red hair gradually turned frost white, her gaze calm: "Thank you for helping me confirm that it was him, and for helping me find clues. Actually, this time entering the Ancient God Realm, I came here with a task from the President."

Gu Jianlin raised an eyebrow again, "The President?"

Tang Ling nodded gently, "The President sent me here for two reasons: one, to determine the whereabouts of the Qilin Wedge, and two, to trace the existence of The Order of the Hidden. I don't have the skills for that, so I had to rely on you."

Gu Jianlin understood, "So you knew from the start what this matter entailed. Then how did you pinpoint the location of the underground ruin's exit? And how did you determine the specific timing?"

"The President requested a Divination Master to perform divination for me,"

Tang Ling looked at the rippling great lake ahead and said softly, "It happened the first time I returned from the Ancient God Realm. At that time, the President had already foreseen everything. But later, when I recalled that red mist, it felt somewhat familiar, though I wasn't certain it was him."

Gu Jianlin thought to himself: So that's how it is. It seems the President's approach is quite reliable after all.

If he wasn't the Qilin Venerable, then this Wedge fragment probably would've been taken out by someone else already.

Even if Tang Ling couldn't retrieve it, she could confirm its whereabouts.

"I told you, when I was little, my great-grandfather cared for me a lot. Later, to ascend to a higher rank, he sent me to the Sword Tomb to be cultivated as a secret weapon. As a result, he gained the opportunity to ascend to the Holy Land. But for some unknown reason, he fell into madness afterward and killed many fellow disciples of the Sword Tomb, as well as members of the Tang Family."

Tang Ling tightened the Extreme Thunder Great Sword into her guitar case and paused: "At first, I didn't know why. It wasn't until you mentioned the existence of The Order of the Hidden that I realized what might have happened to him back then."

Gu Jianlin looked at her deeply.

"After all the things you've said, in the end, you just want to confirm one thing."

He said, almost casually, "You just want to know if he was forced into it, don't you?"

He could tell.

This young woman had proposed splitting into groups and later went off on her own.

She simply didn't want her teammates taking risks with her.

Because she had to face her great-grandfather.

A supremely dangerous Sixth Rank Divine Servant.

"More or less,"

Tang Ling reverted to her usual icy demeanor. Her gaze revealed no emotion: "But based on what you've said, if Tang Zijing chose to become the Divine Servant of the Kui Dragon Ancestor to break free from The Order of the Hidden's control, then he undoubtedly succeeded. If he was truly forced back then, he'll explain himself to me."

"Maybe,"

Gu Jianlin glanced at her. Beneath her seemingly calm exterior, she couldn't fully hide her sense of loss.

"Your father, he was probably targeted by The Order of the Hidden too, wasn't he? The two of us have similar fates."

Tang Ling shot him a sidelong glance and said faintly, "The You Ying Group, the Ether Association, and all the large and small factions in the world—more or less, The Order of the Hidden influences them. This organization... it's terrifying."

Gu Jianlin nodded in agreement: "Among the top ten Omegas, is there still a traitor?"

Tang Ling nodded, "There was one. I killed them."

She raised her head and pointed to the cliff wall on the left.

The corpse of a stunning older woman was pinned to the wall by an iron sword, her death horrific.

Gu Jianlin thought to himself: The top ten are all Fifth Rank, yet this woman killed one by surpassing her rank.

Terrifying.

"I didn't expect you'd mastered self-evolution too."

He marveled.

Tang Ling flicked her long hair, her expression complex: "Will you tell others?"

For some reason, a phrase popped into her mind.

"Miss, you wouldn't want others to know you've mastered self-evolution either, right?"

Under the dim light of the sky, her expression became slightly unnatural. Who knew what she was imagining?

"I won't."

Gu Jianlin said calmly.

"Because you've mastered it too, haven't you? Your combat prowess is simply abnormal."

Tang Ling slung the guitar case onto her back and remarked faintly, "After all, you're someone valued by the King of Qing. As the one who opened the Taboo Magic Box, there's no way he wouldn't teach this to you."

Gu Jianlin froze slightly.

Previously, Youzhu had told him too.

The King of Qing was the first to open the Taboo Magic Box.

He hadn't understood what this meant before, but now he seemed to grasp it.

The so-called Pandora's Taboo Magic Box was, in essence, Controllable Deformation—or self-evolution.

"Alright, enough about that."

Tang Ling suddenly said seriously, "One thing I must remind you about this mission: stop here. Matters concerning my great-grandfather and The Order of the Hidden are best not disclosed to others. You never know if there's a traitor in the Ether Association. Relaying such intel recklessly is unsafe."

She paused: "Anyway, based on the current findings, we've already earned enough rewards."

The top ten had been located.

There were clues about the whereabouts of the Qilin Wedge.

The hidden task regarding The Order of the Hidden could also be reported to the President.

"Got it."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly.

"Pity that the trail of The Order of the Hidden ends here,"

Tang Ling's eyes gleamed with a flicker of coldness. "Who knows where to look for them next."

Gu Jianlin thought for a moment and then said, "Actually, the trail isn't entirely lost."

Tang Ling looked at him in surprise.

Gu Jianlin recalled that old ghost who had set up a ritual while the others were sleeping.

That sacrificial ritual had targeted him specifically.

Yes, he had deliberately let the old ghost target him.

It was the only way to draw out these sewer rats again.

As for his personal safety, there was no need for concern.

One of the traits of the Ancient Supreme—mental interference from external forces was impossible!

Meanwhile, the sound of helicopters echoed in the distance.

Gu Jianlin's phone automatically connected to the Deep Space Network. The Ether Association's support had arrived.

"B-Rank Investigator Gu Jianlin, welcome aboard Deep Space."

"Mission complete. Rewards are being calculated. Please wait."

"Friendly reminder: Time until dimensional stability, countdown—12 hours."

"Do you choose to return?"

Chapter 359 - 185: Won't You Consider Giving Me a Hug?

Dawn City, Guard Tower.

"This operation, in a certain sense, cannot be considered a success, nor a failure. The You Ying Group has been plotting in secrecy for a full eight years. By the time we received word, it was already too late."

"Master Four is indeed dangerous. Eight years of secret scheming, and he truly deserves the fragment of the Qilin Wedge he acquired. Thankfully, it's just a single fragment; it can't be pieced together into the complete Qilin Wedge. We still have plenty of chances."

"Declare war! Immediately declare war against the You Ying Group! Sink every one of their ships floating on the East Sea! That Master Four is extremely dangerous—now that he has the fragment of the Qilin Wedge, he's bound to become a grave threat to the human world! Moreover, they've already broken the rules; they've betrayed humanity!"

"But as of this moment, there's no definitive evidence proving Master Four has genuinely betrayed humanity. Acting recklessly wouldn't be justified. Besides, this guy, even now when death is at his door, still refuses to use Divine Servant Transformation."

"How many times has he used the Sorrowful Corpse Cycle now?"

"Is there any chance that the fragment truly isn't in his possession?"

"Did you even use your brain when asking that question? Even if Master Four didn't take the fragment, this matter surely still ties back to him. Aside from Thunder and the Chair Killer, there's only him left alive in the underground ruins! Oh, and that Butcher invested in by Third Master. But do you think that guy's intelligence level could grasp the Qilin Wedge?"

"Fair point. If Third Master had obtained the Qilin Wedge, he'd have already been boasting about it by now. Instructor Wan and his team have been monitoring Third Master's party the entire time, so there's no chance of that."

"Furthermore, the statements from Thunder and the Chair Killer have been verified by us and contain no falsifications whatsoever."

"If Master Four's eight years of plotting ends in failure, he might as well go ahead and kill himself."

"Agreed. If the Qilin Venerable had acquired the fragment of the Qilin Wedge, how would Si Wei'an have survived? Master Four's Sorrowful Corpse Cycle may seem nearly impossible to unravel for us, but in the eyes of an Ancient Supreme, it's child's play. Unless the Qilin Venerable had completely lost his mind—but the odds of that happening are about as likely as Jupiter colliding with Earth."

"Wait a minute, who came up with the code name 'Chair Killer'? We're the Ether Association, the world's largest Ascension Alliance, and yet we allow such names? It's an affront to decorum! An affront to decorum!"

In the highest conference room, the upper echelons were arguing relentlessly.

Even in the adjacent lounge, the transmission of their heated voices could be distinctly felt.

Gu Jianlin sometimes felt genuinely fortunate for his aloof temperament.

Otherwise, he thought, he would've completely lost his composure.

The Ether Association had wiped out the underground ruins, marking the conclusion of their mission. Following standard protocol, they first underwent examinations by the medical department to ensure no physical issues before reporting their findings.

This process proceeded swiftly, since lying was not allowed. Question and answer, straightforward.

Naturally, this truthfulness regulation didn't bother him much.

Everyone who had just completed their missions and earned merit was allocated to their respective lounge rooms.

All that remained was the wait for their return; other mysteries weren't theirs to unravel.

Yet the upper echelons had been quarreling in the conference room for over ten hours nonstop.

The key issue was that the content of their arguments was utterly absurd.

Gu Jianlin massaged his forehead and let out a sigh.

The fragment of the Qilin Wedge now hovered deep within his consciousness.

But the blame had been pinned on Master Four.

Outrageous—this diversionary tactic was simply masterful.

Even Gu Jianlin hadn't anticipated this turn of events. After all, he considered himself such a gentle and kind person, someone who always adhered to the principle of "be kind to others." Doing something so irrationally malicious, so devoid of ethics—surely not something he would dare attempt.

However, as he recalled the scathing critiques on the Second Generation Kirin Venerable among the upper echelons, suddenly, he didn't feel like laughing anymore.

He even felt a touch melancholy.

"Ding, task reward settlement complete."

"Merit Value Reward: 25,000 points! Total Merit Value: 65,078 points!"

"Reward Item: Extraordinary Ritual Material Exchange Voucher."

"Reward Item: High-level Alchemy Weapon Voucher."

"Reward Item: Creation Angel Secret Medicine."

"Reward Spoils: Mythical Weapon, Doomsday Pocket Watch!"

"Special Reward: Investigator Gu Jianlin, due to your exceptional performance during the mission, you've been awarded one additional entry into the Soul Skywell. Details will be revealed later."

Gu Jianlin's phone displayed a notification from the Deep Space Network. The cascade of rewards left him entirely stunned.

"We've hit the jackpot! Hit the jackpot!"

The parrot screeched maniacally nearby.

Gu Jianlin thought silently to himself—indeed, they had hit the jackpot.

To begin with, amassing over sixty thousand Merit Value meant he could exchange it for a growth-type Mythical Weapon.

For example, Tang Ling's Extreme Thunder!

Next, the significance of those two exchange vouchers required no explanation; as long as it existed in the supply database, it could be redeemed.

Even if it were out of stock, they'd find a way to procure it for you.

This privilege was leagues above that of ordinary investigators!

Regarding the Creation Angel Secret Medicine, he consulted Deep Space Network for further details.

Creation Angel Secret Medicine.

Stock: Unknown.

Rarity: SSS Top-Secret Grade.

Drug Effect: Comparable to divine intervention. Regardless of how severe one's injuries are, consuming this medicine allows instant recovery and bestows sacred protection. For twenty-four hours, all negative conditions are delayed in effect.

Upon seeing the description of the medicine's effects, even Gu Jianlin couldn't help but feel a flicker of excitement.

In a nutshell, the medicine was equivalent to resurrecting from the dead.

No matter how peculiar the curse or how lethal the poison, it guaranteed survival for a day.

Chapter 360 - 185: Won't You Consider Giving Me a Hug?_2

"This can be given to Youzhu."

He said softly.

After Master's death, instead of dropping gold coins, he dropped the Doomsday Pocket Watch.

Tang Ling said she didn't want this item and would give it to him as a token of gratitude.

Gu Jianlin didn't refuse.

Because after he awakened the second pathway, he deeply realized the power of the Ghost Slayer pathway.

Its advantage lies entirely in output and speed, while it is somewhat lacking in other aspects.

"The Doomsday Pocket Watch can also be given to Youzhu for self-defense."

As for the opportunity to enter the Soul Skywell in the end, one could only wonder what it would be.

But the benefits should be substantial.

However, Gu Jianlin wasn't particularly excited about this massive gain.

Because as Deep Space observed reality, modern technology had now solved the dimensional problems of the two worlds. At least in the stronghold of Dawn City, the internet could span both dimensions.

Yet, the message he sent out hadn't received a reply.

Over ten hours had passed, and he still hadn't heard back from Youzhu.

With only about ten minutes left until the return node, he was genuinely unable to sit still.

"Please, let nothing happen. Please, let nothing happen..."

Gu Jianlin sat on the sofa, fiddling with the Black Jade Pendant in his hand, the ancient token he owned. The lounge was already set up with an Alchemy Matrix, ready to transport him back to reality as soon as the time came.

At that moment, his phone suddenly vibrated—a WeChat message.

Tang Ling: "I forgot to remind you of something."

Gu Jianlin replied: "What?"

Tang Ling: "The Moon Princess and the Butcher from the You Ying Group helped us during the mission, but they're ultimately people from the Dark World. When other team members report the mission details, they won't be able to lie. Even if they wanted to help you keep this hidden, there's no way. So they're bound to reveal this."

Gu Jianlin replied again: "And so?"

Tang Ling: "On the Ether Association's wanted list, the Moon Princess is a red name with high priority. Do you remember Wang Taisheng? His son was once severely injured by the Moon Princess."

Gu Jianlin understood: "You mean, he's going to use this as an excuse to make trouble?"

Tang Ling: "Exactly. Stay on guard."

Gu Jianlin replied: "Got it."

The next moment, the clock in the lounge stopped at 6:00 AM.

Gu Jianlin felt the Black Jade Pendant radiating a gentle light. The walls, floor, and ceiling of the lounge lit up with ancient golden patterns, as if the entire world was spinning and flipping.

Return to reality.

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By May, Peak City had already taken on a hint of summer, and the eastern sky began to pale with the first light of dawn.

After a whirlwind of dizziness, Gu Jianlin found himself once more in the sparring grounds of Black Cloud City. The crashing of waves echoed through the sea breeze, and the dim sky was faintly illuminated by lights, revealing coral-like clouds.

Clearly, he was the first to return.

The sparring grounds were empty except for the servants from the labor department, who were stationed there to welcome the return of the prodigies.

"Welcome back to the real world, Mr. Gu."

A beautiful servant slightly bowed, smiling as she spoke: "Your room has been cleaned. Would you like to freshen up first, or head to the restaurant for a meal? Tonight, the base has prepared a celebration banquet and party for your return. The Association's executives will also attend to toast your success."

The Ether Association's lifestyle services were very thorough and highly sociable.

For most investigators, the celebration banquet after each mission was particularly significant.

It helped them strengthen and expand their networks.

"No, prepare a car for me."

Gu Jianlin said emotionlessly, "I'm going home. Thank you."

The servants all froze, showing hesitant expressions.

"That... doesn't quite abide by the rules, does it?"

They hesitated for a moment.

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes. He was already rather anxious, and their delay worsened his mood further:
"The mission is over. I want to return to my own home. What's improper about that?"

The beautiful servant's face turned slightly pale. Naturally, she wouldn't dare to disobey an Omega.

But for some reason, she still seemed hesitant.

Gu Jianlin noticed her expression and suddenly understood: "Someone told you to stop me from leaving?"

The servant's face changed, and she hurriedly said, "You must be joking. How could that be?"

Gu Jianlin said coldly, "Speak the truth."

The servant hesitated for a long time before finally wilting under his pressure. She lowered her head and whispered, "Actually, Officer Wang Taisheng instructed us to make sure you stay at the base. He has something he wants to ask you."

Gu Jianlin's gaze turned icy, his temper dangerously close to erupting: "And if I insist on leaving?"

The servants lowered their heads and respectfully said, "Due to the appearance of a traitor in this mission, Black Cloud City is under lockdown tonight. All investigators must undergo inspection."

Gu Jianlin's blood pressure spiked. His desire to go home was extremely urgent, and he had no patience for these pointless formalities. Any more delay, and he'd start "reasoning" with them.

The passive effect of "Be kind to others" was on the verge of triggering.

Just then, a familiar voice suddenly sounded behind him.

"Look at you, so restless."

The world seemed to freeze in an instant. Even the sound of waves vanished into silence.

Gu Jianlin turned around and saw a familiar figure.

Unbeknownst to him, Jing Ci had appeared behind him, seated on a chair. In front of him was a wooden table adorned with a delicate plate containing perfectly fried eggs and neatly sliced pink steak.