

Ancient 401

Chapter 401 - 200 An Old Acquaintance Seems to Arise_2

Who knows how many traitors are still lurking within the Ether Association? If they infiltrate a powerful upper echelon, they could covertly manipulate everything, rendering all our efforts futile!

Bang!

Director Li smashed down a large tree, creating a deep pit on the lawn!

He spat out a mouthful of blood, his body a mangled mess of flesh, but was healing at a visible speed. However, a sinister black spell, like a living entity, spread across him, causing his body to decay and rot!

This is the power of the Combined Skill!

He struggled to stand but heard the roaring of the Ancient Bell!

Soul Comforting Bell, vibration!

Gu Jianlin swooped down, tilting his head back to drain another bottle of Blue Blood, his spirituality rejuvenated again!

Four expanding Ghost Hands suddenly crashed down, each punch accompanied by burning Ghost Fire!

Punch shadows poured like a tide, each punch as heavy as a thousand pounds, slamming down like iron!

Director Li passively shielded his head, his life force rapidly depleting!

At that moment, Gu Jianlin grabbed his head, and the Divine Sacrificial Fire suddenly ignited!

Priest!

"Bastard!"

Director Li let out a shrill roar of rage, counter-punching through his chest!

Gu Jianlin coughed up blood, but the Divine never fears such injuries.

You wound me severely, I'll burn you fervently; I'll recover it back anyway!

On the other side, Tang Ling was blocked by twelve crew members, launching another sword dance!

The Sword Intent soared to the sky, sword shadows rampaging like a storm!

Scholar supported beside her, using the power of the Four Symbols to restrict the movement of the twelve people!

As the secret weapon of the Sword Tomb, Tang Ling was exceedingly formidable even without using Extreme Thunder.

It only took her half a minute, one sword one head.

Sword Qi crossed, blood splattered!

"Hurry up, still dealing with those lackeys for so long?"

Gu Jianlin endured the pain, slightly grinning.

Director Li even wanted to crush his heart, but his hands were firmly grasped by the four Ghost Hands.

The next instant, Qi Force surged within this person's body, seeming to want to self-destruct.

Gu Jianlin also condensing dark particles in his palms, planning to blast his head off first!

"You have a bright future, dare to gamble your life with me?"

Director Li grinned a sinister smile.

Gu Jianlin said indifferently: "Go ahead, try."

A hint of brutality flashed in Director Li's eyes, these Divines were all madmen!

The next moment, Scholar once again activated the Four Symbols' power.

The soil on the ground suddenly bound his body tightly, spikes burst through the earth, piercing his spine!

At the last moment, Tang Ling rushed over, muttering: "Coming, coming, why rush!"

She threw a sword backhand!

Crack!

Director Li's throat was pierced by the sword's edge, his eyes wide in anger, blood spurting from his mouth!

Gu Jianlin's four Ghost Hands suddenly let go of his arms, backhanding his head with a punch!

Bam!

Four punches struck simultaneously, finally breaching his defense.

Director Li's head was smashed flat, blood gushing out!

Gu Jianlin seized the chance to pull out a dagger, viciously stabbing it through his heart, ending his life!

"Huff, huff."

He breathed a sigh of relief, flipping over to sit on the ground, his voice hoarse: "This guy was really tough, if everyone in The Order of the Hidden is like this, we need to advance quickly."

Tang Ling pulled out the Iron Sword, her charming face also covered in sweat, this battle was indeed strenuous.

On the other side, the sound of a helicopter's rotor was already echoing.

The people from the Judgement Court had arrived.

Scholar had already fled early, setting a big fire before leaving.

The flames would burn everything here, erasing those traces.

Boom boom boom!

The plane exploded as well, the ground also blasted apart.

These were bombs he had set up in advance.

The more severe the on-site damage, the weaker the divination effects would be.

As for the money compensation, anyway, it's all on the Judgement Court.

Gu Jianlin backhanded the Soul Comforting Bell, releasing a black halo like a vortex.

A wisp of a void-like soul was pulled out from Director Li's body, completely devoured.

"All done."

He said in a deep voice: "Retreat!"

Tang Ling helped him up, suddenly asked: "Can we really get away?"

The Demon Hunters from the Judgement Court aren't pushovers.

There's no guarantee no other high-level Ascenders would be present.

"Don't worry, we have reinforcements."

Gu Jianlin dragged her into the small woods, five hundred meters ahead was a road.

He pulled out a new phone, dialing a number: "Hey, mission completed."

On the phone, Lu Zijin exhaled a sigh of relief, saying: "You scared me, if you didn't call me soon, I was about to go there and fetch you myself. Who was your helper? They seemed quite strong."

Gu Jianlin calmly said: "Thunder."

Tang Ling glanced at him unexpectedly, surprised his backup was at a Minister Level.

On the phone, Lu Zijin was rather surprised: "Thunder? The Sword Tomb people are notoriously stubborn and tough, how did you convince her? Don't tell me you sold your body? Tsk tsk, I'll tell Youzhu when I return."

Gu Jianlin almost choked on his own blood, sister, I'm trying to escape here.

You're still fooling around instead of coming to support.

Tang Ling looked at him with an even odder look, calmly said: "So sorry, Minister Lu. I'm not like those Sword Tomb cold faces, I don't need to sell my body to lend a hand."

Lu Zijin chuckled on the phone: "Alright, alright, Councilman Zhang from the Judgement Court is nearby, and it seems like Li Hanting is too, you better run. All the nearby surveillance has been disabled by my

people, and there are high-level Spiritualists counter-divining nearby. At the intersection of Linhai Road and Qinghe Road, there's a Lamborghini, run fast!"

Gu Jianlin was taken aback: "Minister Lu, you're not here?"

Tang Ling also frowned: "If we're caught, we'll turn you in first."

Without Minister Lu, they didn't feel safe at all.

As the phone abruptly cut off, Lu Zijin said with a smiling voice: "I found two unexpected people."

Suddenly, Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling seemed to sense something.

In the distance, on the rooftop of a building, two familiar figures stood amid the raging wind.

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"Unaware as time flies, the child finally grew up."

"In a month, Third Rank? This completely surpasses Professor Gu's record."

"I'm not talking about that, it seems he learned to court girls since we last met, has he awakened to this?"

"From my divination results, evidently not. He just views the girls as tools; there are no untoward intentions between men and women, which aligns with his character."

"What a scumbag, how could this be? Such a top-tier beauty, and he's unmoved?"

"That's just his nature, isn't it?"

"If he had my skills, those two girls would be on maternity leave ages ago."

On the rooftop, two people whispered among themselves.

Snap.

A cigarette butt was tossed to the ground, stomped out with one foot.

"Without that annoying parrot, still a bit unaccustomed."

Someone had their hands in the pockets of their coat, a massive Iron Coffin strapped to their back shaking in the wind.

"Target locked."

A cold, stern older sister with long hair stood beside him, a black suit skirt fluttering in the wind, coldly saying: "Ghost Slayer Path, Fifth-Order Moon Master, Zhang Shouheng. Sword Sect Path, Fifth Order Sword Soul, Li Hanting. Additionally, there's a Demon Hunter team composed of thirty-two members, all Third Rank."

She paused: "I have activated the reverse divination domain."

"Understood, Chen Qing, you stay here, occasionally use your ability to help me cover."

Lu Zicheng smiled playfully as he gazed at the approaching helicopter in the distance.

He stepped on the edge of the rooftop's railing, his Qi Force building up to almost fly skyward.

"Got it."

Chen Qing smiled at the corners of her mouth: "It's your first time using a Growth Type Mythical Weapon, don't overdo it."

"I know, I know, women are so naggy."

Lu Zicheng pouted, suddenly leaping from the thirty-second-floor rooftop.

The Iron Coffin roared open, revealing a skeletal giant dragon soaring into the sky, coiling around him.

The dragon's head suddenly ignited flames, eyes turning a frightening bloody red.

Its mouth gathered terrifying light and heat, illuminating the dim world in an instant.

"Bang."

Lu Zicheng raised a hand to cover his lips, softly spoke.

A gigantic scarlet flash shot skyward, as if to engulf the incoming helicopters!

Chapter 402 - 201: Heading Toward the Edge of the City

The helicopter roared through the air.

Councilman Zhang sat in the cockpit, speaking coldly: "Spirit Medium Team, immediately begin divination to locate Director Li. I need confirmation of his current status. Contact the security team and impose a full lockdown on Peak City's coastal areas. Unlock maximum power permissions for the Deep Space supercomputer, and conduct surveillance and investigations on all city residents."

He stood up expressionlessly, gazing down at the airport engulfed in flames below, his face solemn like still water.

"For Director Li to be attacked at a time like this—it's hard not to let one's mind wander."

Li Hanting sat in the airport, stroking the wolf cub in his arms, his eyes narrowed.

Councilman Zhang thought to himself that this was indeed a sensitive period. His mind was inundated with numerous suspects, but few would dare to attack a director of the Investigation Bureau in broad daylight.

"But regardless of who it is, they won't escape."

Li Hanting said calmly, "Brother Shiheng, it's been ages since we last teamed up."

Councilman Zhang nodded slightly: "Indeed."

A bloodthirsty aura seeped out.

The Councilman from the Judgement Court rarely acted personally, but that didn't mean his strength was lacking.

Ghost Slayer Path, Fifth Rank Moon Master.

Moreover, he was in his peak state, already preparing for his promotion ceremony.

At the same time, the helicopter pilot spoke in a low voice: "Radar has detected a suspicious target!"

Urgent voices erupted from the Spirit Medium Team's communication channel: "Divination complete! Director Li Yi of the Investigation Bureau's sixth branch is confirmed dead—the body was blown apart by a bomb, leaving no remains!"

For a fleeting moment, Councilman Zhang's pupils beneath his glasses emitted a cold gleam like blades and swords. He reached behind him to retrieve a tachi encased in a scabbard. As the blade was unsheathed, a sound resembling a hum burst forth, vibrating intensely.

The torrent of time flashed briefly in the depths of his pupils—it was clear he had entered the domain of Divine Speed Force.

Li Hanting furrowed his brow and had already set the wolf cub down. His sword box behind him automatically opened, and six small green jade swords began trembling in midair, suspended and shimmering coldly like water.

A fearsome and harrowing Sword Intent escalated step by step.

"Lock onto the suspicious target. I'll parachute directly with Hanting, and you handle the cover," Councilman Zhang said indifferently.

Li Hanting opened the plane's cabin door, the six small green jade swords descending to his feet, emitting joyful hums.

The overwhelming presence of two Fifth Ranks seemed to envelop the entire airport.

Suddenly, the Demon Hunter Team issued a warning: "Boss, watch out!"

The helicopter was illuminated by blazing firelight, as if molten lava was gushing out from the flames!

"Damn it!"

An enraged voice resounded in the cabin!

Boom!

The helicopter exploded in midair, blooming like brilliant fireworks.

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At the same time, Gu Jianlin sprinted out of the park, bracing himself against a roadside tree, as the Divine Sacrificial Fire burned furiously!

The terrifying wound on his chest silently healed, and vigorous life energy surged throughout his body.

"Run, run, hurry!"

Tang Ling pulled him along, heading toward the roadside where, sure enough, a Lamborghini was parked.

This two-seater supercar had sleek, low lines like a cheetah, with bright red paint shining like flames—dazzling and cool. The engine was already revved up, emitting a deep growl.

"Know how to drive?"

Tang Ling glanced at him and casually asked.

"I'm still underage, don't have a license."

Gu Jianlin yanked open the door and slid into the passenger seat, panting heavily.

Tang Ling snickered. Even in her red-haired state, she teased with a playful smirk. Her pale and delicate oval face gleamed with a mischievous smile: "Alright then, let big sister take you on a getaway."

She tossed the box containing Extreme Thunder to him.

With a bang, the Lamborghini's doors shut simultaneously.

Tang Ling slammed the accelerator pedal, and the supercar shot onto the road like an arrow leaving the bowstring. It veered like a restless beast, weaving through traffic and leaving countless vehicles behind in its wake, triggering a barrage of angry honks.

"Is this how you always drive?"

Gu Jianlin tightened his seatbelt, panting: "I've been in a car accident before. Can you take it easy?"

"Relax."

Tang Ling curled her crimson lips: "If we don't pick up the pace, we're going to end up as nothing more than Mr. Tang and Mr. Gu."

Gu Jianlin thought to himself, true enough. The Ether Association had strict protocols and laws in place. Actions like bypassing procedures to directly assassinate a superior would never be permitted. If caught, it would all be for nothing.

Even if they proved that Director Li was a traitor, it would merely earn them credit.

Yet, despite the accomplishment, the crime of assassinating a superior would still land squarely on their shoulders.

This is the purpose rules serve.

Then again, some situations don't require following the rules.

"I've never done anything this thrilling in my life."

Gu Jianlin leaned back into the comfortable seat, feeling the tremendous acceleration as he stared out the window: "I used to mess around in the Forbidden Zone or Ancient God Realm. This is the first time I've stirred up trouble in a city."

"You think I've done this before?"

Tang Ling patted her chest with a dramatic flair, complaining: "I'm scared to death."

Gu Jianlin chuckled silently: "And yet you still dared to come."

After all, this woman was the pride of the Sword Tomb, highly esteemed by the President. She need not risk accompanying him in such reckless escapades—one misstep, and it would spell the ruin of her future.

Tang Ling snorted: "You know exactly why I came. We're tied to the same rope."

Gu Jianlin looked at her face—charming yet cold, like a blade hidden within a bouquet of roses, dangerous yet alluring.

Chapter 403 - 201: Heading Toward the Edge of the City_2

Tang Ling glanced at him as well.

The two of them stayed silent for a moment, then suddenly burst out laughing.

Gu Jianlin rarely smiled, but today's events were too exhilarating—and, most importantly, successful.

Tang Ling's vermilion lips curved with an increasingly captivating charm. She also understood what today's accomplishment meant for them.

It carried the thrill of secretly pulling off something mischievous.

And the joy of taking a big step toward their goal.

"But are you sure there won't be any problems later?"

Tang Ling asked.

"Relax."

Gu Jianlin replied calmly, "In the end, the narrative will be directed to say that this was the work of a traitor within The Order of the Hidden."

Tang Ling was momentarily stunned; she hadn't expected such a twist. "I didn't know you were so slyly wicked."

Gu Jianlin raised an eyebrow. "Who says that? I've always been kind to others."

Meanwhile, a violent explosion thundered from the horizon, faintly stirring the sensation of an immense domain being erected, encompassing nearly half a city block. Countless vehicles and pedestrians scattered in panic.

Even at this distance, the oppressive force could be distinctly felt.

Suddenly, Tang Ling noticed a little note on the dashboard.

"Go for it! Try to get those two ladies on maternity leave as soon as you can. I believe in you!"

She read the text aloud, "Who left this? Your nanny and babysitter?"

Gu Jianlin thought to himself, what kind of nonsense was this? "Yeah, Captain Lu and Sister Chen Qing. They went to heal their injuries earlier and completed a breakthrough ritual along the way. Now Captain Lu is a Fifth Rank World King, and Sister Chen Qing is also a Fourth Rank Spiritualist. Minister Lu assigned them here to provide cover for the two of us."

Looking at the explosions in the rearview mirror, Tang Ling remarked, "Captain Lu doesn't seem like someone who just advanced to the Fifth Rank—and he's likely integrated some form of growth-oriented Mythical Weapon."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly. "Apparently, Captain Lu was a gifted Omega candidate in his youth. After years of meticulous preparation, it's only natural for his combat power to have surged. Who did the Judgement Court send?"

Tang Ling let out a cold snort, "Presumably Councilman Zhang and Li Hanting."

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment—it turned out to be two Fifth Ranks.

But Fifth Rank World Kings were notoriously tough and durable to deal with, so it was likely manageable.

Otherwise, Minister Lu wouldn't have arranged things this way.

"So, starting today, you've roped me into your pirate ship?"

Tang Ling's vermillion eyes glanced toward him, suddenly speaking, "Tomorrow night, you won't come telling me something like... 'Miss Tang, wouldn't you also prefer that the Judgement Court doesn't find out you helped me launch an assault on a superior?'"

Gu Jianlin's eye twitched slightly.

"Otherwise, during synchronization earlier, why were you thinking about my legs? Do you think they're nice?"

Tang Ling's outfit today was undeniably trendy—a white off-shoulder casual top paired with a black camisole underneath. The hem of her shirt barely concealed the edge of her shorts, leaving her snowy-white legs strikingly apparent.

Gu Jianlin hesitated briefly, suddenly at a loss for how to explain.

Wait, why would he need to explain?

He'd just picked an eye-catching detail to focus on, nothing more.

"Alright, I won't tease you anymore. I know you're not that kind of person—you're just burdened by too many thoughts."

Tang Ling shifted gears in tone, her playful gaze becoming increasingly mischievous. "But hey, if my legs can attract even someone like you to take a couple extra glances, shouldn't I feel a little proud?"

Gu Jianlin didn't want to respond anymore.

Memories of being bossed around by that girl at home came flooding back.

"Thanks."

Tang Ling said sincerely, "Thank you for trusting me. In an environment rife with traitors, where you can never be sure who's reliable, choosing someone as your teammate is a huge gamble."

"I don't mistake people after spending enough time with them."

Gu Jianlin replied casually.

Tang Ling raised her right hand. "Pleasure working with you."

Gu Jianlin glanced at her fair, delicate hand and lightly clapped against her palm.

Without a doubt, their goals were aligned.

Tang Ling wanted to investigate The Order of the Hidden due to matters concerning her great-grandfather.

Gu Jianlin was driven by the issues surrounding his father and Uncle Mu.

At that moment, twilight painted the coastline in shimmering golden hues.

Tang Ling casually turned on the car's music system, humming along happily.

"Drive, head toward the city's edge, roll down all the windows..."

Gu Jianlin leaned against the car window, watching the girl's expression through the rearview mirror.

As they entered the bustling city streets, the car slowed down to avoid being pulled over by traffic police.

"Want to grab some food later?"

Tang Ling suddenly thought of something, asking with interest, "I remember there's a nice Japanese restaurant ahead, but I've never gone alone—it feels too wasteful."

Gu Jianlin chose this moment to ask the one thing he'd been wondering all along: "Does the Sword Tomb really run out of money?"

Mentioning it, Tang Ling's eyes flashed with a hint of disdain. She replied, annoyed, "Do you know what the Sword Tomb really is? It's my teacher's private domain, a 4,000-meter-high snow-capped mountain. The Sword Tomb is filled almost exclusively with ascetics who've renounced all worldly attachments, living like ghosts."

"Among my fellow disciples, ten of them together couldn't even scrape together one mother."

She added coldly, "As for material needs, they don't have any—they spend all their money buying extraordinary resources and leave nothing behind. They're as broke as ghosts."

Gu Jianlin couldn't wrap his mind around how these people existed in the 21st century and quipped, "Then yeah, you're definitely different from them."

Chapter 404 - 201: Heading Toward the Edge of the City_3

Tang Ling snorted coldly, "I work for them. I've never considered myself one of the Sword Tomb people."

Gu Jianlin roughly understood.

It turns out her icy demeanor was just a facade, or cultivated in the unique environment of the Sword Tomb. This is her true self, full of blood, flesh, desires, needs, and able to complain.

"But there's no time today. After Director Li was killed, The Order of the Hidden will respond."

He took out the Soul Comforting Bell: "We need to strike while the iron is hot, quickly interrogate and catch them off guard."

Tang Ling's expression turned slightly stern as she parked the car by the roadside.

Gu Jianlin infused spirituality into the Soul Comforting Bell, releasing a black halo.

A fragmented soul emerged.

Director Li.

Tang Ling assessed that his Mythical Weapon turned out to be the Soul Comforting Bell, no wonder there's no need to leave anyone alive.

"Which organization are you working for?"

Gu Jianlin looked at the fragmented soul and calmly asked, "The organization you're most loyal to."

Director Li responded woodenly, "The Order of the Hidden."

Good!

Found the right person!

Gu Jianlin further inquired, "Do you know Jing Shangxiu, also of The Order of the Hidden?"

Director Li answered, "I don't know. The Order of the Hidden has countless intelligence lines, which do not interfere with each other."

Tang Ling rubbed her chin and remarked, "Indeed, very cautious."

Gu Jianlin frowned and asked, "Then who instructed you to design against me at the Black Cloud City base?"

Director Li truthfully confessed, "My superior, but I've never met him. Each time we meet at different locations, he sends someone to inform me specially. This time, my instructions were to find a way to conflict with you and leave a Spiritual Imprint on you in the process."

"To further trigger the curse effect, driving you insane, and losing your reason."

He paused: "Finally, under our control!"

A hint of coldness flashed in Tang Ling's beautiful eyes: "Is this how The Order of the Hidden controls others?"

Gu Jianlin also probed, "What is the name of this method?"

Director Li was momentarily dazed: "Specifically, I'm not sure. I unknowingly saw a document during exchanges with my superior. It's a product combining modern technology with ancient civilization, scientifically called Mental Deformation Induction Disorder, controlled through a hidden curse and multiple Spiritual Imprints."

"The ultimate effect of this curse ceremony is called... Oath of Loyalty."

He said, "All cursed individuals, after experiencing madness, will pledge an Oath of Loyalty to one person."

This sounds somewhat terrifying.

Gu Jianlin coldly looked at him, "So you don't know who that final person is either."

Tang Ling snorted coldly, "If he knew, he wouldn't just be a pawn."

Director Li shook his head, "I truly don't know."

We have to admit today's gains have been significant.

However, Tang Ling was not satisfied.

Nor would Gu Jianlin be, as he probed further, "What about those totems on your body?"

Director Li said, "This is the Penglai Ascension Array. The Order of the Hidden found the legacy left by Xu Fu in the Qilin Immortal Palace and discovered this bloody Sacrificial Array. Its effect can grant power akin to ascension by sacrificing offerings. Every member of The Order of the Hidden gains offerings based on their contributions."

He said, "My rank is five, so I got five offerings."

Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling exchanged a glance.

"What are the offerings?"

Actually, there's no need to ask, they had already guessed.

Child Boy and Girl!

The strange totems of the Child Boy and Girl appeared on Director Li's body!

"Where did you obtain this power?"

Gu Jianlin asked coldly.

Tang Ling roughly understood his meaning and started the vehicle again.

Director Li answered, "The Bren Hill, a yacht hovering in the East Sea, owned by the You Ying Group. The Order of the Hidden has a secret base there."

The Lamborghini fell into silence.

The situation now was clear.

Since there is a secret base of The Order of the Hidden on the Bren Hill.

When The Order of the Hidden realizes Director Li's death, they will definitely send someone to clear that base.

This is a rare opportunity.

"You Ying Group?"

Tang Ling murmured, "This is troublesome. With our identities, it's not easy to enter."

Gu Jianlin's expression was peculiar, "Not necessarily."

He fumbled something from his pocket and took out a Golden Card.

Tang Ling was taken aback, "Mr. Liu's Golden Card? Where did you get that?"

Gu Jianlin stated calmly, "Got it along with the West Port incident last time."

Chapter 405 - 202: She's Just My Sister

At 8:30 PM, a massive luxury cruise ship docked at the West Port Forbidden Zone.

Gu Jianlin gazed out through the car window and saw the deck teeming with social elites, each dressed impeccably in lavish attire. It resembled a grand commercial gathering—an extravagant spectacle of wealth and indulgence.

On the phone, Su Youzhu was still berating him, her cool, melodious voice cutting through like ice: "You said you'd just go out to buy me milk tea, and then you ended up stirring up chaos at East Sea International Airport? Do you even realize how dangerous that was? Why couldn't you wait until I recovered and we go together? It's not like Director Li isn't coming back."

Cough, cough.

Gu Jianlin, for once, felt a bit guilty and asked, "You know about that already?"

Su Youzhu said coldly, "East Sea International Airport issued a public statement saying the explosion was caused by a fire-related accident. But any Ascender knows what really happened. Also, given how long you've been gone, no wonder you didn't bring the parrot."

Gu Jianlin cleared his throat. "Okay, how's your injury?"

He wasn't great at dealing with girls and could only awkwardly steer the topic away.

"It was almost healed."

Su Youzhu replied.

Gu Jianlin uttered an "Mm," feeling relieved.

"But now I think I might die from being angry at you."

Su Youzhu's next words made his eye twitch slightly.

"I'm fine. I'm very safe."

Gu Jianlin explained, "Besides, I've already found a lead."

"Next time, don't do something so dangerous on your own. At the very least, have a reliable teammate with you."

No guessing was needed; Su Youzhu was surely pouting angrily, though adorable: "You should know, strictly speaking, I should count as your senior. In terms of precedence or ranking, you're just a baby in understanding the Extraordinary World compared to me."

"I'm capable of acting alone."

Gu Jianlin said helplessly.

Su Youzhu's personality profile was intriguing. Though young, she exuded the self-assured aura of a strong, independent woman.

Their interactions were more akin to the perspective of a nurturing dynamic.

Yes, she was raising him.

"Even so, that won't do!"

Su Youzhu commanded, "Come back soon."

Gu Jianlin thought for a moment and tried a different explanation: "Alright, I'll return as soon as I can since the next investigation indeed requires you. I discovered a secret base of the Order of the Hidden aboard the Bren Hill. It belongs to the You Ying Group, and they possess a special arcane formation that can significantly boost Ascender battle power."

Su Youzhu froze slightly and muttered, "That doesn't surprise me. After all, the You Ying Group is actually a coalition of the six most prominent families in the Dark World, formed to resist the Ether Association's monopolistic rule. This place has always been a chaotic hotspot devoid of order, excessively turbulent and free."

"As for the six directors, they're essentially just spokespersons for the six major families. And among them, the most powerful is the Si Family. With Master Si now deranged, the Si Family has sent out a particularly formidable elder, making the other directors extremely wary."

She paused. "Don't go meddling in this chaos. Just go home."

Gu Jianlin responded with an "Mm." "Got it, I'll head back now."

Su Youzhu sounded satisfied: "Then I'll go take a bath and wait for you. Tonight I'll wear my sheer nightgown for you to see?"

Gu Jianlin nearly had a stress reaction again. "Goodbye."

The call ended.

Thanks to Minister Lu's covert arrangements, their conversation wouldn't be monitored.

In the driver's seat, Tang Ling fiddled with the steering wheel. She glanced sideways at him, her expression suggestive.

She had caught the keywords.

Bath. Sheer nightgown.

"Live-in girlfriend?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Playing it this wild?"

Gu Jianlin solemnly replied, "No, she just doesn't want me to engage with the You Ying Group."

Tang Ling tapped the steering wheel lightly and stared at him. Her gaze was weighty as she said, "Actually, as your friend and teammate, I also don't want you to interact with the You Ying Group people."

Gu Jianlin frowned. "Because I'm the student of the King of Qing?"

"Look at that."

Tang Ling raised her hand and pointed at the two enormous statues on the deck.

Gu Jianlin looked up. The towering sculptures stood opposed on either side of the deck, impervious to wind and waves, like two great deities, radiating majesty and fury.

"Looks like Thousand-Handed Zhujian and Uchiha Madara."

He quipped for once.

"They do resemble them a bit. But these statues actually symbolize the King of Qing and the Red King—the strongest Guardians in human history. That is, solely based on combat power and talent."

Tang Ling said calmly, "These senior brothers competed from childhood, yet their bond was as close as blood siblings. But during the turmoil two hundred years ago, they turned on each other due to ideological differences. I only heard my teacher mention them in passing... It's complicated."

Gu Jianlin frowned. "Go on."

"My teacher said, the King of Qing thought the Red King was an idiot, and the Red King thought the King of Qing was an idiot. Their disagreement on ideology led them to part ways. The King of Qing searched the world for people with 'Ascending Heaven Posture,' though no one knows what that actually entails. On the other hand, the Red King defected to the Dark World."

Tang Ling explained seriously, "The King of Qing is your teacher, so I won't comment much on him. As for the Red King, he's the first to unify the forces of the Dark World—a title known as the First King."

"Perhaps the King of Qing has also told you how insane the Red King's ideology is. Yet, despite its madness, it's garnered significant support, and even today, there are numerous avid followers of the Red King."

She added pensively, "Among them was Netherworld from seventy-five years ago—one of the Red King's believers, who also served as Vice President of the Ether Association alongside President Taihua and Vice President Light in the era of the triad."

"Light is dead. What about Netherworld?"

Gu Jianlin asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Netherworld is still alive. He is the actual power behind the You Ying Group."

Tang Ling fixed her gaze on the young man and warned seriously, "Regarding why you shouldn't interact with the Dark World—it's because the King of Qing once had another student who perished at Netherworld's hands."

Gu Jianlin was taken aback.

"In these two-hundred years, the King of Qing has found three individuals with 'Ascending Heaven Posture.'"

Tang Ling said gravely, "The first was Jing Ci. He's often referred to as the Demon and is a completely unreasonable existence. He was born as a descendant of Ancient Ancestors and regular humans, with freakishly immense talent and power. If he weren't deliberately suppressed by the King of Qing, he would already be a Ninth Rank on the Ghost Slayer Path and a Candle Yin God."

Gu Jianlin had profiled his senior for the Extraordinary World before. Compared to Ultraman, it seemed perfectly rational for him to be Ninth Rank.

"My teacher, the Silver King, once said Jing Ci could become a Catastrophe."

Tang Ling said, "But only if he weren't trapped in the past."

Gu Jianlin mulled over her words.

"The King of Qing chose Jing Ci because of his extraordinary nobility."

Tang Ling said, "As for the second student, his name was Milo. The King of Qing chose him for his tenacity. Compared to his senior, Milo wasn't particularly gifted, yet he never gave up and ultimately achieved greatness before dying at Netherworld's hands."

Gu Jianlin pondered for a moment. "So what you're saying is?"

"Every student of the King of Qing is relentlessly targeted by the followers of the Red King. The grudge from two hundred years ago persists to this day. Cause and effect intertwine with each of you. Those two statues on the deck? They serve as constant reminders to all that the ideological battle remains unresolved."

Tang Ling said quietly, "This is why I also don't advocate you involving yourself with the You Ying Group, especially now that you're gaining visibility in the field. It becomes increasingly likely that you'll become a target."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly, "I see."

"If we're investigating this case, we need to set three ground rules."

Tang Ling looked earnestly at him. "First, life is paramount. If you lose your life, everything else is meaningless. Second, if we investigate, you must follow my lead—I'm the senior."

Gu Jianlin mentally sighed—why did they all enjoy pulling rank on him?

"Third, if your true identity is exposed, in any situation, you must immediately flee."

Tang Ling said with a serious expression, "With our talents, if we ever face an undefeatable enemy, we can retreat, train for ten years, and come back to defeat them later. No need to risk dying unnecessarily."

Gu Jianlin nodded in understanding. Then, he reached into his backpack and retrieved a box.

"What's this?"

Tang Ling blinked in surprise.

"Just a little something I made."

Gu Jianlin said indifferently.

The box contained a collection of ancient tokens he had taken from the Qilin Immortal Palace.

Last night, he had experimented with infusing Ancient God's Blood into these ancient tokens. To his amazement, the process succeeded, transforming them into unique artifacts capable of linking back to him.

It seemed they might even enable spatial teleportation.

"Let's go."

Gu Jianlin said.

"Figures—men lie like ghosts."

Tang Ling remarked dryly. "You were lying to that girl just now, weren't you?"

Gu Jianlin replied with a straight face, "No. I said I'd go back soon, and I will. But I didn't specify whether I'd abandon the investigation to return or finish it quickly before heading back."

Tang Ling paused, then laughed. "Respect!"

The two of them exited the car and walked toward the Bren Hill, docked at the port.

Meanwhile, a black Lincoln was parked by the roadside nearby.

A frail old man leaned on his cane and spoke in a hoarse voice, "Hurry! Faster! You go on ahead—don't wait for me! The auction is about to begin. This time, the You Ying Group unearthed a drop of Ancient God's Blood from the Returning Burial Forest... Whatever it takes, even if it bankrupts us, we must secure that drop!"

His bodyguards stood by his side, bowing respectfully and responding affirmatively.

"What's wrong?"

Tang Ling suddenly turned her head.

Gu Jianlin wore an odd expression as he stared at the elderly figure.

He remembered something.

Back when he was fleeing from the living corpse horde in the Returning Burial Forest, he had buried a drop of Ancient God's Blood in the soil, which triggered the living burial area's corpse upheaval, summoning a massive tide of undead.

Had someone dug up that drop of blood?

Chapter 406 - 203: Gu Jianlin with Heavy Sins

After the Qilin Immortal Palace opened to the public, many large luxury cruise ships floated on the East Sea. Most of them drifted within the Forbidden Zones and were invisible to ordinary people.

These cruise ships occasionally docked, allowing members of the Dark World to travel back and forth.

To board a cruise ship, you either needed an invitation or had to be a recognized candidate.

Gu Jianlin, holding the Golden Card given to him by the Third Master, was naturally identified as a candidate. He encountered no obstacles along the way and even received courtesy from the security guards, who nodded and bowed to him.

As for Tang Ling, she had initially been worried about whether she'd be allowed in.

It turned out that the security here wasn't as strict as imagined—there wasn't anyone to stop them.

Upon reaching the deck, a drunken playboy clinging to two enchanting women came forward and slurred, "Hey, buddy, the figure of the woman beside you is incredible. Want to trade? I'll give you these two women, and she can keep me company for just one night!"

Before he could finish speaking, Gu Jianlin shot him a cold, piercing look that sent him retreating in fear.

"I want to kill him!"

Tang Ling whispered coldly in Gu Jianlin's ear.

Clearly, she was enraged.

"Hold back. Remember his face and deal with him later."

Gu Jianlin brushed away a couple of tipsy women trying to flirt with him and headed inside the cabin.

Tang Ling snorted, her charm undeniable despite both of them being disguised with human skin masks.

Most people in the Dark World are nothing more than drunkards and wastrels. Their deaths wouldn't stir much sympathy. The true predators have ways to protect themselves, and no one would entrust their lives solely to hired security.

Of course, some cunning individuals like Lao Liu might deliberately disguise themselves as drunkards and wastrels.

Thus, caution was essential, and maintaining a safe distance from others was crucial.

The Bren Hill tonight was packed with people, most of them here for the evening auction. Among them were heirs of powerful families within the Dark World and representatives of secretive organizations. Despite the apparent luxury onboard, there was an ominous atmosphere, like the hidden turbulence beneath the sea's surface.

In this place, even the slightest misstep could swallow you whole.

Auctions in the Dark World were common and rarely novel.

However, tonight was different. This was the first auction held following the Qilin Immortal Palace's opening. Forces from across the Dark World had gathered here to trade resources, share information, and exchange experiences.

During their journey aboard the ship, Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling overheard numerous rumors.

"The Ying Province Gao Tianyuan Organization—that woman who inherited the name of Yue Du—is said to have hunted down an Ancient God Seed in the snowy plains of the Qilin Immortal Palace's northern first floor. Apparently, the Ancient God Seed lived for sixteen thousand years, and now they're offering rewards to recruit top-tier Alchemists and Pharmacists to process the materials."

"What kind of groundbreaking alchemy technology will they craft from this?"

"Not just that—super rare secret medicines too."

"I've heard the Second Master discovered an Ancient Ruin that contains a powerful Ancient Ancestor who still retains some sanity. They're believed to be a figure from the Three Kingdoms Period."

"A figure from the Three Kingdoms? Could it be Cao Cao? Didn't we never find his tomb?"

"Every historical figure from the Three Kingdoms Era is automatically Cao Cao to you? It's clearly a woman!"

"What if it's a female version of Cao Cao?"

"Do you know anything about the Ether Association's Omega Sequence? Especially the top-ranked Ying Changsheng? If anyone has intel on his whereabouts, I'll pay any price. He killed all three of my brothers. The next time I enter the Immortal Palace, I swear to avenge them!"

"Seeking revenge against the Ying Family? Are you insane? Sober up—the auction is starting soon."

Gu Jianlin listened to the chatter and shook his head.

Tang Ling pulled a small bottle of secret medicine from her pocket and handed it to him. "Here, drink this."

Gu Jianlin paused, confused. "What's it for?"

She replied lightly, "Do you think I'd harm you?"

Tang Ling explained calmly, "Once consumed, it will temporarily alter your Life Rhythm."

Realizing the purpose, Gu Jianlin quickly uncapped the bottle and drank it in one gulp.

On the deck, many others were doing the same to conceal their identities.

The auction was set to take place on the first floor of the cabin. Participation required asset verification or valuable auction items—ensuring that penniless individuals were excluded.

Under the guidance of attendants, the Ascenders dressed like high-society elites were led to the auction hall.

"What do we do now?"

Tang Ling whispered, lowering her voice. "Are we really going to auction our Mythical Weapon?"

Gu Jianlin shook the box in his hand filled with ancient tokens.

It was fortuitous—he happened to have prepared items for auction.

Ancient tokens served as tickets to enter the Ancient God Realm and were eternally valuable.

Of course, this batch of tokens had undergone his tampering.

Among the most-discussed items at the auction tonight was the drop of Ancient God's Blood rumored to be unearthed from the Returning Burial Forest. The seller's identity was kept completely anonymous. Otherwise, they wouldn't have survived long enough to bring it here—they'd have been assassinated.

Equally, acquiring the Ancient God's Blood wasn't about financial ability.

It was about power!

The eventual buyer would undoubtedly face numerous assassination attempts and assaults.

If their strength wasn't formidable, they'd likely perish before leaving the Forbidden Zone.

Which unlucky—or lucky—individual would claim this drop of Ancient God's Blood?

"Director Li mentioned the secret stronghold should be on the second floor of the cabin. However, the first floor has been tightly sealed for the auction. If we don't participate in the auction, we can't get through," Gu Jianlin noticed an inspection checkpoint ahead, guarded by ten Fourth-Rank Spirit Mediums holding Crystal Balls.

To his eyes, their Transcendent forms towered like buildings.

All attending Ascenders had to pass inspection.

Weapons and Mythical Weapons were detected and then entrusted to the You Ying Group for safekeeping.

Most participants didn't possess Mythical Weapons.

Some individuals unwilling to entrust their weapons to the group had their personnel stationed outside to watch over them.

"If my Extreme Thunder is discovered, chaos will break out immediately,"

Tang Ling murmured near his ear, lowering her voice. "I've used Extreme Thunder to bash quite a few people from the You Ying Group."

Gu Jianlin whispered back, "Who hasn't? Speaking of, Moon Princess once told me that the Fourth Master has gone insane. We don't know the extent of his madness, but if he sees Extreme Thunder here, he might lose it completely."

He considered something. "Give me Extreme Thunder. I'll take care of it."

In the Extraordinary World, Ascenders highly treasure Growth-Type Mythical Weapons, often valuing them above their own lives.

Tang Ling casually tossed the box to him. "Here, take it."

Gu Jianlin gave her a deep look; her trust was rare to come by.

Without further comment, he carried the box to the restroom and reached out with his consciousness to the fragment of the Qilin Wedge.

In an instant, Gu Jianlin found himself inside the Qilin Wedge's fragment.

Standing before an ornate coffin containing the Dragon Bone of an old monster—or rather, an elder beast.

He placed Extreme Thunder in the coffin and contacted the Qilin Wedge fragment again, returning to the restroom.

"Storage-type treasures aren't common in the Extraordinary World. Only peak-level Ascenders gain independent spaces. It's reminiscent of how each Ancient Supreme had their own Ancient God Realm. As the core of this world, the Wedge surprisingly contains a hidden space,"

Gu Jianlin mused to himself, likening the situation to nested dolls, before emerging with the box of ancient tokens.

Tang Ling froze briefly. "Where's the other item?"

Gu Jianlin waved his hand dismissively, "It's safe. I can retrieve it whenever necessary."

Tang Ling was stunned and mouthed, "You have a storage-capable Mythical Weapon?"

Gu Jianlin casually lied, "A gift from my father."

The auction's reception desk was guarded by thirty-two Ancient Martial Path bodyguards, all Fourth-Order Mad Kings.

Graceful Bunny Girls greeted guests with warm smiles.

Gu Jianlin approached to complete registration and auction off his box of tokens.

For a brief moment, Tang Ling's breathing faltered, her body tensing sharply, as she discreetly jabbed his lower back and wrote something on it.

Gu Jianlin froze as well, without needing to ask for an explanation.

From behind, voices erupted one after another:

"Master Four!"

"Greetings, Master Four!"

"Good evening, Master Four!"

Si Wei'an!

What a twist of fate!

Both Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling turned simultaneously.

Indeed, the caller was Si Wei'an. His face showed no emotion, clad in a crisp snow-white suit adorned with elaborate rings and watches. A retinue of ten Guardians followed closely behind him.

"Master Four, please stop pretending to be mad. Even the Old Master has deployed guards to protect you—what more could you fear? The Old Master personally oversaw your upbringing; he wouldn't harm you,"

A Guardian pleaded earnestly, "No one can take the Qilin Wedge fragment from you. Even Lord Youming publicly stated that whoever takes it owns it—all by merit. Your precautions are unwarranted. Who would dare try to assassinate you under these circumstances? Now's not the time to overthink!"

Si Wei'an's face suddenly twisted into a deranged smile.

His mouth stretched almost to his ears.

"What did you say?"

He seized the Guardian's head and grinned madly, "You think the Qilin Wedge fragment is with me, huh? Why doesn't anyone believe me? WHY DOESN'T ANYONE BELIEVE ME? I should kill all of you! No one will slander me! The Old Master included! I'll kill HIM too!"

"For the last time, I don't have that cursed object—it was taken by the Qilin Venerable!"

As his fury escalated, spittle flew from his lips and Divine Sacrificial Fire ignited in his palms!

Boom!

The Guardian's head was incinerated, his Life Force devoured mercilessly until only skeletal remains were left.

The rest of the Guardians stared at Si Wei'an in sheer horror.

None of them wished to remain under this madman's command.

Yet, bound by orders from the Old Master, defiance meant death.

Watching this scene, Gu Jianlin was utterly stunned.

"What made him like this?"

Tang Ling scribbled behind his back, "He's pulling out all the stops to keep the Qilin Wedge fragment for himself."

Gu Jianlin remained silent for a moment, burdened by the weight of his actions.

Chapter 407 - 204: Red King, Jiang Yanli

Here is the translated text as per your instructions:

Si Wei'an is a Fifth Rank Star Lord and one of the six directors. No one believes he's truly gone mad—most lean toward the idea that he actually found a fragment of the Qilin Wedge and received some monumental blessing. As a result, he has to pretend to be insane to protect himself, avoiding being devoured by big shots from the Dark World.

Because in the Dark World, survival of the fittest is the rule.

In the Ether Association, if you truly demonstrate enough talent, the President will immediately groom you as their successor, and no one will dare touch you—unless they have a death wish.

But in the Dark World, the ones above might devour you at any moment.

Master Four has always been a deeply cunning and ruthlessly pragmatic person.

This aligns with his behavioral logic.

"I'll say it again: the fragment of the Qilin Wedge is not in my possession."

He scanned the people around him, the smile on his face twisted and eerie.

No one dared meet his gaze.

After all, there was a dead body lying right there.

At this moment, Gu Jianlin suddenly noticed that the man's gaze had shifted to his side.

Tang Ling's delicate body instantly tensed up, her striking eyes filled with an icy chill.

Si Wei'an walked up to her, then completely ignored her presence, looking directly at the man behind her.

"The way you looked at me earlier was suspicious. You think the Qilin Wedge fragment is with me, don't you? Are you planning to kill me and take the fragment? If I say it's not in my possession, you wouldn't believe me anyway, right?" Si Wei'an's smile grew more terrifying.

The middle-aged man attending the auction wet himself in fear and turned to escape immediately.

But Si Wei'an suddenly leapt forward, tackling the man, and ignited the Divine Sacrificial Fire in his hands.

He burned him alive on the spot.

The crowd was horrified, and no one dared to look at him again.

Si Wei'an resembled a rabid beast; anyone who dared to meet his gaze would make him suspect they'd slander or even try to kill him to steal the artifact—prompting him to strike first.

Once no one dared to look at him anymore, he straightened his clothes and stepped into the auction hall.

The Guardians lowered their heads and followed silently behind him.

Moments later, a familiar laugh rang out.

"Si Wei'an would stop at absolutely nothing to protect his treasures, huh."

Mr. Liu swaggered in with his hands clasped behind him: "Does he think this act will make everyone believe the Qilin Wedge fragment isn't in his possession? How naive! One day, he'll pay the price for his actions. Letting living corpses bite my ass in the Returning Burial Forest? Just wait; he's a goner!"

After disappearing for a few days, this rotund man emerged from the Returning Burial Forest looking rather spirited.

Ning Chen, his loyal bodyguard, still trailed behind him.

Butcher, as Mr. Liu's most assertive candidate, naturally stuck close by, his expression fierce.

Besides him, there was also Miss Lan, whose bodyguards held up a black curtain for her.

"Third Master!"

"Good day, Third Master!"

Numerous candidates passed by, all greeting him respectfully.

"Miss Lan, what are you looking at?"

Mr. Liu was notably deferential in his tone toward the young woman.

If the candidates were his investments, then this Alchemy Master in front of him was someone he had explicitly hired.

"Nothing much. I happened to glance at the list of attendees at today's auction and spotted a familiar name. I looked around casually and found him after all," Miss Lan replied, glancing at a young boy in line and the red-haired woman beside him, letting out a scoff.

Mr. Liu blinked. "Who is it?"

Miss Lan calmly said, "Gu Ting."

Mr. Liu, who had recruited far too many candidates, waved dismissively. "Can't remember; probably just some minor character. But that surname—it reminds me of that chair-murdering lunatic from the Ether Association. That guy sure is fierce! No wonder he managed to catch Miss Yue Ji's eye."

Miss Lan let out a soft sound of acknowledgment: "If Miss Yue Ji were here today, things would get interesting."

"It's a shame Miss Yue Ji got injured at such a critical moment. I had even planned to pour in resources to help her advance to Fifth Rank first. Now, the Si Clan's elder has emerged, bringing along a few formidable candidates, making it up to Butcher whether he can secure the Moonstone Heart successfully," Mr. Liu sighed.

Butcher grinned and said, "Relax, Third Master. I'm not afraid of those bastards!"

"Cut it out. The Ancient Martial Path only becomes dominant at Fifth Rank. The candidates brought out by the Si Clan are all insidiously cunning tacticians. Your brain wouldn't stand a chance against theirs," Mr. Liu muttered.

"Still, I'm curious why Miss Yue Ji insisted on taking the risk to enter the underground ruins. She ended up heavily injured again. Same thing last time; if she had agreed to participate in Lord Youming's trial and accepted his blessing, she might already be at Fifth Rank. But she couldn't be found anywhere during that time."

He scratched his head. "What's she been up to?"

Butcher chuckled darkly. "Fell in love, obviously."

Mr. Liu paused for a while before speaking. "The Ghost Slayer's Inheritance Path demands not only spatial awareness but also deep, overwhelming obsessions. The more intense the obsession, the more likely someone is to choose this path. Her talent is exceptional, indicating profoundly rooted obsessions. She's endured so much hardship to get here; why would she allow herself to be held back?"

No shit—it's because of a man.

Miss Lan let out a cold snort.

After all, Sister Yue Ji was her closest confidante.

Chapter 408 - 204 Red King, Jiang Yanli _2

She knew about those private matters.

Back in the West Port Forbidden Zone, Sister Moon Princess had used her connections to get her to deliver a Heavenly Evil Spirit.

When she had curiously asked about it back then, she learned the true identity of this boy.

She had initially wondered what kind of person could make that icy beauty lose her composure so entirely.

And now that she saw him, it turned out he was nothing but a scumbag.

Bringing another woman onto the Bren Hill, and acting so intimately with her.

The longer she stared, the more displeased she felt. Suddenly, she ordered her subordinate, "Xiao Wu, arrange for that Gu Ting to be seated next to our private lounge. I have something I want to say to him personally later."

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Half an hour later, Gu Jianlin had completed the procedures and obtained the admission ticket to the auction.

"The auction will last quite a while, let's find a chance to slip away later."

He lowered his voice.

Tang Ling followed closely behind him and responded with a soft "Okay."

A servant ahead of them guided them down a shadowy corridor, adorned on both sides with framed ancient paintings. The ground shimmered like transparent Liu Li, faintly glowing with hints of gold.

At the end of the corridor was a grand, Holy Temple-like ballroom. Bright spotlights shone upon an enormous stage, with towering columns surrounding it, and the walls radiating shifting light and shadows. The faint outlines of Ancient God Clan civilization emerged—those Giants perched above the clouds, gazing down upon the world with a profound, religious aura.

The audience seating was already packed, shrouded under dim overhead lighting, people whispering to each other.

In addition, there were six separate private boxes located at the best vantage points above, overseeing the seating below.

They seemed reserved only for six board members who were qualified to occupy them.

Meanwhile, a beautiful host stepped onto the stage and spoke softly.

"Tonight is a sleepless revelry, a place that is both Hell and paradise. Welcome to the Dark World."

Smiling faintly, she faced the audience and continued, "From the darkness, we were chosen, from destruction, we are reborn, and amidst chaos, we seek salvation. In the shadows, we ignite kindling and burn away the decay."

She declared, "To the glorious King."

Every person in the audience stood up, intoning deeply, "To the glorious King."

Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling, clueless about the ritual, could only mimic the others' actions.

The next moment, everyone sat back down.

The host said, "Before tonight's auction begins, we've prepared a special surprise for one distinguished guest. The Bren Hill Auction will commence in twenty-five minutes, but in the meantime, please enjoy the theatrical performance crafted by the You Ying Group—Ancient Catastrophe."

Tang Ling was slightly taken aback: "Wait, Ancient Catastrophe?"

Gu Jianlin was equally shocked; he hadn't anticipated a play before the auction.

The audience erupted into murmurs of surprise; they clearly hadn't expected this treat either.

Yet, just hearing the words "Ancient Catastrophe" was enough for them to grasp its significance.

Snap.

The lights within the ballroom dimmed completely.

The glass curtain walls around them flickered with light as holographic projections ignited.

Accompanied by melancholic classical music, the actors made their grand entrance.

The Holy Temple was replaced by a cracked and barren wasteland, the blood-red sunset saturating the horizon, casting its glow upon five colossal statues. These figures towered into the heavens like The Immortal of Colossal Spirit, draped in vivid red robes, their faces obscured as they lowered their heads in silent reverence. They gazed down from above with profound, enigmatic intensity, commanding awe.

Countless fragments of stone hovered weightlessly in the air, as if the world itself had lost gravity.

Beneath the dim, crimson sun, faint images of massive planets could be seen—they lay dormant in the depths of the Universe, connected by starry pathways like veins of a magnificent and resplendent civilization.

In the apocalyptic silence, the echoes of enormous sighs reverberated.

"Red, why did you betray humanity?"

In the dim twilight, a black-haired, red-eyed man was pierced by an ancient Tang Blade, his body frozen in the Void, resembling a martyr crucified upon an invisible cross. His form visibly withered at an alarming rate.

Besides him, four others were similarly impaled by Tang Blades, suspended in place and unable to move.

Time seemed to hasten, their bodies decaying rapidly towards death.

"All these years, you've been calling me a traitor to humanity so often that I'm sick of hearing it."

Someone sighed softly, his silhouette stretched by the fiery sunset, seemingly extending to the ends of the earth.

"But I believe—I'm the only savior of the Human World."

He paused before continuing, "Sadly, geniuses are always lonely and misunderstood. Alright, stop trying to use Divine Sacrificial Fire to siphon Life Force. Donghuang of the Eighth Rank, are you so unwilling to face death?"

His voice was youthful—gentle yet firm.

The Donghuang let out a deep sigh, saying: "So saving the world means slaughtering all the Ascenders and severing the Inheritance Path? Such madness—no wonder even your allies abandoned you."

The young man laughed, "Don't put it like that. In the Dark World, I actually have many supporters. This world has been sick for too long, to the point of being beyond cure. Sometimes, without destruction, there can be no renewal. And as for the Inheritance Path, what's so good about it? Is it humanity's preservation mission you're unwilling to let go of—or the power it brings you?"

"You haven't shown that your methods can truly save this world."

The Donghuang said gravely, "All this is merely your delusional obsession, a self-serving fantasy."

The young man suddenly sighed in regret, his tone shifting to cold indifference: "I remember in the autumn of 1820, my teacher brought me and my senior brother to London for further studies. We listened to an old priest preaching in a chapel. There was one passage that stuck with me... If I'm not mistaken, it was from Bible-Matthew, Chapter 13."

Chapter 409 - 204: Red King, Jiang Yanli _3

He spread his hands and said softly, "The wheat field represents the entire world. The selected seeds are the citizens of Heaven, while the weeds are those who belong to the Devil. The one who sows the weeds is the Devil. The day of harvest is the apocalypse, and the workers for the harvest are the Angels. During the apocalypse, the fate of those who belong to the Devil will be like the weeds that are pulled out and thrown into the fire to burn."

"My senior brother may be a fool, but at least he's smarter than all of you."

He spoke earnestly, "The mission and faith we carry are like a tragic joke, pitiful and absurd. The truth had already been recorded by our predecessors, yet you do not believe it, and you even misinterpret it."

A deep sigh echoed like a bell: "You are desecrating the faith we have held sacred since time immemorial."

The young man sneered, "Just because it's always been this way, does that make it right? When the dog at the head of the village barks, the dogs in the village, clueless, follow with their barking. Why bark? What's the purpose of barking? Who are you barking for?"

"Are you comparing all of us to dogs?"

"Frankly, you're unworthy. At least dogs obey their master."

"..."

"I want to ask, have you ever ventured beyond Earth to see? When you traverse the world of the Ancient Gods, have you ever glimpsed the dimension that belongs to them? Have you explored the origins of the Universe, the cycle of life and death, the principles of karma? Have you pondered why you exist? And where does the origin of the Ancient God Clan lie?"

The young man said, "I know you haven't. In this world, only I have glimpsed that astounding secret. But secrets, much like devils, must be spoken of softly; otherwise, you'll awaken them."

Donghuang remained silent for a long time: "Why do you say this?"

The young man sat on a fractured boulder and murmured, "From the Barbaric Era of Ancient Times until now, the history of human civilization spans merely 150,000 years. Yet, do you realize that the existence of the Inheritance Path stretches as far back as the sunlight shining on your face right now—ancient and eternal."

Using the most ordinary words, he revealed the most shocking secret: "Taiyin Instructor, you are a hero protecting the human world. Back then, I revered you as a teacher. But you are too foolish, too weak. The Inheritance Path is not something someone like you should ever meddle with."

"For someone as ignorant as you to aspire to the Ninth Rank, does it not make me appear mediocre in comparison?"

Dusk fell upon the young man.

His frame was ordinary, faintly resembling that of a youth.

He gazed up at the Sky Dome, where innumerable stars seemed on the verge of plummeting, radiating a thick killing intent.

Five statues of The Immortal of Colossal Spirit teetered, while demonlike black shadows writhed and struggled in the darkness.

As if on the brink of breaking free from their prison.

"So, go in peace. This world doesn't need you."

The young man said, "Your faith, your persistence, your contributions—they mean nothing to this world."

On the dark wasteland, multitudes of believers surged forward like a tide.

As numerous as grains of sand by the sea.

At the moment twilight fell, a massive black hole unfolded above the Sky Dome.

A man wearing a green mask walked forth from the void, looking down at him condescendingly as he spoke blandly: "This ends here. Since we are both sinners of the human world, why not resolve it here and now?"

"Senior Brother, you've arrived."

The young man raised his head, his crimson mask painted with a sinister smile.

The world collapsed before his eyes.

In the deafening roar of destruction, he seemed to laugh wildly, unrestrained and arrogant.

This was the Red King.

Jiang Yanli.

Applause surged like waves. The audience seated in the theater clapped in respect.

This play featured the most cutting-edge modern technology and employed top-tier actors, but none of the applause was for the play itself. It was offered in honor of that genuine fragment of history.

Because no matter how advanced the special effects, no matter how outstanding the actors or how skilled the scriptwriting, nothing could replicate even a thousandth of the grandeur of that epic battle, let alone restore the unrivaled presence of the King.

Gu Jianlin watched the play in silence.

"This is a piece of authentic history, which occurred in the early 19th century at the Fusang Divine Palace. The Red King sacrificed five Eighth Rank Holy Sanctuary Level Ascenders to awaken five Ancient Ancestors. The Fusang Divine Palace, dormant for four thousand years, reawakened and once again invaded reality. The human world descended into chaos, an event referred to as the Ancient Catastrophe."

Tang Ling mouthed softly, "It symbolizes the greatest disaster in human history because, for the first time ever, the two strongest pillars of the human world nearly brought the civilization of Ascenders to its doom in the abyss."

Gu Jianlin's lips moved slightly: "The Ether Association doesn't have this piece of history."

"Because no one airs their dirty laundry in public. The King of Qing and the Red King were personally nurtured by the President. They should have been her proudest achievements in life, yet they nearly destroyed the entire human world instead."

Tang Ling explained, "The President, being such a proud person, could never accept such a matter. She ordered that the King of Qing and the Red King be expunged from the records, forbidding any internal discussion within the association. The King of Qing, to his credit, at least ultimately prevented the destruction of the human world. But the Red King—he became the ultimate taboo."

Whether she liked it or not, she was the disciple of the Sword Tomb Master, a student of a Catastrophe.

And still, she was the chosen successor favored by the President.

Chapter 410 - 204 Red King, Jiang Yanli (6000)_4

The secrets known are, naturally, more abundant.

Gu Jianlin thought so indeed.

Earlier in the Soul Skywell, that Minister Zhou had merely mentioned the Red King.

And was immediately struck dead by the descending Thunder from the heavens.

Not a trace of his body remained.

Though the Ether Association had taboos, the Dark World paid them no heed.

The Red King was their faith.

"The Golden King and the Silver King both emerged only after that cataclysm. In terms of their power and historical contributions, they fall short compared to the Red King and the King of Qing. These two figures might be considered the culmination of tens of thousands of years of human history, and legends even say they could communicate as equals with the Ancient Supremes."

Tang Ling's gaze was deep as she spoke: "It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that, across the entire Human World, only those two truly deciphered the wisdom and mysteries left behind by their predecessors, stood on the shoulders of giants, and reached the pinnacle. They are the only ones in history to have left the Human World and entered the dimension belonging to the Ancient God Clan."

Gu Jianlin was startled: "Doesn't the Ancient God Realm count as a dimension separate from the Human World?"

Tang Ling shook her head: "It doesn't, because the Ancient God Realm has already partially merged with the real world. What I refer to as the dimension of the Ancient God Clan is the world that truly belongs to Them."

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

The Red King's actions were indeed insane.

To the point where he grew increasingly curious about what his teacher had done back then.

As this play reached its finale, the actors had already withdrawn.

Only a crumbling world remained, countless black holes erupting in explosions, as if the stars in the sky were tumbling down.

The world swayed precariously, as if on the brink of apocalypse.

Only one rebellious voice echoed through heaven and earth, eternal and unyielding:

"No hatred for the ancients who failed to see me; only hatred for the ancients who failed to witness my arrogance..."

Applause surged again, resonating like waves unending.

Almost everyone stood up, offering their highest respect to the first king in the Dark World.

Tang Ling also stood, clapping in a feigned manner.

At that moment, Gu Jianlin suddenly noticed two figures in a hidden corner, who had arrived unnoticed.

Under the dim light, Jing Ci stood in the darkness, like a ghost that shouldn't exist.

Huai Yin sat in a wheelchair, listening to the defiant sighs, his weathered face betraying neither sorrow nor joy.

He looked like an elderly monk seated silently in a temple.

His stillness was like an untroubled ancient well, yet carrying an immense solitude.

In the next instant, as though they were an illusion.

Both figures vanished.

Gu Jianlin was taken aback.

The unpredictable master and apprentice had actually appeared here.

Which only confirmed the authenticity of this drama—it was reenacting true history.

This play concluded here, roughly recounting how the Red King, who was supposed to be a Guardian of the Human World, betrayed the Catastrophes' mission, let down his mentor and master, and even resorted to massacring Ether Association's upper echelon to join the Dark World, where he rallied countless believers and attempted to sever the Inheritance Path.

The King of Qing, as his senior brother, upheld a completely opposing philosophy and stood against him until their fatal confrontation. Once allies who had been the Human World's strongest pillars, they turned against each other, unleashing chaos upon the heavens and earth.

The Ether Association, which had nurtured these two Catastrophes, naturally suffered the greatest loss.

Their grudges and affections, too, were buried in the rivers of time.

Yet the impact of these two figures has not disappeared to this day.

As to why these two Catastrophes suddenly escalated into madness, it remains an unresolved mystery.

With the drama ended, the holographic projection screen dimmed.

Once more, lights descended from the dome.

The beautiful hostess reappeared, signaling the official start of the auction.

But amidst the crowd, Gu Jianlin couldn't help but feel a hint of doubt.

Just earlier, the hostess had mentioned that this stage play named "Ancient Catastrophe" was prepared for someone.

Who could this someone be?

"Teacher or senior brother?"

He muttered softly: "Strange indeed."

Tang Ling glanced at him: "What's the matter?"

Gu Jianlin shook his head, indicating nothing.

Suddenly, someone stood behind him and lightly tapped the back of his chair.

Gu Jianlin quietly turned his head and saw a girl shrouded in black curtains by bodyguards. Through thin veils, she stared directly at him.

The next moment, he slightly raised his hand, stopping a red-haired girl who was already poised for action.

"You're the one Sister Moon Princess fancies, aren't you?"

A crisp yet aloof voice directly echoed in his mind.

Miss Lan's gaze toward him carried an icy coldness.