

Ancient 431

Chapter 431 - 213: As Tall as the Heavens, Resembling a God _2

The Bren Hill was constantly roaring, and if it hadn't been frozen by ice, it might have already begun sinking.

Bam!

The frozen cabin was slashed horizontally and vertically by a Tachi, tearing open a massive gap.

Councilman Zhang clutched his wound, leaping down onto the empty dock, neutralizing the inertia with an agile roll. His Divine Speed Force domain stretched to its utmost, transforming into a shattered blur as he sprinted forward.

With a thunderous explosion, black flashes burst through the bulkhead, causing chunks of ice to crash down.

Gu Jianlin jumped down, observing the blood trailing on the ground, his gaze directed ahead.

A layer of Frost covered his body, severely slowing his pursuit, the chill penetrating to his marrow!

With a loud plop, Tang Ling descended amidst swirling snowfall, landing beside him. Her entire body was drenched, her red hair scattered across her forehead. Her captivating eyes betrayed uncontrollable murderous intent—clearly filled with seething rage.

If it weren't for the Frost stiffening their bodies, they would have already caught up moments ago.

"It's alright."

Gu Jianlin murmured softly, "We won't lose him. I've already sent people to hold him off."

Tang Ling, unaware he had additional assistance, gritted her teeth and said, "But what about us?"

At this moment, they were completely immobilized.

Because under the moonlight, three shadows stretched long along the ground. The world seemed frozen within amber, devoid of all sound, leaving only a terrifying aura suffocating them like the crushing pressure of deep-sea depths.

Zii Zii.

Streetlights flickered wildly, spewing electrical sparks.

They didn't even dare to turn their heads, nor could they make any attempt to escape or resist.

Because if this was a Seventh Rank Holy Land Level entity, killing them would only take an instant.

Rumble.

The ground shook, as if the darkness itself was boiling, and pressure from all directions compressed their hearts.

It felt like they might explode at any moment.

"Give up resisting. Come back with us."

It was Li Qingsong's voice, cold and imperious.

Tianzhou and Xingye, the two Saints, stood on either side of him, their faces devoid of emotion.

Spirituality surged higher and higher.

It felt like a destructive storm was brewing.

Meanwhile, a small leisure yacht floated on the surface of the sea, with someone watching them from afar.

Lord Youming cradled a diary in his hands, gazing at the scene on the shore with squinted eyes, licking his lips. "How interesting."

"Three Saints leaving the Ancient God's Blood to chase after these two youngsters. Oh, two Evolvers, huh? Such people, shouldn't they belong to the Dark World?"

His eyes gleamed with a blood-red light. The muscles on his body bulged grotesquely, veins throbbing violently, and the demonic tattoos etched across his skin seemed to come alive, letting out silent, skyward howls.

"Give me a minute—I'll go grab them and play for a bit!"

Time and space abruptly twisted, cracking inch by inch as if about to shatter like a mirror!

Lord Youming displayed the awe-inspiring might of a demon god, striding atop the Void.

"Lord—Lord Youming!"

Hel suddenly let out a panicked shriek, utterly horrified.

At that moment, Lord Youming sensed something, and he turned. His bloodshot eyes instantly grew deranged.

A man in a sleek suit had somehow appeared, lounging casually on a beach chair, quietly pouring himself a glass of red wine. He spoke softly, "Good evening. It's been such a long time."

Blood-red Candle Dragon Mask adorned his face, with sinister and regal Dragon Horns atop his head.

Those blood-red slit pupils burned like flames.

Lord Youming's breaths grew rapid and ragged, as though he had entered a state of extreme ecstasy. He rasped, "Jing Ci? It's you? Hahaha, the King of Qing actually released you?"

Though his voice wasn't loud, it reverberated like rolling thunder, deafeningly explosive.

Pitch-black Demon Runes spread across his towering frame, while blood trickled from his scalp.

It seemed as though Dragon Horns were about to burst forth from him.

"Those two—no one is allowed to touch them."

Jing Ci raised his red wine, fixing his blood-red slit pupils coldly on him. "I have frozen the entire surrounding space. Unless you defeat me, you won't be able to leave. Why not stay and keep me company?"

He smiled faintly, "It's been quite a while since I last stretched my muscles."

"The two people you're protecting—could it possibly be your junior disciples? The King of Qing's newly accepted apprentices?"

Lord Youming chuckled maniacally, laughter laced with madness, shouting harshly, "You forbid me from killing? I insist on killing! If I remember correctly, you've yet to step into the Demigod Domain, haven't you? Can you stop me?"

Rumble.

The stillness of time and space trembled violently, seemingly on the verge of collapse!

Jing Ci suddenly flashed before him, raising a hand to gently push against his chest!

Crack!

The Void shattered like a broken mirror, and a deafening explosion echoed across the sea.

Hel was instantly flung into the sea, plummeting downward until she sank to the bottom.

Even Lord Youming himself was knocked back a full kilometer. He flew backward amidst the turbulent waves, his form blurred by the torn-apart sea breeze. The ocean raged furiously, towering tsunamis surging into the sky!

"Hahaha! An Eighth Rank Zhu Ming—and yet you're this strong?"

Time and space fragmented inch by inch. The entire world seemed frozen in mirror-like stillness, then shattered completely.

Boom!

Jing Ci smashed through the Void with a single punch, extracting a black Tachi from the time-space fissure. A thunderous symphony of unholy blade cries filled the air, unleashing a tsunami-like wave that engulfed the boundless sea.

"—Guess?"

Gu Jianlin now found himself in the greatest danger of his life, facing three Holy Land Levels at once.

Chapter 432 - 213: As Tall as the Heavens, Resembling a God _3

Even with Tang Ling by his side, there was no chance of victory.

"Time is tight tonight. I don't want to waste it on you two little ones. Don't even think about resorting to something like self-detonation—it won't work. You won't die because I'll keep you alive."

Beneath the streetlights, Li Qingsong stood with his hands clasped behind his back, speaking indifferently: "Until the day I decipher the Evolution Path."

Boom!

A violent snowstorm descended from the sky, accompanied by howling gales that seemed to sweep in from the edges of the world. Ice crystals and snowflakes swirled together, roaring like a rampaging lion aiming to pulverize everything in its path!

West Port vanished.

The harbor was gone, too.

In their place arose an icy expanse, glacial plains and snowy peaks erupting skyward.

It was bone-chillingly cold.

"Why aren't you dead from old age yet?"

Vermilion light glimmered coldly in Tang Ling's pupils. At this moment, a trace of madness surged within her, as though her very soul had been displaced by some monstrous force. Her terrifying aura climbed higher and higher.

The Extreme Thunder Great Sword in her hands began to tremble as well. Crimson lightning pulsed through the cracks in its blade, as if awakening from a deep slumber.

And it wasn't just her.

Gu Jianlin, too, was trying to awaken the Black Qilin within him. Though channeling the Supreme's power in the real world would exact a devastating price, there was no alternative—he had to stake everything on this final gambit.

Suddenly, the Saint of Day materialized before him in a flash, extending a single finger toward his forehead.

Boom!

Gu Jianlin heard the sound of the world shattering, and in an instant, the spirituality within him scattered.

The Saint of Night also advanced in a blur, snapping his fingers.

Tang Ling's Extreme Thunder Great Sword emitted a fracture-like groan, and the crimson lightning extinguished in an instant.

This was the difference in power!

"It seems you have many secrets!"

Li Qingsong, with his hands still clasped behind him, spoke calmly: "Now I'm even more curious—what are your true identities?"

The swirling blizzard was about to bury the faces of the young man and woman.

Like the crushing weight of the deep sea, the oppressive force rendered them immobile.

And then, in that fleeting instant—

A figure suddenly stepped in front of them, raising a hand gently, pushing forward!

Roar!

The storm-laden sky tore apart abruptly as an azure Qilin bellowed toward the heavens, reigning over the world!

Its deafening roar shattered the silent night, obliterating the snowstorm into scattering fragments.

Li Qingsong spat a mouthful of fresh blood. On his chest appeared a massive handprint, caving his torso inward. Cracks rippled across the glaciers and snowy peaks before collapsing in resounding destruction!

The Saints of Night and Day froze in terror, but the thunderous roar of celestial lightning filled their ears.

"Kneel!"

Thud!

Li Qingsong fell to his knees, the ice beneath shattering under the impact, blood surging from his body.

The Saints of Night and Day, unable to muster any resistance, collapsed to their knees as well, blood streaming from all seven orifices. Their bones groaned under the immense strain, snapping who knew how many.

"Who granted you such audacity?"

The figure pushed forward again with a hand. "Hmm?"

The three Saints slid backward across the icy surface, only for a Cross Iron Sword to descend from the heavens, piercing their chests. Pale Ghost Fire ignited along the blade, eliciting horrifying, guttural screams as they howled in agony.

Amidst the roaring gales, Gu Jianlin, snapping out of his daze, tilted his head upward in disbelieving awe.

Tang Ling, too, stood frozen, her bangs softly fluttering.

It appeared to be a phantom silhouette—so ancient, yet towering and majestic.

Amid the frosty, bone-chilling winds, it stood motionless and unyielding.

Like a god, propping up the sky and trampling the earth underfoot.

The azure Qilin coiled above the firmament, unleashing a soul-stirring roar.

"This is..."

Tang Ling's teacher, also a Catastrophe, had never displayed such transcendent power in their teaching throughout the past decade—a force as though it pierced the heavens and stood atop the earth.

How could you embody the essence of the Qilin Venerable even more than I imagined?

Gu Jianlin spoke softly, "Teacher."

"To be precise, this should count as our first real conversation, shouldn't it?"

Huai Yin, their hands clasped behind, turned back with a faint smile and said, "Jing Ci once mentioned that the third lesson I'd teach you is called 'choice.' After tonight, you must decide—will you become my student or not?"

The silhouette grew taller and taller, seemingly blotting out the heavens as it ascended beyond the ninth heaven.

With just a single glance, this image seared itself deeply into Gu Jianlin's memory.

Even countless years later, when recalling this moment, it would still shake him to the core, stirring his soul.

At that moment, Gu Jianlin suddenly realized who the sky-high silhouette was, the one he had seen when he first chose his Inheritance Path.

Chapter 433 - 214: The Sun, Always the Sun

In the world of ice and snow, Gu Jianlin stared blankly at the towering figure that had charged beyond the nine heavens and whispered, "So the figure I saw when I first ascended... was you."

Thinking back now, what an incredible coincidence.

The first person he saw after becoming an Ascender was this towering silhouette.

The first time he studied knowledge about the Divine Path, he encountered this elder's writings.

His very first victory as an Ascender was won thanks to this elder's guidance.

Fate, indeed, is such a wondrous thing.

"There aren't many in this world who can glimpse me on the Inheritance Path."

With his hands clasped behind him, Huai Yin faced away and said with a faint smile, "But I always believed that among the few, you would be one of them. Because in the future, you will surely stand where I stand today—or go even further."

His silhouette grew taller and taller, seemingly breaking through the firmament to stand shoulder to shoulder with the stars of the universe.

As Gu Jianlin looked at his back, it sometimes resembled a Divine surveying the heavens and earth.

And other times, a roaring green Qilin.

Gu Jianlin was flooded with endless confusion and bewilderment, unable to discern who he truly was.

At this moment, Tang Ling gave him a deep look. Beneath her frost-covered lashes, her eyes carried profound meaning.

Perhaps, this is why this Catastrophe is regarded as a lunatic!

"No need to be shocked. Of course, I am human. For humanity has never been a weak race. Selfishness, greed, narrow-mindedness, ignorance, and arrogance—these may be the disgraceful facets of human nature. But equally, tolerance, selflessness, contentment, humility, and kindness—these are the luminous aspects of human nature. Remember your principles and bottom line, and you'll remain human."

Huai Yin cast his gaze toward the three Saints pierced by the Cross Iron Sword and chuckled, "Of course, there are always some fools blind to self-awareness who think someone like me is no longer human. But as long as I uphold my principles and bottom line, then I am human."

He asked earnestly, "What do you say? Am I human?"

Boom!

Ghost Fire rose toward the sky, its pale flames transforming into a hue nearly golden.

As if scorched by the Sun's Yang Flame.

Xingye and Tianzhou, the two young Saints, let out maddened wails. In the face of overwhelming terror, their minds unraveled, their faces twisted like Evil Spirits as they cried out in hysteria, "Ancient God Clan! A Supreme-level Ancient God Clan has appeared! Requesting backup! Requesting backup! A Supreme-level..."

Flames engulfed their bodies, and their screams replaced their incoherent ramblings.

Saints, who in the outside world were majestic and exalted, now revealed their disgraceful appearances.

Like clowns.

After all, they were merely at the Seventh Rank.

The Holy Land of the Seventh Rank may indeed be powerful.

But even power is relative.

Before a Catastrophe, they were as fragile as toys.

Only Li Qingsong remained, his body convulsing in agony under the burning Divine Sacrificial Fire. Despite the pain, he roared at the top of his lungs, "You have violated the taboos! You brought powers

alien to humanity into the human realm, and the lives you've taken are no fewer than those devoured by Chi! It is you who have personally pushed this world into the abyss! You are no human at all!"

Huai Yin stared at him silently, then suddenly let out a sigh.

"Li Qingsong, we are from the same era. But have you ever wondered why we could step into the realm of the Demigod Domain and become Catastrophes, while you, after all these years, are still wallowing at the Holy Land Level?"

He paused for a moment. "Because you're an idiot. A Seventh Rank in your two hundredth year—how is that not pathetic?"

Snap!

A gentle snap of the fingers.

The frigid domain of ice and snow collapsed, and the swirling blizzard withered in the ocean breeze. The chill dissolved.

Waves surged toward the sky, the roar of the tides reverberating across the heavens and earth.

Like thunder.

"Evolution was the path to ascension I discovered through the legacies left behind by humanity's ancestors. Indeed, I killed many for it, caused widespread calamity, and nearly destroyed this world."

"But if I could live life over again, I might still make the same choices, for that is who I am."

"In some ways, my junior apprentice and I are alike, but I am somewhat smarter than he."

"I aim to find the true path. I seek to ascend beyond the stars of the universe and search for the origins of all things, the cycle of karma, and the meaning of existence. I love this world, but I refuse to remain as cattle and sheep."

"Throughout my life, I've left behind countless acts of slaughter. You despise or detest me; I don't care. Because I am stronger than anyone else. If I want to kill, I kill. What can you do about it?"

"The only thing that can truly bind me is not any so-called Heaven's Punishment, but my own heart."

Huai Yin said coldly, "Do you truly despise the power of evolution so much, or do you disdain the fact that whoever wields this power—is simply not you?"

For one brief moment, the dark clouds above the sky were illuminated by light—the brilliance of countless stars cascading down. In the night, they were so dazzling, yet they resembled spears of annihilation, cloaked in murderous intent.

Gu Jianlin looked up, and the starlight piercing the night sky stung his pupils.

"Heaven's Punishment."

Tang Ling murmured softly.

"Breaking news: According to the astronomical observatory, on the evening of May 6th at 9:30 PM, a massive meteor shower will appear in the night sky and will be visible across northern regions of our country. This is an incredibly rare occurrence, as the meteor shower was suddenly observed. The reason remains unknown, and experts will provide further explanations shortly."

On the giant display screen in the shopping mall, the female anchor reported this news.

Chapter 434 - 214 Sun, Always the Sun_2

The tourists gathered in the square, excitedly discussing, couples hugging each other in fervent enthusiasm.

But at this moment, the screens of the mall suddenly went dark.

The entire city lost power in an instant, plunging the world into an immense pitch-black void.

Only the brilliance of the starry sea illuminated the darkness.

Due to the sudden blackout, taxis made emergency stops, pulling over to the roadside.

Su Youzhu immediately pushed open the car door and stepped out. Less than a kilometer away from West Port, she moved through the darkness like a specter, reaching for her phone in hopes of making a call.

But every attempt failed to connect.

As she approached the entrance to the Forbidden Zone, a thunderous roar echoed.

The Butcher slammed into the ground, now in his Qilin-transformed state, presenting a ferocious and terrifying image.

On the extinguished streetlights, Councilman Zhang gripped his tachi, half-crouched, his eyes ice-cold.

Meanwhile, the resplendent starry sea had already illuminated the night sky.

"Detected intense magnetic field interference. Currently, all electronic devices across Peak City will malfunction. I will shut down in five seconds. One final warning: detected high concentrations of unknown spirituality, infinitely close to the Ancient God's Breath, with Quasi-Supreme Level fluctuations brewing. Good luck to you all."

This was Taixu's voice.

Most of the Ether Association's senior members were well aware of Heaven's Punishment.

It was a weapon of annihilation created by the Red King.

Originally designed to kill all Ascenders.

Later, the Red King's plan was thwarted, and the boundless stars turned into humanity's weapon against the Ancient God Clan.

This was what most people believed.

But only a very few knew the truth.

The so-called Heaven's Punishment targeted only one person.

King of Qing.

This ultimate Catastrophe blurred the line between Ancient God and humanity's mightiest existence.

"I can't get through to the teacher's phone."

Chen Bojun tossed his phone to the ground, slumping in the car seat, muttering, "Could this really be the apocalypse?"

Lu Zijin's delicate face turned pale as paper: "What's going on here?"

A helicopter plummeted midair, frozen in descent by countless shards of ice.

Han Jing led the Night Watchers, arriving belatedly, though there was no longer anything for them to do.

At this moment, even the prodigies of the Omega Sequence, enveloped by starlight descending from the heavens, felt the icy killing intent of the cosmic abyss. Even their spirituality froze, unable to function, as though it had been sealed in frost.

Combat onboard the Bren Hill ceased abruptly.

Because they were horrified to realize that their spirituality had gone awry, rendering them incapable of battle.

The inhabitants of the Dark World, awestruck by such terrifying power, felt an overwhelming reverence rise within.

This was the world-ending force left behind by the Red King!

Trembling, terrified, and helpless.

It was as though the end of humanity had come.

At this moment, Taihua stepped out of the car, hands behind his back, softly marveling, "Was this truly necessary?"

On the raging sea, Netherworld's black hair danced wildly, suspended in midair. Gazing upward, he erupted into laughter: "It's here. This is the King's most prized creation—is the apocalypse upon us?"

Jing Ci held his black tachi, looking toward the heavens with a calm expression.

As if he had anticipated all of this.

In the boundless darkness, a golden silhouette appeared, towering and imposing.

The Golden King.

Countless strands of silvery radiance coalesced in the black void, outlining a cold, lofty figure.

The Silver King.

At this moment, high-level Ascenders from across the world all focused their attention on Peak City simultaneously.

They all knew what was happening.

The King of Qing had openly violated the ancient covenant.

The Judgement Court under Rhein's guidance had already activated a star-filled sea of killing intent.

If the King of Qing were to perish, humanity's end would come sooner.

Because no matter right or wrong, the stability of reality was sustained by the King of Qing alone.

If he were to die, the Ancient Gods might attempt to awaken their slumbering Supreme.

Starlight surged like a tide, consuming all.

At the universe's extremes, countless meteors rubbed against the darkness, combusting in searing silence.

Falling!

This moment felt beyond time, frozen.

Because a colossal green Qilin ascended to the skies, its ethereal body expanding limitlessly in the darkness. If anyone observed from outer space, they would be overwhelmed with soul-crushing terror and sheer dread!

For such an immense Qilin seemed to occupy half of Earth!

Boom!

Heaven and earth trembled; the star-filled killing intent no longer descended.

It was held aloft by this titanic Qilin!

At that instant, the detached voice of the King of Qing echoed in the ears of every high-level Ascender worldwide.

"Two hundred years have passed. I believe this world has forgotten one thing."

A towering vision shone brilliantly in the darkness, speaking indifferently: "The reason Heaven's Punishment could bind me in the past was that I bore the killing intent of these boundless stars for this world. I could have stood by and watched you fools perish, saw this decayed world be consumed in flames, but I didn't."

The massive green Qilin roared across the globe, pushing back against the tyrannical stars.

Step by step, it tread upon the void of the cosmos, carrying the might of the world.

"I did this not for the ignorant fools like you but to guard this world and wait for my student to be born... to ask him whether he is willing to walk this path in my stead."

His voice rumbled like thunder, as though an Ancient Supreme had awakened from its slumber—majestic and powerful, echoing through time: "In the next two years, I will no longer remain silent. The Sun is eternally the Sun, even if consumed by darkness or obscured by clouds. But if you reach the apex of the universe, you will find..."

"—The Sun always exists."

He coldly declared: "You cannot see it due to your insignificance, not its lack of brilliance."

This was a warning.

And a proclamation.

Boom.

The universe is devoid of sound.

Yet in this moment, it felt like a devastating noise emerged from the depths of the cosmos.

"In the end... Heaven's Punishment is nothing more than this."

Such unimaginable horror.

Heaven's Punishment, humanity's deadliest weapon in history.

A masterpiece of the Red King's life's wisdom.

But now, it had been neutralized by the King of Qing.

After a two-hundred-year struggle, the King of Qing had triumphed once again.

In front of the entire world, a total victory.

Magic City, Ether Association Headquarters.

The lofty Deep Space Headquarters seemed swallowed by the clouds above; the brightly-lit city below had lost all light, enveloped in darkness. On the rooftop, a lone young man stood.

Exalted, solitary.

All the city's splendor ceased in this moment, replaced by the abyss.

Silent and still, intensely dreadful.

In the distance above, the towering green Qilin gazed downward.

Its eyes were majestic and cold.

Like Divine.

If an ordinary person faced such a terrifying sight, they'd likely be scared out of their wits, rendered utterly senseless.

But the young man in a white suit only stared ahead. His black hair swayed in the wind, his lean, solitary figure seemingly on the verge of being swept away but instead steady as a mountain.

His eyes were double pupils, extraordinary and imperial.

"Senior Huai."

The youth in the white suit asked expressionlessly, "Back then, my father once posed this question to you. Do you consider yourself more human now, or more Ancient God?"

The green Qilin replied indifferently: "Rhein, this question has no significance in asking me."

The youth in the white suit was none other than the Vice President of the Ether Association.

The designated successor to the role of President.

—Rhein.

"Why?"

Rhein's expression was calm but heavy, asking.

"Because in the future, there will be two others far more deserving of this question than I."

Huai Yin looked down from above: "Not me."

Rhein fell silent, his golden dual pupils revealing no emotion.

"I usually disdain meddling in the squabbles of petty generations, but tonight I've reconsidered. Heaven's Punishment means little to me; Red's brilliance was never that extraordinary, after all."

Huai Yin said lightly: "I have no stake in Gu Ci'an's affairs. However, his son will become my student and undoubtedly follow my path. The Forbidden Path will reawaken. He will execute the Order of the Hidden's investigations, and whoever is found... will meet their death. If you have objections—then keep them to yourself."

"The question of whether this world will meet its end at the hands of the Ancient God Clan depends on one premise: whether the civilization created by Ascenders will perish first—at my hand."

He sneered: "—Don't be impatient. It's just two years; endure it."

Rhein remained silent for a moment: "Li Qingsong, Tianzhou, Xingye—they must live."

The Qilin lowered its gaze, golden pupils flickering with a taunting glint.

"Hah."

Chapter 435 - 215: The First Person Ever

Above the boundless firmament, the green Qilin surged like mist and gradually vanished into the night.

Only a mocking remark remained, echoing through the air like thunder.

"Rhein, your people have been manipulated, and you didn't even realize?"

Amid the rolling thunder, the King of Qing's power descended out of thin air and scattered into the wind.

For a brief moment, the entire Magic City's electronic devices restored their power supply; the neon lights once again illuminated the darkness, casting their glow onto the coral-like clouds, resembling a dim sea of stars.

Rhein silently stood on the rooftop of the Deep Space Headquarters, his golden heavy pupils devoid of any emotion.

The last words he spoke were not meant as negotiation.

It was because, regardless of the actions of the nine great saints of the Judgement Court now,

Their past achievements remained irrefutable.

They had once been heroes who saved the Human World.

They should not perish so easily.

But now, it seemed there was no room for discussion.

Rhein reached into the pocket of his suit jacket and retrieved an electronic remote control forged from Pure Crystal Stone.

This was the control device for the Heaven's Punishment Plan.

It was also the most cutting-edge alchemy technology weapon under the Judgement Court's command.

But it had now become obsolete.

He gazed skyward, his sight seemingly penetrating the vast clouds, reaching into the darkness-shrouded depths of the Universe, as if he could see the light of burning stars being obscured by an enormous entity, falling into a frigid abyss.

In that moment, Rhein suddenly understood what this Catastrophe had been doing for the past two centuries.

The Ancient Catastrophe occurred two hundred years ago—back then, he hadn't even been born.

It marked the rise and fall of humanity's Golden Age, a time of prosperity jointly created by the husband-and-wife duo Taiqing and Taihua, only to be buried by their most accomplished disciples. Ether Association's various family factions suffered an untold number of casualties, ancient traditions from around the world were severed, and even the Dark World was shattered once.

Taiqing perished.

Taihua took the throne.

The Red King died, activating the Heaven's Punishment Plan just before his death.

The King of Qing bore the murderous intent of these endless stars alone, enduring the weight for the world. This also became a restraint upon him; otherwise, his threat level would rival that of the Ancient Supreme.

An unrestrained Supreme Level combatant—just thinking about it was terrifying.

Rhein's father was a radical within the Ether Association.

He argued that humanity should eliminate every aspect connected to the Ancient God Clan.

This ideology was mocked by Qing and Red Kings alike as the ultimate idiocy.

He should be crowned the King of Fools.

It was a colossal humiliation.

Yet even today, Rhein had to concede one truth.

From beginning to end, the only opponents in the eyes of Qing and Red Kings were each other.

The Red King waged war against the entire world, ultimately falling at Buzhou Mountain, leaving behind a lingering challenge before his death.

That was Heaven's Punishment.

The King of Qing could have avoided it and watched this world face destruction, but he didn't.

Instead, he single-handedly held off the murderous intent of countless stars.

And then spent two centuries unraveling it.

The rivalry between Qing and Red Kings was about to open a new chapter.

"Although our stances differ and our intentions vary, however selfless or selfish the motives may have been, the past two hundred years have undoubtedly been arduous for you. Even though I too believe that using Heaven's Punishment as a means to restrain you was indeed crude, if given another chance, I think I'd still choose to do the same." Rhein placed his hand over his chest and bowed slightly.

Then he turned, speaking into the miniature microphone on his lapel: "Everyone, prepare yourselves from tonight onward. The Judgement Court has revealed a flaw, and Lin Dong and his group will likely pursue us relentlessly."

He paused: "The internal structure of the Ether Association is about to change again."

In the fleeting moment before departure, he cast a cold, steely glance into the darkness.

"The Order of the Hidden, is that it?"

The sea breeze carried the sound of distant tides.

Huai Yin's consciousness returned to his body, and the green Qilin still hovered atop the sky, overlooking the world between sea and heavens. His voice was detached yet tinged with hearty laughter: "Ultimately, I won, as mere stars dare to rival the Sun?"

However, his complexion was dreadfully pale, as though all blood had drained away, and he began coughing heavily.

Even his towering figure seemed to have aged slightly.

His posture appeared hunched.

He turned back, gazing at the two dumbfounded children, chuckling softly: "What's with the surprise? You, too, have stepped onto the Evolution Path. Your future achievements will surpass mine."

Gu Jianlin listened to these words, yet felt a sense of unreality.

It was akin to hearing parents tell you to study hard and aim for Tsinghua and Peking University.

But you'd feel no connection to those words, for such distant dreams feel irrelevant compared to the whimsy of playing with mud.

"When my teacher taught me the Evolution Path back then, he never said it could reach such heights."

Tang Ling said wistfully.

On this night, they had witnessed the true power of a Catastrophe.

No, to be precise, this was no longer confined to regular Catastrophe Level—it was a unique strength belonging solely to this elder, unmatched in history, peerless through the ages.

This was the King of Qing, undoubtedly the pillar of the Human World, able to single-handedly carry the banner of resistance against the Ancient God Clan and deter even the Ancient Supremes from awakening while he lived.

The Human World had long passed down this saying.

Chapter 436 - 215: The First Person Ever _2

The apocalypse of humanity has not yet arrived—not because the time is premature,

but because the King of Qing still lives.

"Since your master and junior sister were willing to teach you the method of evolution, it proves they also believe I am right. They merely refuse to admit my greatness, as acknowledging it would indirectly confess their own foolishness. Of course, I do not despise them—they are indeed rare pillars and heroes of the Human World."

Huai Yin smiled and said, "They are only a little foolish compared to me, but not overly so. At least, compared to that fool of a king, you could already consider them exceptionally intelligent."

Tang Ling fell silent.

For a moment, Gu Jianlin didn't know what to say either.

"Actually, breaking Heaven's Punishment is not a difficult task for me. I found the method many years ago; I just hadn't bothered to attempt it because there was no need. Back then, my temper was rough, and if fools barked at me, I couldn't restrain myself from killing them."

Huai Yin tilted his gaze to the sky and suddenly sighed: "I spent two hundred years honing myself to finally learn how to patiently communicate with fools, all in preparation for this day."

"From today onward, I stand above the heavens."

He gently remarked, "Whatever you wish to do, go ahead. No one will stop you."

Tang Ling froze.

Gu Jianlin hesitated for a second: "What do you mean?"

"I have broken your cage. From now on, you needn't fear anyone—whether it's the President or Catastrophes, especially the Judgement Court. Go do what you think is right. If you succeed, pursue it boldly. If you fail, you bear the consequences yourself."

Huai Yin paused: "But as long as what you pursue is righteous, even if the sky collapses, I will bear it for you."

Those words carried many implications.

Gu Jianlin and Tang Ling understood them perfectly.

If you confirm someone is from the Order of the Hidden, you may kill.

If you kill in error, you bear the blame yourself.

If the kill is justified, even if floods rage across the world, someone will bear the consequences for you.

"After all, this world ultimately belongs to the young. It should be your decision to shape the future, not the decrees of old fools. The measure of youth is not age,"

Huai Yin said, "but whether the heart has already rotted."

"Two hundred years ago, they called me mad. You young ones have heard as much, though you haven't witnessed it firsthand, so there's no visceral sense—no fear."

He turned once more, gazing at the three Saints: "Now, I will let you see it."

With just a casual gesture of his hand,

the time and space where Xingye and Tianzhou—the two Saints—stood twisted and distorted.

In the blink of an eye, they were brought before the old man.

The two Saints, one male and one female, were still being burned by the Ghost Fire on the Cross Iron Sword. Yet, after enduring such long torment, they no longer screamed in agony—they seemed numb, dazed.

Huai Yin raised both hands, placing them atop their heads.

Golden blood burst forth from his palms and forced its way into their seven orifices like living creatures.

At that moment, the two Holy Sanctuary Level Ascenders howled in agony; the torment was a thousandfold worse than before, as if subjected to excruciating torture—souls boiling and writhing in Sulfur Hell's torment.

The golden blood seemed to possess an eerie quality.

Even Holy Sanctuary Level Ascenders couldn't endure it.

They spiraled into madness, white smoke billowing from their faces as their features twisted and blurred.

Simultaneously, their bodies began to swell grotesquely.

Flesh cracked open, horrifying appendages burst forth.

Convulsing bodies spilled pus and blood, with pale exoskeletons sprouting violently across their surfaces.

Their forms distorted monstrously.

In mere seconds, they had transformed into abominations.

"This is why they called me mad—because I discovered a way for humans to wield the Ancient God Power. But in doing so, I unleashed catastrophe upon the world. Countless experiments like this—I've lost count. I can't even remember the number of deaths at my hands. Heroes of the Human World, vicious criminals, Ether Association elites, countless souls from the Dark World..."

"After all, I succeeded. Why shouldn't others succeed like me? So I kept trying, bloodstaining my hands as I crossed forbidden lines, making countless enemies."

"Yet I have no regrets."

Bang.

The bodies of Xingye and Tianzhou rapidly expanded, emitting monstrous roars.

"Some claim I murdered innocents, that my accomplishments rest on the foundation of insane human experimentation. Others believe I am trying to destroy humanity, that I am no better than the Ancient God Clan."

Huai Yin softly murmured, "I personally opened Pandora's Taboo Magic Box. Countless souls were lured by its allure, chasing after evolution's chance in mad frenzy—pushing the Human World into an abyss."

He raised his hand again.

The agonizing cries of Tianzhou and Xingye abruptly halted, stuck in their throats.

Only compound eyes glowed blood-red, illuminating the darkness.

Behind them, Lee Qingsong—nailed to the ground—struggled to lift his head, his face revealing terror and despair.

Clearly, he had survived that era.

"Now, the moment of choice has come."

Huai Yin gazed at the boy and girl before him, surprisingly asking the latter first: "The little girl catches my eye. You also possess the Evolution Path method. Do you wish to become my apprentice? I can free you from the Sword Tomb."

Tang Ling clenched the Extreme Thunder Great Sword, supporting her weary body, replying solemnly: "No."

"My place in the Sword Tomb is to repay a debt—the Tang Family owes them. Over these ten-plus years, they've also nurtured me. If I leave now, I may gain freedom, but I'll forever despise myself."

She looked steadily at the old man, neither arrogant nor servile: "At least in the Sword Tomb, I can still see the hope of freedom. But if I became your apprentice, I'd be shackled for life, never escaping it."

Huai Yin, unfazed by the rejection, seemed to appreciate the girl more. His gaze shifted to the boy beside her: "And you? You've seen all I've done. They call me mad—a man who performs human experiments on innocents. Even these two Saints, who had contributed greatly to the Human World, fell victim."

He paused: "They say I am a butcher, crazed for power, the one who drove humanity into the abyss—an eternal sinner. Now that you've seen everything, would you still wish to be my apprentice?"

Gu Jianlin stared at the elder before him, scrutinizing those aged yet gentle eyes.

After a long, silent gaze, the boy said nothing.

He simply turned and walked toward the darkened road.

Tang Ling glanced at his retreating figure, bowed slightly to the old man, then followed him.

The answer was clear.

Yet, Huai Yin didn't seem disappointed; his smile only grew warmer.

For a moment, strange patterns appeared on the bodies of Tianzhou and Xingye. Countless boyish and girlish figures resembling malevolent ghosts silently wailed—they were so numerous it was harrowing.

Bang!

Their bodies exploded, scattering bone and flesh fragments across the ground.

"Hahaha, no one wants to be your apprentice."

Under the scorching Divine Sacrificial Fire, Li Qingsong spat fresh blood and laughed hoarsely, malicious and sinister: "Huai Yin, in the end, you still haven't found your legacy. So what if you were the first? In the end, you're like a Joker—even those you nurtured are frightened and hateful of you!"

The sea breeze roared past, while Huai Yin spoke softly: "Is that so? I disagree."

Suddenly, his figure turned ethereal, fading into the wind.

In his place sat the elderly man in a wheelchair.

Apart from being paler and seemingly much older, he appeared unchanged.

"Then let's make a bet,"

Huai Yin said with a smile. "Let's wait ten minutes."

In the dark alleyway, faint shadows stretched long under the dim moonlight.

Carrying the Extreme Thunder Great Sword on her back, Tang Ling glanced meaningfully at the boy beside her.

Gu Jianlin took out his phone and dialed. "Tell me Councilman Zhang's location. I'm heading over now."

Chapter 437 - 216: Starting Today, I Have One More Student

Councilman Zhang wanted to flee, but there was no escape.

Especially when he saw the green Qilin coiled above the firmament, an ancestral coercion from the Ancient Wilderness descended from the heavens. Even just a fleeting glance nearly caused his heart to burst under the pressure.

He also heard a proclamation, as if echoing from the depths of the Universe.

He knew—something had gone terribly wrong.

After all, he was a member of The Order of the Hidden and understood that the organization had infiltrated major powers across the world. No matter where he went, there were countless operatives lying in wait, allowing them to act recklessly without restraint.

Earlier, in the cabin of the Bren Hill, the reason he hadn't exposed the identities of that filthy couple was simple.

Behind that filthy couple was none other than a Catastrophe.

Publicly announcing their identities would not merely lead to the capture of Evolvers.

Someone would inevitably try to intervene.

For instance, Chen Bojun. Or Lu Zijin.

Thus, treating them as unknown Evolvers, directly apprehending them, and sending them to the Judgement Court's secret prison was the best course of action. At that point, they would hold all the leverage.

But now—no messages had come through the communication channel, and even the Saints were out of contact.

He had to find a way to save himself. Thus, he activated a communication channel and said coldly, "B-rank Investigator Gu Jianlin, A-rank Investigator Tang Ling have been confirmed as Evolvers, conspiring to attack their superiors. It has now been determined that these two are the assassins behind the attempt on Director Li's life. Requesting reinforcements! This incident involves a Divine Servant. Requesting reinforcements!"

A member of the Judgement Court uttering such words.

For a person of ordinary background, such accusations would push them into an abyss of no return.

"Die for me!"

A thunderous roar erupted as the Butcher leapt into the air, clutching a broken utility pole in his hands. With an earth-shaking momentum, he swung it down fiercely, like a towering colossus wielding the mighty Jingu Bang!

You bastard!

Councilman Zhang had been stalled by this Divine Servant for long enough. He still didn't even know where this thug had come from. In his shock and rage, the ghostly cries of Child Boy and Girl erupted silently across his form, forming a blade stance on the streetlamp!

Dimension Slash!

The Void tore apart in an instant, a horrifying, eye-searing rift cutting through the darkness.

The utility pole was severed cleanly at the midpoint!

Under the blessing of Divine Speed Force, Councilman Zhang ghosted gracefully to the ground. His figure warped and flickered as he closed the distance using Space Jump. The blade edge cleaved through the gale, carving a sharp and deadly arc of light!

This was the power of the Ghost Slayer Path—giving no chance whatsoever for reprieve.

In his Qilin-transformed state, the Butcher had no intention of dodging. As long as his head wasn't severed, he wouldn't die. At worst, he'd lose a pair of hands or his tail. One hit was all he needed.

Then, light footsteps sounded from behind.

A cold voice commanded, "Move aside!"

The Butcher instinctively stepped back, only to see a slender, graceful figure brush past him in a blur.

Su Youzhu emerged with noble Dragon Horns crowning her head, her murderous gaze gleaming. A trace of crimson stretched from the corner of her eyes, as the Ancient God's power surged through her body and mind. In one swift motion, she drew a blood-red Tang Blade.

Combined Skill: Divine Speed Force, Dimension Slash, Space Jump!

Clang!

The clash of blades echoed, scattering sparks across the air.

The Void rippled as two opposing forces of space-time detonated against each other, obliterating all in their path!

Councilman Zhang roared in shocked fury, "Another one? Get lost!"

He twisted his waist and launched a fierce kick!

With a resounding boom, the strength behind it was overwhelming.

Though Su Youzhu managed to block with her blade, she felt a torrent of immense, crushing force rebound against her. It hurled her back like a fragile leaf in a storm, forcing a pained grunt from her lips as her arm went numb!

With a thud, she collided into a firm, cold embrace.

"What are you doing here?"

Gu Jianlin caught her steadily, his hands wrapping around her slender waist.

She was light, so light that even after being sent flying, catching her required little effort.

Su Youzhu stared at him, momentarily dazed.

For Gu Jianlin now bore a dignified yet sinister pair of Qilin Horns atop his head. Black Ghost Fire burned on his forehead, his pupils ringed with eerie darkness. His expressionless face was marked with ebony tattoos—a transformation embodying his evolved state.

Tonight, Su Youzhu had been tricked by him. She'd originally intended to put up a show of being mad, but seeing him in this form, anxiety took hold of her: "This place is crawling with Ether Association operatives. Aren't you afraid of exposing yourself?"

Gu Jianlin shook his head. "It doesn't matter. There's no need to hide anymore."

Behind him, pale Ghost Fire erupted, and four Ghost Hands bathed in golden flames materialized, roaring skyward.

The Candle Dragon Shadow revived once more, its magnificent, otherworldly visage looming above his head.

Rumble!

The heavens raged, storm clouds amassing with thunder's radiant fury streaking inside.

The phenomenon resembled a womb of destruction birthing calamity.

Tang Ling stepped out of the shadows, wielding lightning that glimmered across the vast night sky in her hands.

Su Youzhu's face darkened. As expected, he'd come with *her* to stir up trouble tonight.

"Extreme Thunder!"

Upon seeing the weapon blindingly sparkle, the Butcher turned with glee. "Hahaha, you're doomed now!"

It was now four against one!

One Divine Servant.

Three Evolvers!

The Ether Association's reinforcements still hadn't arrived.

Even as a Fifth Rank, Councilman Zhang could feel the looming specter of death.

No.

It was as though he could see Death itself, reaching out to claim him!

Tonight was destined to be a terrible night for the Ether Association. First, they lost Heaven's Punishment, a weapon of strategic deterrence. Then, the strongest Catastrophe proclaimed itself to the world. And now, an attack on a Councilman and the open rebellion of an Omega Sequence prodigy—this unbearable chain of disasters brought nothing but endless headaches.

Chapter 438 - 216: Starting Today, I Have Another Student_2

The battlefield over at the Bren Hill still needs resources diverted to compete for the Ancient God's Blood.

Thus, only Chen Bojun and Lu Zijin, the two high-ranking combatants, arrived at the battlefield first.

Including Nie, the Deacon, from the Judgement Court.

As well as Wang Taisheng, the Night Watcher.

And a large number of prodigies from the Omega Sequence.

When they all arrived at the battlefield, however, they fell silent, as if by agreement.

Gu Jianlin sat on a shattered stone pedestal, his dust- and blood-stained shirt open, panting heavily.

The demonic elegance of his Qilin Horns, the ghostly pitch-black eyes, and the uncanny tattoos on his face.

He was clearly in an Evolutionary State.

The Extreme Thunder Great Sword was plunged into the ground before him, sparks flashing and dispersing, illuminating his cold, hard profile.

Tang Ling let her crimson hair cascade freely, the prominent Dragon Horns atop her head equally striking. Her vermillion eyes reflected the tardy arrivals with disdain and frigid indifference, a trace of mockery in her gaze.

Four against one—there was no room for suspense.

Even with the aid of the Penglai Ascension Array, Councilman Zhang, despite being Fifth Rank, couldn't withstand the combined barrage of four combatants.

The shattered highway, the collapsed buildings, severed utility poles.

The ground awash in blood.

"Well, we've surely made a name for ourselves now."

Tang Ling rested against the Extreme Thunder Great Sword, her voice icy and arrogant.

"Indeed."

Gu Jianlin chuckled soundlessly. His Female Sacrifice and Tiger General had left the scene earlier, leaving him without any lingering concerns.

Four blazing golden Ghost Hands floated mid-air, clutching a mangled figure in their grasp.

"Councilman Zhang!"

Nie, the Deacon, was the first to charge forward, his face pale: "What are you doing? Openly assassinating a superior?"

Wang Taisheng's expression twisted between light and dark as he bellowed into the microphone concealed under his collar: "This is treason! Total rebellion! The Ascender realm is on the verge of civil war! Two Evolvers have appeared within the Omega Sequence—is the Ancient God Clan infiltrating the Ether Association from within? Why are you all standing there stunned? Take action!"

Their allegiance naturally lay with the Judgement Court, so witnessing such a scene left them mentally shattered.

Nie, the Deacon, was anxious about his career falling into jeopardy.

Wang Taisheng's thoughts were even more sinister. He had only been beaten severely yesterday, and had it not been for a Priest's healing, he'd still be lying in the hospital.

Moreover, his own son was still in critical care battling death, barely clinging to life.

The perpetrator of that gruesome assault was none other than a candidate from the You Ying Group—

The Moon Princess.

During the Returning Burial Forest incident, Gu Jianlin was deeply entangled with the Moon Princess.

With these events threaded together, resentment was inevitable.

Black Mercedes-Benz cars screeched to a halt roadside, blocking off the entrance.

The team leaders inside the vehicles exchanged silent looks, none daring to speak up.

Lin Wanqiu stood among the gathering, her flowerlike features drained of color, her complexion pale with terror.

Lu Zicheng wore an expression as if witnessing ghosts, his voice breaking: "What the hell?"

Chen Qing appeared tense to the extreme, her cold, alluring face clouded with worry.

Lu Zijin widened her mesmerizing eyes, muttering: "Bold move... truly insane."

"You two..."

Chen Bojun scratched his head in frustration but refrained from completing his sentence.

At that moment, communications and electricity returned to Peak City.

The car's projection system flickered to life, displaying phantasmal figures draped in Holy Robes.

"Cease your actions immediately and release Councilman Zhang!"

Thunderous voices of rage boomed from the speakers: "Do not doom yourselves!"

Evidently, these were Saints from the Judgement Court.

Councilman Zhang appeared manic, screaming hysterically: "Save me! They've betrayed humanity's faction! Their accomplices include the You Ying Group's candidate and the Qilin Clan's Divine Servant! This is a conspiracy, likely part of the Qilin Venerable's grand scheme! The King of Qing is absolutely no altruist – he's probably seizing this opportunity to destroy the world!"

"Tang Zijing, Gu Ci'an, as well as Mu Feng—they're all accomplices!"

He roared: "They're nothing but scum fit to die!"

Councilman Zhang's suit was shredded long ago, his blood-slicked body covered in tattoos of Child Boys and Girls.

Those figure tattoos displayed children in hellish agony, writhing violently, silently screaming, transforming into dragons at a rapid pace.

Utter terror, bone-chilling horror.

The sight of Councilman Zhang in this state left the crowd gripped by dread.

What in the world was this unholy abomination!

"Just a traitor from The Order of the Hidden; does it warrant so much drama?"

Tang Ling cast them an icy glance: "Get on with it."

Gu Jianlin exhaled deeply and snapped his fingers.

Crack!

In a graphic display of gore, the four Ghost Hands roared, vibrating with accumulated power.

Councilman Zhang's limbs were ripped apart alive, torrents of blood spraying like waterfalls!

Thud.

His broken body crashed to the ground, nearly fainting from unbearable pain!

Silence.

A Judgement Court Councilman, stripped of his limbs so cruelly, reduced to nothing more than livestock awaiting slaughter.

In this moment, someone suddenly realized something.

No one made a move to stop these two, despite their madness.

At that moment, a sleek black Maserati emerged from the shadows, its dazzling headlights illuminating the crowd's faces.

The onlookers gazed at the vehicle's license plate, their expressions shifting to ones of deference and reverence.

For this was the President's personal car!

High above the skies.

Golden brilliance cast its piercing gaze, silvery phantoms lowered their heads to watch.

Both the Silver King and Golden King—the two Catastrophes—were observing this spectacle.

"My thanks for tonight's aid."

Gu Jianlin turned to the red-haired girl beside him: "Let's collaborate again next time."

Tang Ling withdrew the Extreme Thunder Great Sword, replying coolly with a simple "Mm."

The two brushed past each other.

"Get in the car."

Chapter 439 - 216: Starting Today, I Have Another Student_3

Inside the black Maserati, a voice cold with authority echoed.

The old servant immediately got out of the car, respectfully opened the door, and gestured invitingly.

Tang Ling didn't even spare him a glance, indifferently settling into the rear seat.

Bang—the door shut with a heavy sound.

In the dark, the projected faces of the Saints looked extremely grim.

Nie Feng and Wang Taisheng, the administrative officials, suddenly felt like nothing more than Jokers.

Because the President had shown no intention of holding anyone accountable!

All eyes turned to the blood-soaked young man, and the nearly unconscious Councilman he dragged along with him.

No one knew what to do next.

Tang Ling being protected didn't come as a tremendous surprise.

But when people looked at the bloodied young man under the lights, their expressions became profoundly complex.

This was no longer the Black Cloud City of old.

Gu Jianlin was no longer the boy who had once stood alone.

Behind him stood a Catastrophe.

The strongest Catastrophe.

The King of Qing.

"Why so shocked?"

Gu Jianlin smiled faintly, a feeling of release in his voice: "It's not like this is my first time doing something like this."

With those words, he dragged the half-dead Councilman into the darkness.

The dim road was illuminated by pale light, and by the coastline stood an elderly man in a wheelchair.

"I'm back."

Gu Jianlin casually tossed the half-dead Councilman forward. "Do you think he has what it takes to grasp the Evolution Path?"

The King of Qing was someone willing to bear Heaven's Punishment for the sake of the Human World.

He could have chosen to stand idly by, yet carried the unbearable weight of others nonetheless.

How could someone like him ever be guilty of reckless slaughter?

Gu Jianlin knew this deep in his heart.

From beginning to end, those killed by the King of Qing had always been nothing more than the parasites within The Order of the Hidden—hardly innocent lives.

Such a proud King wouldn't even bother to defend himself.

No matter how many pointed fingers accused him.

No matter how countless voices cursed his name.

No matter... how utterly abandoned he became.

Gu Jianlin's profile had already outlined the old man's emotions.

Struggle, sorrow, heartbreak, silent grief.

Disillusionment.

Like the smoldering remnants of a burned-out ember, faint warmth lingered.

But what he utterly lacked was cold-bloodedness or madness.

Gu Jianlin couldn't sense a shred of it.

The King of Qing's questions had never needed contemplation.

Because there was no need to consider them.

The answer was singular.

And it would remain singular.

From the wheelchair, Huai Yin smirked. "Don't know—why don't I give it a try?"

"It's an Order member, so do whatever pleases you."

Gu Jianlin stepped behind him, tentatively placing his hand on the wheelchair's backrest. "Whatever the reason, these past two centuries have been insult enough for you. The guilty one has never been the beam of light piercing the darkness, but the darkness itself. Even if black and white can be reversed, the Sun still endures."

He paused for a moment. "You were right, Teacher."

For the first time, he attempted to push the wheelchair.

For teacher and pupil, this action carried profound meaning.

Suddenly, Huai Yin burst into hearty laughter, his voice mingling with the sea breeze, resonating across heaven and earth.

Gu Jianlin pushed the wheelchair forward, silently moving ahead.

Through the silence.

Through the darkness.

Past the whispering wind.

Into the murmur of waves.

At the entrance of the West Port Forbidden Zone, the black Maserati stood silently alongside the highway.

The geniuses of Omega, the nano warriors of the Dawn Combat Sequence.

Elite investigators from across the globe, as well as their team captains.

Even department heads, staring for extended periods through the cameras.

The Saints reflecting in the projector of the Judgement Court, their expressions boiling with fury.

Inside the helicopter cabin, members of the Night Watchers gazed with complex emotions at the scene unfolding.

Unknown numbers of high-level Ascenders worldwide used secretive methods to watch it all.

Even two Catastrophes hung in the skies above, observing silently.

The black-haired young man pushed the wheelchair into their view.

Huai Yin sat upon it, his smile brimming with the exhilaration of release, and his laughter spanned the universe.

"From today onward, I have gained another student."

He spoke seriously.

This, perhaps, was the weakest moment of the past two centuries for him.

He knew it well.

Many pondered whether to seize the opportunity and kill him.

Yet he lacked any trace of apprehension.

Because someone was pushing his wheelchair.

And for him, this was enough.

Chapter 440 - 217 Butcher: Who is this old man?

The light in the grocery store was dim, with moths fluttering around it.

Gu Jianlin pushed the wheelchair as he strolled along the beach. The midsummer sea breeze rippled the calm water, and faintly, the sound of waves could be heard.

At the farthest point of the firmament, deep purple lightning collided with blood-red flashes, creating a web of sparks that flickered, as if trying to tear the night sky apart. The cloud sea, resembling coral clusters, fragmented into wisps.

Strangely, no sound echoed, a silence so eerie it felt terrifying.

"Don't worry, your senior brother is currently having a great time battling the Netherworld. Young people need an outlet now and then."

Huai Yin spoke softly, sitting in the wheelchair: "You don't need to worry. There are probably only a handful of humans in this world who could threaten your senior brother. Those who could truly kill him are nonexistent. Although he hasn't yet ascended to the Ninth Rank Candle Yin God, the ritual was actually completed long ago. I merely suppressed it myself."

He said flatly: "To him, this is nothing more than small potatoes."

Gu Jianlin looked up at the sky, thinking to himself that this certainly didn't look like "small potatoes."

"Next, I have a few things I need to tell you."

Huai Yin said quietly: "They're important, and you must remember them."

Gu Jianlin replied calmly: "Don't bother."

Huai Yin raised an eyebrow and glared at his shadow: "Hmm?"

"If it's a last will, then don't bother saying it,"

Gu Jianlin said expressionlessly: "Bad omen."

Huai Yin didn't take kindly to this, puffing his beard and glaring, scolding: "Unworthy pupil! How dare you curse your teacher! Your teacher's bones are still solid enough to survive for at least another couple of years."

Before accepting disciples, they're good kids.

Once accepted, they become ungrateful brats.

Ha.

Gu Jianlin asked: "Then why are you speaking as if you're sharing your last words?"

"Just going along with the mood, that's all."

Huai Yin slapped his thigh, laughing: "Don't worry, I really won't die. To me, Heaven's Punishment might be an inconvenience, but it's ultimately nothing extraordinary. As for those few in the Judgement Court, they're even more fragile—utterly useless. Wait until you grow a bit stronger; you'll be able to casually dispatch those worthless ones."

Gu Jianlin wasn't buying it one bit, calmly replying: "My experiences from childhood tell me that adults' words aren't reliable at all. Anyway, if you do kick the bucket, I'll head over to the Dark World and take the Red King as my mentor instead."

"What?"

Huai Yin widened his eyes again: "What's the point in becoming the disciple of a dead man? Have you lost your mind?"

Yet after a moment of silence, he chuckled helplessly.

Snap—a finger clicked.

Gu Jianlin felt as if the world had suddenly shifted somehow, though he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"Every cockroach and mosquito across the northern region has just died."

Huai Yin's face looked noticeably revitalized—this was the superiority of the Divine Path.

Gu Jianlin, bewildered, sensed the surrounding rhythm of life, unsure of what to say.

"When you reach the Ninth Rank Taiyi God someday, you'll understand this feeling," Huai Yin said with faint amusement. "Legend has it that one of the reasons the Qilin Venerable is so dreaded is that, given enough time, He could genuinely ravage this planet into a barren wasteland—taking the entire dimension with it."

"Ninth Rank Taiyi God?"

Gu Jianlin suddenly understood: "Do all Ninth Ranks get a divine designation?"

This was the first time he learned the Divine Path's nomenclature for Ninth Rank.

"That's correct, because Ninth Rank falls within the Demigod Domain—able to rival Primordial beings in the real world, and in the Ancient God Realm, they stand a chance for survival in the fiercest of struggles. A Catastrophe must be a Ninth Rank Demigod, but not all Demigods are catastrophes."

Huai Yin smiled: "The definition of a Catastrophe adheres to only two criteria."

Gu Jianlin waited for the explanation.

"First, surviving a clash with an Ancient Supreme."

Huai Yin paused: "Second, mastering the Evolution Path."

Gu Jianlin froze momentarily.

"Exactly—once I activated the Evolution Path, both the Red King and others like Gold and Silver were forced to follow suit. How should I explain this to you? Ah, yes—it's like an arms race. Imagine we're students in the same school, but I secretly enrolled in a tutoring class first, forcing them to follow suit or risk losing their edge."

Huai Yin elaborated: "Otherwise, they would lose all competitiveness."

Gu Jianlin saw the light.

"Truth be told, I no longer qualify as a Catastrophe."

Huai Yin chuckled: "You've noticed, haven't you? Everyone's already treating me like an Ancient Supreme."

Gu Jianlin didn't know how to respond; he almost mistook this teacher for the Qilin Venerable himself.

To determine who truly resembled a Supreme, it absolutely had to be him.

"What about the President?"

He asked: "Isn't she a Catastrophe?"

"No, because she hasn't embraced the Evolution Path, nor is she willing to align herself with us,"

Huai Yin explained: "Her strength comes mostly from her mastery of the Breathing Technique and Forbidden Spells, as well as humanity's ultimate weapon—the Heavenly Person's Wedge. It's modeled after the Ancient God's Wedge, created according to the rules of the human world, and is held exclusively by each generation's President."

"I understand now."

Gu Jianlin hesitated briefly before asking seriously: "So what's your current level, then?"

Huai Yin laughed: "Quasi-Supreme Level."

It was as if thunder had erupted without a sound.

It felt as though the world's sea tides had all grown more tumultuous.

Gu Jianlin's hand trembled as if shocked by electricity. He tightened his grip on the wheelchair's arm.

"But it's not as exaggerated as it sounds. If I had achieved this level in my youth, I surely would've accomplished great feats. Now, though, I'm old—only a few years left to live. You've probably sensed my Life Rhythm; it's as hollow as a black hole. And... though I hate to admit it."