

Ancient 541

Chapter 541: Codename, Qilin! _3

The scene before him was extremely horrifying.

Zhang Xuzhi let out a painful scream toward the sky, with blood dripping from his mouth.

His back had been pierced through.

Gu Jianlin held his heart, though his gaze wasn't on him.

Instead, he lifted his head to look at the massive face amidst the wind and snow.

"This should be our first meeting, but I have long heard of your great name."

He said coldly, "Vice President Rhein."

The wind and snow howled.

The crowd remained silent. This update is available on Novel-Fire.net

The enormous face gazed at him, yet its eyes didn't convey a sense of looking down, instead showing a hint of solemnity, it said indifferently: "I must admit, until now I regarded you as just a child or a junior. But now it seems you're standing before me, ready to challenge me?"

The cruel voice echoed between heaven and earth.

Gu Jianlin slightly exerted force in his palm, his voice sounded gentle yet inexplicably resonant: "Something like that, actually I have never been interested in the factional struggles within the Ether association. My teacher doesn't meddle, so as his student, I'm not in a position to take action. I just want to protect those I wish to protect, and uncover what I want to uncover."

"But now, the Judgement Court is getting in my way, and I'm tired of your so-called factional struggles."

He denied nothing, speaking coldly: "Whether it's Mu Feng or the people in the refuge, or Lu Zijin and the Lin Family siblings, and my father's student Moon Princess. If the Judgement Court wishes to move against them, that is unacceptable."

Crack!

Zhang Xuzhi let out a muffled groan, blood dripping from his lips onto the snow-covered ground.

He fell into the snow with a thud, dead.

The scarlet color spread across the snow.

Gu Jianlin raised his hand, displaying the bloody, still-beating heart in his grasp.

"I really want to know, since the Judgement Court accuses others of colluding with the Fallen, forming cliques for private gain, and violating order. Now, if a minister with a Judgement Court background abuses public office for private gain, attempts to murder members within the association, colludes with Dusk. Does this count as violating order, Vice President Rhein?"

His voice wasn't loud, yet it pierced through the howling wind and snow.

Rhein silently stared at him.

After a long while.

"Of course it counts."

He openly admitted: "With such irrefutable evidence, why wouldn't it count? This time, you've won. All consequences and responsibilities will be borne by me as the Vice President."

Gu Jianlin expressionlessly discarded the heart from his hand.

"If I'm not mistaken, this is your official signal to intervene in the factional struggle within the Ether association. From now on, I will consider you a real opponent, just like your two senior brothers."

Rhein said indifferently: "I might as well call you Mr. San, looking forward to our next confrontation."

The majestic golden face silently collapsed.

The crowd was stunned speechless.

That was Vice President Rhein.

The prospective next President, a Ninth Rank demigod.

Had actually regarded a Fourth Rank junior as an opponent.

Gu Jianlin looked down at the blood on his hands, silently.

Suddenly, a shadow wrapped in wind and snow descended beside him.

"Wipe it off."

She offered a handkerchief, speaking coolly.

Gu Jianlin was taken aback, before him stood a familiar woman in military uniform.

Han Jing.

"Lord Lin Dong asked me to watch over you, lest something happens to you."

Han Jing glanced at the young man, speaking softly: "Since you've already decided to step into the fray, then you'll need a camp, right? Last time you refused me, so this time, do you want to publicly embarrass me?"

Gu Jianlin was silent for a moment, accepted the handkerchief to wipe his hands, and shook his head.

Han Jing rarely showed a smile: "I didn't want you to get involved initially because I didn't want you to bear too much pressure. But it seems now, you should indeed take your father's place. By the way, your chair killer nickname is too inelegant, want to pick a new code name?"

Gu Jianlin gazed at the swirling wind and snow, pondering for a moment: "Any code name, is fine?"

"Of course, a code name is irrelevant, choose whatever you like."

Han Jing explained.

"Hmm."

Gu Jianlin thought for a while.

"Then... Qilin."

Chapter 542: Think Tank's Game

Snowflakes drifted gently from the sky.

Since the Qilin Immortal Palace had opened, the Order World had suffered consecutive losses of key figures: the deaths of Tianzhou and Xingye, the two Saints; the deaths of two Minister-level officials; and the demise of several Omega members due to infighting.

Of course, the You Ying Group experienced even greater losses.

The Night Watchers exchanged uncertain glances.

The people from the Judgement Court wore pale expressions, their faces as white as paper.

It was over.

Everything was over.

Vice President Rhein seemed calm when he left, but in reality, he had already sensed imminent danger, seething with anger.

Originally, if Minister Zhang Xuzhi were brought back for interrogation, it would have proved this matter to be his personal act—be it abusing authority to conspire to murder internal members or colluding with the Dusk evolvers.

But now, Zhang Xuzhi was dead.

Dead without leaving evidence.

This meant everyone had to suspect.

Was Rhein orchestrating everything from behind the scenes?

Given the President's naturally suspicious character, doubts would inevitably arise.

The battle for the position of the next President was bound to intensify.

And for Rhein, the most intolerable scenario was for any mishap to occur before he completed the handover of power.

As for the significance of the President's position?

Even the upper echelons of the Ether Association only vaguely understood part of it.

It was not just about authority.

It represented supreme power.

Now, the Judgement Court's arrangement had nearly collapsed entirely.

"Codename: Qilin."

Chen Bojun meditated on the codename repeatedly, commenting, "Impressive, truly a lawless force."

"Director Chen."

Fu Qingxuan, though aware this youth had saved him, hadn't interacted much at all and asked curiously, "Has the kid always been like this? After all, we're talking about Vice President Rhein here—what audacity he has."

But then again, for a student of the King of Qing, such behavior seemed fitting.

Profound Yin Saint stewed silently for a long while, his face darkening to the extreme, before blurting out, "I feel there's something we need to seriously consider: Gu... Mr. Gu's earlier actions reminded me of someone—Gu Ci'an! The sudden onset of the blizzard and Mr. Gu's abrupt appearance, this isn't the first time something like this has happened."

Indeed, this wasn't the first occurrence. Those deeply familiar with the Ancient God Realm could leverage certain supernatural mechanisms to achieve their objectives—killing many lives in the process.

Take Gu Ci'an back in the Fusang Divine Palace, for instance, when he once clashed with an Ascender organization from another country. He leveraged a sudden Heavenly Fire, annihilating twelve Sixth Ranks, and made his name in one fell swoop.

Later, it was proven that the Heavenly Fire originated from the anger of a Primordial.

That such a figure reemerged now was terrifying.

"At least for now, we should trust his character. He doesn't seem like someone utterly depraved."

"Are you referring to the morality of the Chair Killer?"

"What Chair Killer? His name is Qilin! Speaking of which, that's quite a noteworthy title."

From a certain perspective, this wasn't entirely bad news. The final battle to conquer the Sea of Eternal Life was fast approaching.

Gu Jianlin could provide critically important intelligence.

If all went according to plan, the Sea of Eternal Life would be the ultimate gateway to the next layer.

Gu Jianlin turned around, his gaze falling upon the two dying Omega members.

"Do you want me to kill you too?"

Li Hanting coughed painfully, kneeling on the ground, struggling to rise.

Zhou Hanye's pupils abruptly dilated.

"Your grandfather and my teacher belonged to the same generation. Logically, my seniority should surpass yours."

Gu Jianlin looked down at him from above, speaking calmly, "My teacher didn't kill your grandfather, so why should I kill you? I don't even know if you belong to The Order of the Hidden and frankly have no interest in you. Or is it that you wish to protest on behalf of Councilman Zhang? Or avenge your grandfather by defeating me?"

"If you have the courage, then go find that Profound Yin Saint to heal you now."

He stated indifferently, "One against two—deciding both victory and death."

Back when he faced off against four Twilight Candidates, he was only of the Third Rank.

Thus, Ancient God Transformation was necessary.

Now, as a Fourth Rank, merely activating the Evolutionary State would suffice to handle one against two, effortlessly.

Zhou Hanye's throat shifted, staring at the youth's cold, indifferent gaze and the Skeleton Giant looming around him.

Li Hanting recalled the astonishingly deadly achievements of wiping out five Twilight Candidates prior.

Could they possibly win?

Even at their peak, victory seemed improbable.

Moreover, their Growth Type Mythical Weapons had shattered.

"I don't even need Growth Type Mythical Weapons."

Gu Jianlin said flatly.

Ultimately, Zhou Hanye and Li Hanting lowered their heads.

Back when the King of Qing freed himself from the shackles of Heaven's Punishment, elevating the Evolvers to a rightful place in history.

The Judgement Court hadn't dared utter a single word. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT NOVELFire.NET](#)

And now, Gu Jianlin was once again trampling rules directly under their noses, killing Minister Zhang on the spot.

Vice President Rhein hadn't intervened.

What could they possibly do?

Especially now, with Gu Jianlin possessing the talent for profiling and having gained early access to the Sea of Eternal Life.

The intelligence he held was of utmost importance.

At this critical juncture, he was indispensable.

"If even this you cannot handle, then my senior brother was correct—the Judgement Court's faith is indeed laughable. Your so-called defense of order is merely a guise to consolidate your power. The rejection of Evolvers stems from jealousy over power not in your grasp. And as for your relentless eradication of the Fallen and the Unclean—it's beyond absurd."

Gu Jianlin spoke with cold indifference: "If you think I'm wrong, do you not even dare challenge me?"

Chapter 543: Think Tank's Game_2

Li Hanting and Zhou Hanye did not respond.

Because their self-esteem had been shattered.

However, at that very moment, *crack*!

The ice on the two Dusk members began to fissure, and with a thunderous explosion, it shattered apart.

Gu Jianlin narrowed his eyes, becoming instantly alert.

He didn't know what rank these two were, but their Life Rhythm was overwhelmingly powerful!

Han Jing sidestepped in a flash to shield him. The freezing cold that filled the air seemed to bow before her, gathering at her command. Her codename was Frost, and this was her domain.

Chen Bojun expressionlessly hefted his sniper rifle, moving to his side and activating the Rectangular Domain.

"Everyone, on full alert!"

The Profound Yin Saint roared, "Protect Mr. Gu!"

It wasn't that he was switching sides quickly—it was simply because this young man, adept at profiling, held critical intelligence. If anything happened to him, it would benefit no one. It would be a loss for the Order World.

What's more, if the President and the King of Qing blamed him, he'd be finished.

When facing the Dark World, unity was still paramount.

As icy debris fell, Xing Yun shook her head like a little dog shaking off dust.

"Xing Yun, you idiot! Look at you! What did I say earlier? Didn't I tell you we took the wrong route? We're definitely in the Kui Dragon Ancestor's lair now, right? Otherwise, why else would we have been attacked by it? We're finished; we're dead this time. I just hope my son burns me some extra offerings!"

Ghost Eye cursed loudly, "Without an organized Heavenly Person System, what do we even use to fight a Primordial? You clueless woman, if I ever team up with you again in the future, I'll take your surname!"

Xing Yun, looking aggrieved, bowed in apology. "I'm sorry, senior. I don't know why we were attacked by the Kui Dragon Ancestor, but I'm pretty sure this isn't its lair."

"But... the mission does seem to have failed."

She turned and seriously scrutinized the Ether Association members. "Zhang Xuzhi is dead, though."

Ghost Eye froze. "Dead? Damn it!"

"Yep, he's really dead."

Xing Yun, her face filled with innocent confusion, said, "Looks like we'll have to proceed with the second task from the Think Tank."

Everyone silently watched the pair, thinking to themselves that these two seemed more like comic relief than threats.

"Are we making a move?"

Chen Bojun asked coldly, "Dare you try."

Han Jing stood unperturbed, arms folded, staring them down.

Yes, Dusk was dangerous.

But the three giants of the Ether Association were nearby.

Making a rash move would be tantamount to suicide.

"I'm no fool. Your Heavenly Person Realm must be around here somewhere, right?"

Xing Yun said seriously, "Don't treat me like an idiot."

Ghost Eye spat, "The Ether Association folks are the most shameless."

Gu Jianlin stood behind his senior comrades, his face full of doubt.

He'd only ever heard that the Dusk Organization was mysterious.

But now that he saw them... they didn't seem entirely sane.

"Which one of you is Mr. San?"

Ghost Eye cleared his throat and folded his arms, attempting a solemn demeanor. "I'm the blind one, and my companion is the fool. Please respect us—don't deceive individuals with disabilities. It's not easy for us to carry out missions, either."

Surprisingly, Xing Yun didn't get mad at being called a fool. Instead, she earnestly added, "Our Think Tank told us if Zhang Xuzhi dies, then it must be by the hands of Mr. San. He left us a message for you."

A chilling silence enveloped the group.

The name "Think Tank" was like thunder in their ears.

It was said that Dusk's rise in recent years was closely tied to this figure.

This individual had appeared out of nowhere and seemed to carry on the legacy of the Red King.

Though they hadn't exhibited much combat strength, their meticulous thinking and flawless strategies were terrifying.

Han Jing glanced at the young man, her entire body tense.

Chen Bojun muttered softly, "Xiao Gu?"

Gu Jianlin knew they were addressing him, but the title "Mr. San" felt downright strange.

He directly stepped past the two seniors, positioning himself in front of the Dusk members. "What do you want?"

Ghost Eye snorted coldly and pulled a phone out of his pocket.

Xing Yun helped him press the call button.

"Hello, Mr. Gu. This must be our first conversation, though admittedly one-sided. First off, I'd like to express my respect. To have eliminated five Twilight Candidates with Third-Rank strength... truly remarkable combat prowess, not to mention your impressive fighting spirit. I am quite curious how you managed it—I'll be sure to find out."

The Think Tank's voice was calm and smiling. "You were the one who spied on me from the Sea of Eternal Life back then, weren't you? As expected of Gu Ci'an's son—you're quite capable. My meticulously crafted plan was nearly ruined by you alone. Generally speaking, those who sabotage my plans... must die."

Gu Jianlin's eyes narrowed.

Han Jing placed her hand on his shoulder, signaling subtly with her eyes.

Chen Bojun gave a nod, ready to act at a moment's notice.

But the Think Tank's tone shifted. "That said, if you were to die, Moon Princess would probably be heartbroken, wouldn't she? She's someone I value, as well as the descendants of the King. I wouldn't want her to resent me. I won't kill you, but I'll make you lose someone important. Care to guess who it might be?"

Gu Jianlin raised an eyebrow, the skeleton giant behind him roaring ferociously. A flash of dark energy blazed forth!

Boom!

The massive black flash dissipated entirely.

Xing Yun, with just a raised hand, crushed the ferocious black surge with ease.

Dark energy dissolved in her palm, making her frown. "That hurt. Are you sure you're only Third Rank?"

Ghost Eye jumped in fright and quickly hid behind her.

"Whoa, someone's aggressive."

The Think Tank chuckled. "You're nothing like your father. He used to at least give me a heads-up before making a move."

The phone signal crackled with static.

Gu Jianlin looked up expressionlessly and said, "I don't care to guess, because you won't succeed. But based on that last remark, I'd wager that aside from Moon Princess, Dusk won't have much need for Candidates going forward."

"And why is that?"

The Think Tank's voice carried mild amusement through the static.

"Because dead men can't become candidates,"

Gu Jianlin replied coldly. "Now, scram."

After a moment of silence, the Think Tank chuckled. "Interesting."

The phone call ended.

In that instant, an overwhelming surge of energy burst forth, scattering the endless wind and snow.

Xing Yun's long black hair was disheveled by the force. In an instant, her usual foolish and dazed demeanor was replaced by an explosive killing intent!

Boom!

Snow cascaded down the mountain peaks with deafening force!

Without hesitation, she hoisted her companion and turned to flee!

Boom!

A burst of unimaginable power rocketed through the sound barrier like a cannonball, sprinting into the distance.

Almost simultaneously, a cold snort echoed from the void.

Brilliant golden light streaked across the sky like a falling star, crashing toward the pair!

"The President has made his move!"

Boom!

Towering snow exploded into the sky, and the dazzling golden light erupted like the sunrise. It was as if a nuclear bomb had detonated, illuminating the icy realm in blinding brilliance, forcing everyone to shut their eyes.

Even Gu Jianlin had to shield his face, taking half a step back under the onslaught of fierce winds.

The Black Qilin in his consciousness stirred uneasily, filled with dread.

Such terrifying power!

Chapter 544: Men and Women Should Not Touch When Giving or Receiving Things

Rather than saying that the highest authority of the Ether Association is the President, it would be more accurate to say that this superalliance, which maintains the order of the real world, is entirely upheld by her alone.

After all, without her, there would be no two-hundred-year-long Golden Age in human history.

Nor would there have been the birth of the Catastrophe.

In terms of accomplishments, she is undoubtedly one of the greatest leaders in human history.

However, due to the isolation that comes with standing at the summit, she hasn't taken action in many years. She's never encountered an enemy worthy of truly enraging her, and she doesn't even need to personally appear when dealing with the Ancient God Clan.

As a result, many people no longer know how formidable she truly is.

But after all these years, when the President activated the power of the Heavenly Person again, people felt as though a nuclear bomb had detonated on the Ice Field. Endless light and heat erupted, burning eternally.

"What do you think?"

The snow vehicle sped across the Ice Field. Chen Bojun sat in the driver's seat, grinning. "This is the power of the President. The massive energy transformed from the Heavenly Person's Wedge—if a Seventh Rank Evolver takes one hit, not even their ashes would remain. Not only is it immensely powerful, but it's also clean energy: low-carbon, eco-friendly, and hygienic."

Gu Jianlin, wrapped in a heavy military overcoat, took a deep breath as he gazed at the distant burning brilliance and couldn't help but remark, "Indeed, the enemy doesn't even need cremation. But, this has already been burning for half an hour."

He sat in the back seat, clutching a thermos of hot water, and sneezed.

He had caught a cold.

"That's how the President's power works. Even without giving her all, it has to burn for an entire night."

Han Jing was driving her own snow vehicle, keeping pace with them. "Those two Twilight Candidates are strong. They're definitely more than just Seventh Rank—at least Eighth Rank level. But they don't seem very bright. If I'm not mistaken, they are the infamous 'Dimwit Duo' from Twilight. Both of them have dim brains, but their combat power is terrifying."

"The Dimwit Duo..."

Gu Jianlin sighed. "I didn't think Twilight's style would be like this. Achoo!"

"Twilight has all kinds of people. Nothing surprising about it."

Han Jing shot him a cold glance and handed him a bottle of medicine. "Take this—three times a day. You'll feel better tomorrow."

This minor illness clearly didn't require a Priest to treat. Self-healing would enhance one's own immunity, which was somewhat beneficial for an Ascender. Taking medicine just made him feel more comfortable.

"Thanks."

Gu Jianlin took the pills, swallowed them with a tilt of his head, and took another sip of hot water.

A parrot popped its head out of the backpack and squawked, "Thanks, Mommy!"

Pfft!

Chen Bojun nearly choked.

The icy elegance on Han Jing's face turned unnaturally red in an instant. She scolded angrily, "Mommy? Who was this parrot listening to? I'm going to tear their mouth off!"

Panic mode activated.

Gu Jianlin thought to himself, your reaction has already confirmed it.

The parrot immediately retracted into the backpack, pretending to play dead.

"It wasn't me. I didn't say anything."

Chen Bojun cleared his throat. "There are only a few suspects. Think carefully, and you'll figure it out."

Han Jing's face darkened. "Heh, if it's not Lin Lan, it's Mu Feng! Those two loudmouths! Don't listen to their nonsense!"

Gu Jianlin thought to himself: A woman's intuition is terrifyingly sharp.

Poor Uncle Mu.

If this gets traced back, he might not have died at the hands of the Judgement Court but rather at the hands of the Night Watchers.

"How's everyone doing?"

He suddenly asked.

Chen Bojun smiled. "They're all doing well. The Little Princess has become a major hero. She even received a reward from the President and is going around the camp bragging about it. She's basically gone mad from excitement. Captain Lin Wanqiu is the same. Although her mind was corrupted, she received a special pardon. She can no longer go on missions but is completely free."

"As for Lin Lan, that rascal is lying in the intensive care unit. He's the only living specimen. We need to study the matrix on his body to determine what it does."

He paused. "Once he wakes up, we can clear Mu Feng's name."

Han Jing said mildly, "In short, everything is steadily improving."

Gu Jianlin nodded slightly. "Will I be held accountable?"

"Of course not. Although you killed Minister Zhang right in front of Vice President Rhein, which is quite a serious incident and would usually get you locked up for decades, the fact is Minister Zhang intended to kill you all. So, your actions were understandable to some extent."

Chen Bojun added, "The key point is that you're still valuable to the President right now."

"As long as you're useful to the President, she will be particularly lenient with you. But any rewards you might have received are gone. The real problem is that Lu Zijin's actions have been confirmed, and now she's been taken to the Sea of Eternal Life by the Moon Princess. This is practically considered betrayal, so her position as Divine General is probably forfeit."

Han Jing explained, "As for the Moon Princess, since Wang Taisheng's mysterious death, the intensity of the hunt for her has lessened. But now that she's confirmed to be your father's student and also a Twilight Candidate..."

She left the rest unsaid.

No further explanation was needed.

"But there's no need to be overly tense."

Chen Bojun pondered for a moment. "Originally, Rhein was supposed to complete the handover of the Heavenly Person's Wedge next month, but thanks to your interference, that's probably not happening anymore. Now the entire Judgement Court is frantically scrambling, desperate and chaotic."

Han Jing sneered.

Gu Jianlin understood. He looked up at the golden brilliance of the Golden Realm in the sky.

Chapter 545: Men and Women Should Not Touch Hands When Giving or Receiving Things_2

Now the Black Qilin is asleep in consciousness, clearly wary of this power,

This is the power of the Heavenly Person.

"If I'm not mistaken, this power will invade the depths of the Sea of Eternal Life next, won't it?"

He suddenly asked.

"Yes, the Ether Association is already preparing to raid the gatekeeper boss."

Han Jing said coldly, "As the name suggests, the dimensional hierarchies of the Ancient God Realm have layers. For instance, Buzhou Mountain has seven layers, Fusang Divine Palace has nine layers, Yun Mengze has thirteen layers, and the Gate of Hell has five layers. Qilin Immortal Palace has fewer layers, but each one spans an immense area. Originally, this layer was supposed to have many Ancestors guarding it, but due to a decisive battle over two thousand years ago, most of the Ancestors fell."

"Some truly perished, while others are dormant in dimensional fissures we cannot observe—they won't emerge for at least a few hundred years. As such, the only confirmed surviving Ancestor on this layer is Kui."

She paused briefly and continued, "The Sea of Eternal Life holds the key to the next layer. In a sense, the Kui Dragon Ancestor is the gatekeeper boss of this layer. It's akin to playing a game—whenever a new version rolls out with new expansions, players worldwide form teams and strive for the first kill of the boss."

Gu Jianlin nodded in realization, "That's quite apt."

"The Red Qilin Ancestor in the Returning Burial Forest is already half-dead, its power has mostly dissipated, so it hasn't caused much of a stir. It will awake again 1,500 years later, but that's not our concern."

Han Jing elaborated, "As for the Kui Dragon Ancestor, if it were at its peak, only Catastrophes could handle it. However, the first time we observed it, it was in a severely weakened state. Now it has likely recovered to about two-thirds of its strength. When the time comes, things will get intense, and the gatekeeping team will be quite extraordinary."

"Such as?"

Gu Jianlin curiously asked.

"This time, the gatekeeper team is led by Vice President Lin Dong, accompanied by the Heavenly Fire God General, Xuan Shui God General, Profound Yin Saint, and Ye Dao Saint. Lastly, the team includes me, who recently ascended to Holy Land Level, and another Night Watcher."

Han Jing spoke calmly, "One Ninth Rank, two Eighth Rank, four Seventh Rank. In reality, the only main force is Vice President Lin Dong; the others are there to handle any potential Ancestors or to play supporting roles."

Chen Bojun chuckled, "That's not all. We, the rest, will be busy outside. After all, this is an Ancient Ancestor; we can't afford to be careless. There will even be a Catastrophe to oversee the battle."

"You're already at Fourth Rank. Tonight, I'll assign you to the primary team. It's not ranked but rather an auxiliary position."

He said, "Just like Thunder."

Gu Jianlin nodded in understanding, "I get it."

"To be honest, I thought you'd reject me this time."

Han Jing suddenly remarked, "I think Thunder would actually suit you better than the Night Watchers."

Chen Bojun laughed, "Indeed. None of us thought you'd agree to assist the Night Watchers. You know, right? You carry significant weight—you're King Qing's student. Once you engage in the Ether Association's internal faction struggles, regardless of which side, your influence will be immense."

"If you were willing to support Thunder, then the President might even reconsider, abandoning Vice Presidents Lin Dong and Rhein without hesitation, and use some extreme methods to extend his life."

He emphasized, "This would set the stage for Thunder's ascension."

Gu Jianlin's heart stirred.

"Moreover, compared to Rhein and Lin Dong, it's clear that Thunder has a brighter future."

Chen Bojun commented with a sense of wonder, "Her background is extraordinary."

"Although I hope you'll join the Night Watchers, if it's the best choice for you, you should choose Thunder. You can reconsider now, but you might not have the chance later."

Han Jing advised, "Thunder's backing isn't limited to the Sword Tomb. The so-called Sword Tomb is merely an ancient sect inherited by the Silver King, fundamentally similar to the Ying Royal Family under the Golden King."

Gu Jianlin thought of something.

The Bai Ze Clan.

"Why not pick Thunder then?"

Chen Bojun asked curiously, "I thought you had a good relationship with her."

Han Jing also cast a questioning glance at him.

"Because she doesn't like it."

Gu Jianlin considered briefly, "I want to go see Thunder first."

Chen Bojun was startled for a moment and grinned, "Alright."

Han Jing gave the boy a deep look but said nothing.

The frost and wind swirled ahead as they returned to the temporary encampment. Here, nano warriors stood guard everywhere, alongside newly erected towers and turrets, with countless drones circling above.

Thunder's tent lay in the deepest part of the medical zone, oddly without any nano warriors stationed.

Instead, black-robed figures guarded the tent. They carried ancient, rustic sword boxes on their backs and stood statue-like in the snowfall—twelve in total, exuding an eerie, mysterious presence.

Chen Bojun and Han Jing had official matters to attend to, so they naturally wouldn't accompany Gu Jianlin.

Gu Jianlin drove his sled closer alone. Thanks to his special status, no one stopped him along the way.

As he dismounted, he headed straight for the tent.

The blood-red Tang Blade, wrapped in bandages, trembled faintly in his hand, seemingly sensing something.

"What's the matter?"

Gu Jianlin asked silently.

Jiuyin chuckled, "Interesting."

For a brief moment, the black-robed figures lifted their heads to look at him. Their faces under the hoods were crystalline like jade, indistinguishable in gender, with an otherworldly, seductive quality. Their eyes gleamed like starlit skies.

Gu Jianlin had seen such people before—in his mentor's grocery store.

"These are not humans."

Jiuyin snickered.

Gu Jianlin was taken aback, "Could they be members of the Ancient God Clan?"

Jiuyin mocked, "Not exactly. These were humans initially but had the power of the Ancient God Clan infused into them, transforming them into their current forms. The Bai Ze Clan continues to experiment with such methods. The Lord attempted this over a millennium ago—it doesn't work."

Gu Jianlin asked in confusion, "What do you mean?"

"Do you think I was created any differently?"

Jiuyin sneered, "The Bai Ze Clan developed the concept of fusing growth-type Mythical Weapons with humans. These people are pseudo-ancestors—a far cry from genuine Ancestors but still a viable path."

Gu Jianlin fell into contemplation.

"Of course, compared to peculiar beings like you, they're leagues apart. Seeing you, I'm convinced that the Lord succeeded. Though I don't know exactly what you are, it all proves the Lord's greatness!"

Jiuyin softly buzzed.

Stupid sword.

Gu Jianlin shook his head and proceeded toward the tent, still unimpeded.

A wind chime dangled outside the tent, and he lightly flicked it.

A crisp sound rang out.

From within the tent came a cold, composed voice, "Who's there?"

Gu Jianlin answered evenly, "It's me."

Rustling noises ensued from inside.

Tang Ling cleared her throat and called out, "Uh... one moment."

Barely had she spoken when the sound of bottles and jars smashing erupted, followed by a heavy thud.

It seemed someone had fallen.

Gu Jianlin quickly lifted the tent flap and entered, only to freeze.

Tang Ling was sitting on the ground, hurriedly pulling a blanket over her body. Her frost-white hair cascaded down, spilling across her smooth, rounded shoulders. Her collarbones were exquisitely sculpted.

Apparently, she wasn't wearing clothes.

Notably, her shoulders were wrapped in bandages, and scattered around her were spilled secret medicines.

They locked eyes.

Tang Ling's cold, resolute gaze held faint traces of embarrassment. After a brief silence,

"I was applying medicine."

She lowered her head, somewhat flustered, "And accidentally fell."

Recalling her frostbite, Gu Jianlin couldn't help but ask, "Why didn't you have someone help you?"

Tang Ling paused for a second, "I don't like dealing with strangers."

Gu Jianlin hesitated, "In that case... should I help you?"

He had only said this to be polite—after all, propriety dictated male-female boundaries.

But simply walking away would be equally awkward.

Tang Ling brushed a strand of hair behind her ear and said calmly, "Yes, that's fine too."

Chapter 546 Tang Ling's Secret

Gu Jianlin swore to the heavens that ever since he learned about the curse on his family, he never planned to develop a romantic relationship with any girl, let alone consider anything like marriage or having children. He avoided them as much as possible.

But who could have expected that Youzhu would like him so much, even to the extent of fearing nothing—even the curse.

Youzhu's original words were: "Since I already like you, what else can I do? If a mere curse could make me give you up, then it would only prove that I never truly liked you."

She said it so plainly, but he could only interpret it as the naïveté of a young girl.

But he could not afford to be that naïve.

Adding to this, he was born with a cold nature and had little interaction with women throughout his entire life.

Recently, he had been constantly brainwashing himself.

"Women will only slow down your blade!"

"A heart free of women lets the blade move like a god's!"

Just as he was fortifying his mental preparation, a delicate scolding voice rang in his mind!

"Heart free of women? And what of the Lord?"

Jiuyin's sharp voice echoed.

Gu Jianlin's hand trembled. He genuinely wanted to curse. What kind of broken blade was this?

On the military cot scattered with clothing, Tang Ling's bare, fair, and smooth jade-like back was exposed. Her spine carried a faint dark green hue, even enshrouded in a delicate layer of frost, creating a shocking sight.

"I can feel your hands trembling. Are you that nervous?"

Noticing the boy's abnormality behind her, she tried her best to feign calmness and said, "Have you not seen a girl's back before? I heard boys your age are all experts, with hard drives boasting hundreds of gigabytes of waifus."

In fact, she felt incredibly embarrassed.

Mainly because she had just narrowly avoided being fully exposed a moment ago.

And also because, politeness aside, she hadn't expected him to actually agree to apply the medication for her.

"Sorry, I truly haven't. I'm not interested in those fake things staged for photography." Gu Jianlin took in a deep breath, muttering under his breath like a sage reciting a mantra. He carefully applied the ointment to his fingertips, cautiously touching her spine as he evenly spread it. The sensation beneath his fingers was exquisitely smooth.

Tang Ling asked curiously, "What are you chanting?"

Gu Jianlin replied earnestly, "The Great Compassionate Mantra."

Tang Ling's beautiful eyes sparkled with a hint of annoyance. "Why are you chanting that? It makes me feel like some kind of demonic woman, while you're pulling off this abstinent, deadpan Taoist look."

Gu Jianlin replied expressionlessly, "Dead Taoists don't apply ointment for demonic women."

Tang Ling let out a light snort, "What if a Taoist falls for a demonic woman?"

She spoke casually, but after saying it, she felt that the words carried too much ambiguity.

Gu Jianlin, slow to react, found nothing unusual and replied calmly, "If a dead Taoist falls for a demonic woman, then it wouldn't just stop at applying ointment—it would lead to even more forbidden storylines."

Tang Ling held her clothes, glancing at her scattered intimate apparel like her camisole and bralette.

A flush of red crawled up her snowy and flawless face.

Gu Jianlin was about to say something when he suddenly felt Jiuyin's low hum.

"Well said! Quickly take down this Female Sacrifice. This woman isn't ordinary. I can sense the loathsome aura of the Bai Ze Clan on her, and it's incredibly strong. It makes me feel extremely uneasy! Though I don't recognize that Extreme Thunder artifact she holds, there's not a single decent thing from the Bai Ze Clan!"

Jiuyin's voice came like the devil's whisper: "Find some way to devour and defile her. Ruin her pristine body! The Bai Ze Clan's ascendance relies on maintaining an immaculate physique. These idiots think they're the purest and most incorruptible beings under heaven, their minds unwavering and their wills indomitable. Whatever plans the Bai Ze Clan has for her, breaking her purity would shatter them!"

Gu Jianlin, thoroughly annoyed, retorted in his mind, "Can you shut up for once?"

Jiuyin replied, "Devour this Female Sacrifice, and I'll shut up!"

Gu Jianlin had a flash of inspiration. "If I do this, then where would that leave the Lord you've been praising so much?"

Jiuyin froze, unexpectedly rendered speechless.

"May I ask you something?"

Gu Jianlin focused on applying ointment to the girl.

Tang Ling gave a soft hum of assent.

"Who are those people outside?"

Gu Jianlin was very curious about the black-clothed individuals.

Tang Ling hesitated for a moment. "They were initially meant to be confidential, but it doesn't matter if I tell you. Those people are from the Lishan Tiyan Pavilion, cultivated by the Bai Ze Clan. They're artificial members of the Ancient God Clan."

Gu Jianlin raised an eyebrow. "Artificial Ancient God Clan?"

"The Bai Ze Venerable fell into slumber ten thousand years ago. But before that, using Their own bones and blood, They created a doppelganger bestowed with human emotions and thoughts. Of course, compared to the original, this doppelganger was considerably weaker, probably only as strong as a Primordial. However, it became a close friend of the Emperor."

Tang Ling explained softly, "The Bai Ze Venerable and the Emperor had an agreement. It was that two thousand years later, during the apocalypse, They would assist humanity in overcoming the calamity. This is why the Lishan Tiyan Pavilion came into existence."

Gu Jianlin thought to himself, So that's the story.

"Because the Bai Ze Clan is closely aligned with humanity, the Ether Association's higher-ups consist mostly of those from the Sword Sect Path."

Tang Ling gathered her long hair as she said, "Due to the unique nature of the Sword Sect Path's ascension ritual, most swordsmen have a stable disposition and tend to be emotionally detached, making them well-suited for maintaining order."

Gu Jianlin considered her words and found them to be true.

Divines lean toward madness; Ghost Slayers are deeply obsessive.

Other paths all seem to have their issues to some degree.

Only the swordsmen of the Sword Sect appear the most normal.

"Then you don't seem to resemble a Sword Sect disciple at all."

He suddenly said this.

Tang Ling raised her meticulously sculpted brows. "You think I'm crazy too?"

Gu Jianlin said coolly, "Crazy isn't necessarily derogatory."

Tang Ling pouted and said, "That's why I still haven't ascended to the Fifth Rank—it's all because of me."

Gu Jianlin had heard rumors about her and asked, "So what does the Lishan Tiyan Pavilion want you to do?"

Tang Ling fell silent for a moment. "An experiment."

"Hmm?"

Gu Jianlin blinked, caught off guard.

"An experiment related to the Heavenly Power, and they also want me to integrate the powers of an Evolver."

Tang Ling whispered. "This plan started when I was just a child—the moment my great-grandfather sold me to the Sword Tomb. There, I began my cultivation in the Sword Sect Path, earned the recognition of Extreme Thunder, then returned to the Ether Association to undergo the baptism of Heavenly Power."

Her voice grew soft, her gaze somber. "Soon after, I'll head to the Lishan Tiyan Pavilion to cultivate for a long time, until the day of the apocalypse, when I'll take up the position of President."

Gu Jianlin froze in place. "You're leaving soon?"

"Mm."

Tang Ling said quietly, "I actually received the message before entering the Sea of Eternal Life. They told me I'd spend a long, long time training at the Lishan Tiyan Pavilion. Don't let them calling me 'Princess' fool you. I've never truly been free—whether it was going to the Underwater Palace, accepting the Returning Burial Forest mission, or accompanying you in investigating the Bren Hill..."

"Even this journey to the Sea of Eternal Life was just my last act of rebellion."

Her voice was cool and emotionless, leaving it unclear whether she was happy or resigned. "It was all quietly allowed by the President."

Gu Jianlin finally understood. She had always been a bird in a cage.

She had never been free.

And before fully resigning herself to her fate, she simply wanted to struggle one last time.

She wanted to meet someone who had once been most important to her.

And ask him why.

That person was Tang Zijing.

"At the age of six, I was sent to the Sword Tomb and had virtually no contact with the outside world. Besides my parents occasionally visiting, there wasn't anyone else. My great-grandfather was likely my only lingering attachment."

Tang Ling suddenly said, "Thank you."

Gu Jianlin casually asked, "Thank me for what?"

"For letting me see him twice. Even though I didn't uncover the truth, it doesn't matter anymore."

Tang Ling said softly, "Over time, I'll naturally forget."

Gu Jianlin's fingers trembled. "Are you giving up?"

"I won't have time to delve into these matters anymore."

Tang Ling bit her lip. "After I leave, you shouldn't continue being so reckless. Stop taking such dangerous risks. The Ether Association is preparing to take down the gatekeeper boss now. If the Kui Dragon Ancestor gets killed, its Divine Servants will also perish. Tang Zijing has committed so many atrocities—he deserves to die."

"I understand."

Gu Jianlin didn't argue further. He applied the final bit of ointment to her back and fastened the bandage for her.

"It's done."

He turned his back to her. "You can get dressed. I won't look."

Rustling sounds came from behind him.

"All done."

Tang Ling was now dressed in a loosely fitting white shirt paired with a gray knitted sweater. Her long, shapely legs were tucked into jeans, her snow-white hair cascading down, exuding beauty.

"Is Zhang Xuzhi dead?"

She inquired.

"Yes, I killed him myself."

Gu Jianlin nodded.

Tang Ling tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "With your current weight in the Ether Association, they won't hold you accountable. Still, try not to kill people like him openly. If you have to, do it discreetly."

Gu Jianlin let out a quiet chuckle. "Got it."

"Now that it's over, Uncle Mu and the others should gain their freedom, right?"

Tang Ling asked seriously, "With your abilities, it shouldn't be difficult."

"Yes,"

Gu Jianlin replied, "It won't take long."

Tang Ling gave a slight nod. "That's good to hear."

Silence fell between them.

Neither knew what to say next.

"If there's nothing else, I'll take my leave."

Gu Jianlin hesitated briefly. "I still have something to do."

Tang Ling inclined her head slightly. "Safe travels."

Gu Jianlin picked up Jiuyin and left her tent.

In the prolonged quiet, Tang Ling watched his back disappear without saying a word.

After some time, she suddenly coughed up a mouthful of blood.

The deep, vivid red soaked the ground.

Picking up a makeup mirror, she thought back to her premonition about the future.

She had assumed she'd encounter a fatal danger in the Sea of Eternal Life.

But now, it seemed otherwise.

"Your body can't hold on any longer. Without merging with the Heavenly Person Seed, my power will completely crush you."

In the mirror's reflection, a sharp and alluring feminine face spoke in a cold tone.

Tang Ling murmured, "In my view, the odds of a successful fusion are slim. I'll likely die anyway."

"Your foresight predicted your death, but you never saw your own corpse. Even with slim chances, survival isn't impossible. It's unnecessary to be this pessimistic."

Chapter 547: Candle Dragon, Danger!

Here's the translation of the requested text:

Gu Jianlin returned to his tent, took off his clothes, and jumped into the wooden tub for a hot bath.

Although conditions in the Ancient God Realm were primitive, alchemy technology truly was a marvel. The camp here was already connected to a matrix capable of generating electricity, ensuring a twenty-four-hour supply of hot water.

"Lishan Tiyan Pavilion, the Bai Ze Clan, Bai Ze Venerable's experiment."

He thought to himself, "Without a doubt, this experiment was also aimed at breaking the rules restraining the real world, but it seems to have failed. Instead, something peculiar was developed. Qilin Venerable—if we're talking about his personal perspective—was a total failure. Though I was created, I'm just a half-finished product."

This was because he himself was too weak and needed to level up bit by bit.

For now, only Candle Dragon Venerable's experiments remained.

Of course, there was also Vermilion Bird Venerable.

And the one with the lowest presence—Xuanming Venerable.

"Candle Dragon Venerable is about to descend; the final preparations should almost be complete by now. I wonder if He will succeed. And then there's Vermilion Bird Venerable—why is He considered particularly dangerous? What is He plotting?"

He rubbed his temples, feeling a deep sense of frustration.

Reaching into the pocket of his clothes nearby, he pulled out a folded piece of paper.

This was a transcription by Lin Lan, information left behind by Old Gu.

Two key points stood out in the content.

Firstly, before Old Gu, two powerful individuals had entered the Qilin Immortal Palace.

One was the Think Tank.

The identity of the other remained unknown, but this person had ventured into the deepest parts of the Qilin Immortal Palace.

They likely met the true form of Qilin Venerable.

This detail was eerie, like a horror story.

Secondly, the reason Candle Dragon Venerable hadn't descended yet was fear—fear of Vermilion Bird!

There was also a matter concerning The Order of the Hidden.

Back then, the people who tried to control Old Gu had a nickname: Mr. Solomon.

This figure had never been heard of.

Even the memories of Councilman Zhang and Director Li failed to mention him.

"Wait!"

Gu Jianlin suddenly had an epiphany: "Tianzhou and Xingye!"

These two Saints were also members controlled by The Order of the Hidden, but the teacher hadn't had him bind their souls.

Not even their bodies could be found.

A wild guess—his teacher probably had other methods to interrogate their memories.

For some reason, the teacher hadn't shared those with him.

"Teacher, what exactly are you planning?"

Gu Jianlin fell silent for a moment, then emerged from the tub and dried himself off.

Shaking the water from his hair, he dressed in a loose gray wool sweater, layering it with a thick, heavy black woolen coat, donning fleece-lined jeans and tall boots. He placed Jiuyin into his sword bag and stepped out of his tent.

The camp was bustling, crowded with Omegas returning from outside, hauling the massive corpses of beasts, blood flowing everywhere.

Medical personnel rushed around, while nano warriors guarded every corner.

Heavy armor vehicles roared, and helicopters hovered overhead.

They carried incomprehensible super-heavy alchemy technology weapons.

Truly terrifying.

If you say the Ether Association is good, it's plagued by infighting and systemic issues.

If you say the Association is rotten, it nevertheless wields unparalleled power. Glancing across the globe, it's the only organization capable of fielding teams that can easily kill Ancient Ancestors.

And it's even backed up by the Heavenly Person Realm.

Every time Gu Jianlin thought of the Ether Association's lineup, he felt grateful to be amphibious.

Otherwise, he would've been stuck deep within the tomb for eternity.

When the tomb doors reopened, it wouldn't be Pharmacist Thief and his team coming in.

It would be the President, alongside Rhein and Lin Dong, with silver and gold walking at their flanks.

Lastly, the King of Qing would leisurely push a wheelchair, greeting him.

The scene—the epitome of grimness.

Almost as if by sensing, a tent distorted like mist.

In its place appeared a quaint and antique grocery store, as though it had descended out of nowhere.

Utterly seamless.

Gu Jianlin walked in with a stiff face, expressionless.

Today's grocery store played the song "Borrow Another Five Hundred Years from the Heavens." An old man sat in a wheelchair, sipping tea unhurriedly, looking pleased as he gazed at a painting on the wall and hummed softly.

"Teacher."

Upon entering, Gu Jianlin felt warm as if it were spring. He casually picked up a bottle of cola and greeted.

Huai Yin opened his eyes to glance at him, smiling faintly: "Not bad, looks like your haul this time wasn't small. Fourth-Order Cloud Monarch, superdimensional level in just half a month—you haven't let me down. Took out four Twilight Candidates in one go and even killed a descendant of the Jiang Family. Well done, my good student!"

He laughed aloud: "Haha, satisfying!"

Gu Jianlin retorted, "Am I not the 'wicked student'?"

"Wicked? Where's the wicked? I have only my excellent apprentices!"

Huai Yin replied: "If Xing Yun and Ghost Eye hadn't run fast enough, I would've wiped them out."

Gu Jianlin muttered inwardly that he hadn't seen Huai Yin make any moves—wasn't it the President who dealt with it instead?

Huai Yin scrutinized him approvingly:

"Hmm, so you've subdued Jiuyin as well—funny enough, I still don't know its actual abilities myself."

He grinned, saying, "That wife of yours, she's really just you, isn't she?"

Gu Jianlin felt thoroughly awkward; he knew his teacher would see through him.

"Your shadow holding Jiuyin becomes part of the Ghost Slayer Path?"

Huai Yin raised an eyebrow: "Since ancient times, dual paths have been impossible. However, external factors can make it happen. For instance, within Twilight exists a Mythical Weapon called the Burial Casket. As its name suggests, it buries you with your lover, transferring half of your consciousness into them."

Gu Jianlin inhaled sharply: "That's so twisted?"

Huai Yin remarked with a sigh: "It's not that bad—if both partners are Ascenders with different paths, it amounts to having a 'clone' of another pathway. Other methods likely exist."

Gu Jianlin fell contemplative—seemed the teacher truly didn't know the specifics of Jiuyin's powers.

"Be careful not to let anyone discover it."

Huai Yin paused: "Especially in the Candle Dragon Clan or among other Ancient God Clans."

Gu Jianlin couldn't agree more. If mistaken for Candle Dragon Venerable, who knows what might happen?

The Ancient God Clan was nothing like humans.

It was virtually impossible for them to surrender.

The previous Ancestor had been easier.

But if he encountered some old monster with a grudge against her, he'd just be shielding her from the knives.

"Can I ask a question?"

Huai Yin suddenly said.

Gu Jianlin froze: "Go ahead."

Huai Yin hesitated before asking: "How did you subdue Jiuyin?"

Gu Jianlin didn't initially catch the implication, but then he caught the look in his teacher's eyes.

"I didn't just pick up some girl as a disciple, did I?"

Huai Yin asked in puzzlement.

"Old rogue."

Gu Jianlin replied expressionlessly: "Seems like you're healed enough to start spouting nonsense again."

Huai Yin didn't look as ruddy as before but appeared much better. As he sipped tea, he explained, "It's just a minor injury. Don't listen to your senior brother's ramblings."

Gu Jianlin, curious, asked, "Where is Senior Brother?"

Huai Yin chuckled: "Gone to see his lover."

Gu Jianlin hesitated: "A lover? Has Senior Brother started a family?"

Huai Yin shook his head: "No, that fool will probably stay unmarried his entire life, hopelessly fixed on one person. Do not follow his example—falling too deeply in love doesn't bring any good."

Gu Jianlin paused for a second: "Did she pass away?"

"Not exactly. The person your senior brother loves can't die even if they want to. But waking up isn't easy either."

Huai Yin waved dismissively: "Let's not discuss this—it's bad luck. Why are you here?"

Gu Jianlin remained silent for a moment, then handed over the folded paper.

Huai Yin blinked, took out a pair of reading glasses, and scrutinized it for a long while: "Well, that's interesting. Your father actually said someone entered the deepest parts of the Qilin Immortal Palace ahead of him? If they encountered Qilin Venerable and emerged alive, that's truly incredible."

"As for the Think Tank, his entry isn't surprising—he has many contingencies that Red left behind."

He paused: "As for Mr. Solomon, I'm still investigating."

Gu Jianlin, mentally prepared, said, "You must know everything, which is why you didn't let me interrogate Tianzhou and Xingye?"

Huai Yin raised an eyebrow, refusing to answer.

"Let me take a guess: if I'd questioned Tianzhou and Xingye, not only would I learn The Order's plans for Aunt Zijin, but I'd also uncover their specific intentions."

Gu Jianlin calmly continued, "That way, I could prepare ahead of time and avoid a close call."

Huai Yin casually asked, "What are you trying to say?"

"You already know what the Think Tank intends to do, don't you?"

Gu Jianlin said solemnly, "But you don't want to stop it. You even prefer to see it play out. You want to let things spiral out of control and have Aunt Lu Zijin die, thereby triggering infighting within the Ether Association. Of course, maybe you're not that cold-blooded—Aunt Lu Zijin might not actually die—but you'll ensure the world believes she did."

He paused: "Your ultimate target is the President."

Huai Yin tapped a rhythm on his knee leisurely.

After a long beat.

He sighed: "Who knew you'd be so stubborn, and insist on stopping it—successfully, no less."

Gu Jianlin stood stoic as ever.

"I should've taught you less."

Huai Yin sighed: "Training a student too well's no good either."

Gu Jianlin asked in a measured tone, "Why would you do this, though? She's your Master's wife."

Huai Yin fell silent briefly, then coldly scoffed, "Old grudges from the prior generation—what do you know? You're my student, not hers. She's no saint either; you'll understand someday. Do you truly believe the President doesn't know the Blood Moon Slaughter Incident wasn't orchestrated by your father?"

Gu Jianlin froze slightly.

"Do you truly think the President isn't aware that Mu Feng and the others were falsely accused? She also knows about The Order of the Hidden. But none of these matters are of importance to her."

Huai Yin sneered: "Sitting in her position, many things are beyond one's control. If the President were to investigate The Order, the order she upholds would completely collapse. As for the true mastermind behind the Blood Moon Slaughter Incident, for certain reasons, she chooses not to pursue it. What's done is done—what's there to change?"

"You must understand—many incomprehensible things in this world become clear when viewed from a profit perspective. Rhein inheriting the position isn't necessarily a bad thing for her. Do you know why?"

He paused: "Because, while Rhein may resort to despicable means to vie for the President's seat, he does possess capabilities sufficient for maintaining order. And that's enough. Since time immemorial, which person in power hasn't committed dishonorable acts? It's merely that your interests aren't aligned with theirs."

Gu Jianlin remained silent.

He had nothing to say; the world felt deeply complicated.

Complicated enough to chill one's heart.

"This world is like this—the more you understand, the greater the disappointment."

Huai Yin suddenly chuckled: "But don't overthink it; the Strategy Group for the Sea of Eternal Life expedition is already prepared. You young ones can take a share—it's brimming with treasure."

Gu Jianlin brushed aside the gloomy thoughts: "Teacher, aren't you going to take a look? This involves Candle Dragon Venerable, Vermilion Bird Venerable, and Qilin Venerable, who hasn't appeared yet."

Huai Yin laughed: "Not me—I have more important matters to attend to."

Gu Jianlin curiously asked, "Where are you heading?"

Huai Yin looked out at the snowy winds beyond the window, smiling: "To Buzhou Mountain, with silver and gold."

Gu Jianlin was stunned.

Huai Yin's next words struck like thunder.

"Candle Dragon Venerable is now at His weakest moment in ten thousand years."

He gazed at the painting on the wall: "Now's the perfect opportunity."

Chapter 548: Teacher, Take Care!

That night, Gu Jianlin conversed with his teacher for a long time, but only about one topic.

"Teacher, is this the moment we bid an eternal farewell?"

"What kind of nonsense is that? Are you already planning my death just because I'm heading to Buzhou Mountain?"

"No, I'm genuinely worried about you. Can you really defeat Candle Dragon Venerable? She's the strongest Ancient Supreme! Even if you're a Quasi-Supreme, you can't win against her. Besides, you're still injured. Even though Candle Dragon Venerable is at a critical moment and might be extremely weakened, I still think you're no match for her."

"Don't forget, I've got Gold and Silver helping me. My junior brothers and sisters are strong too, you know. There's no way they'd let their senior brother die. If I die, who'll deal with Red Valiance?"

"Can the three Catastrophes really take on Candle Dragon Venerable? This feels more like a suicide squad to me."

"Bah! Who are you calling a suicide squad?!"

"I need to tell you; I've uncovered an earth-shattering secret. Candle Dragon Venerable has known about your birth all along — whether it's the President or the Green and Red Dual Kings. She could have killed you all when you were infants, but she didn't. As long as you know this in your heart, that's enough."

"How did you find this out? Killing us as infants... Knowing the Venerable as I do, she wouldn't stoop to something like that. Even if she foresaw our birth, she wouldn't have cared."

"Exactly, she looks down on you."

"Right! And since she's so dismissive of us, how can we tolerate that?"

"I already have to visit graves for my family of five every year. I really don't want to add one more."

"Can you think about things happening here in the mortal world?"

"Alright, if you're gone, I promise I'll find a way to level up and avenge you."

"Get lost, you ungrateful disciple!"

With a roar of irritation, the grocery store vanished silently into the snow and wind, like a mirage.

"Sigh."

Gu Jianlin exhaled heavily. "Teacher, stay safe."

Truly, this was a case of the valiant departing and never returning. They were far too bold.

Based on what he currently knew, the old monster was utterly invincible. In the known universe, there was no force capable of matching her battle prowess. Without aide from an equivalent Supreme-level ally, humanity had no chance.

But there was nothing he could do to stop what the Catastrophes intended to accomplish.

Let them go, he thought.

After all, people of their caliber surely had a clearer grasp of the situation than a novice like him.

Surely, they wouldn't gamble their lives recklessly.

"Now the Ether Association has assembled the Strategy Group to raid Kui Dragon Ancestor's lair. This old nemesis I've faced since my debut is finally going down; serves him right. And the Sea of Eternal Life still hides immense secrets, linked to Candle Dragon Venerable's plans to adapt to human rules. If I can destroy those, I'll stand at the forefront as a Supreme."

Facing the endless blizzard, Gu Jianlin mused aloud, "First, I need to ascend to the Fifth Rank as a Supreme!"

As a hybrid of human and Ancient God, a dual-path wielder...

Every advancement brought him astounding enhancements.

But just then, a foul stench burst forth from the military camp.

Unprepared, Gu Jianlin nearly gagged.

People fled en masse from the eastern camp, faces twisted in despair.

It's said that after Ji Xiaoyu's recent accomplishment, she received her very first verbal praise from the President.

There was no tangible reward—because she didn't need any.

What thrilled her the most was the President's recognition, which left the young girl ecstatic.

Unfortunately, after gaining this approval, Ji Xiaoyu became even more unruly. She forcibly enlisted twenty Alchemists to serve her and obsessively researched the potion formulas she had found in Buzhou Mountain.

Now, the once-adequate military camp had turned into a biochemical research base.

The Alchemists were miserable, and everyone else complained incessantly.

But because her research was genuinely significant, the higher-ups approved her project.

They even allocated special funding for it.

After announcing their decision, the higher-ups immediately relocated their operations, erecting a new camp a kilometer away.

"I've witnessed the depths of this world's depravity!"

Jiuyin, sheathed in the Sword Bag, began to tremble. "Have you fallen into Wujian?"

Gu Jianlin asked curiously, "What's Wujian?"

Jiuyin responded, "Wujian refers to Hell for the Ancient God Clan. It's a realm filled with the most toxic substances and malevolent scents in the world. Even the Ancestors lose their sanity after one whiff. Only Ancient Gods who've committed unforgivable sins are sentenced there, a punishment more humiliating than death by tenfold."

Heh.

Hang in there, naughty monkey.

Gu Jianlin shook his head and prepared to leave the area.

Suddenly, amidst the swirling snow ahead, a graceful silhouette appeared.

"You're here!"

Lin Wanqiu seemed to have been waiting for a long time. Snowflakes clung to her hair, and frost dusted her eyelashes. Her brilliant eyes glimmered with an unusual radiance. "Thank goodness you're safe!"

Clutching her chest, she exhaled deeply in relief.

"What could possibly happen to me?"

Gu Jianlin asked calmly.

Lin Wanqiu looked at him with a trace of wounded resentment and said softly, "You're just too impulsive, too reckless. The entire Ether Association knows by now that you killed Minister Zhang and openly challenged Vice President Lai Yin. Do you even understand what you're doing? Fortunately, you have talent, and humanity desperately needs your intellect right now. Otherwise, you'd already be finished."

Gone was her usual coquettish demeanor—she sounded like an elder sister admonishing an impetuous boy.

Perhaps this was her true self.

A woman who endured humiliation and danger for a younger brother not related by blood, willing to risk her own life.

Gu Jianlin suddenly saw this woman's beauty.

Not her appearance...

But the beauty of her authenticity, revealed when she removed her mask.

"Don't worry, I'm fine."

Gu Jianlin shook his head. "There's no reason to be concerned about me."

Lin Wanqiu hesitated as if she wanted to say something but ultimately just smiled faintly.

Her smile drifted like snowflakes, scattering in every direction.

"To think, when I first met you, I thought you were insane. You dared to confront the Joker by yourself after the rescue team was obliterated, and you actually killed him. Back then, I had no choice but to rely on the Judgement Court, which led me to do some terrible things to you. Luckily, I didn't cause you any real harm. I'm sorry."

She clasped her hands in front of her legs and bowed deeply. "But more than that, I want to say, thank you. Thank you for sheltering me as Omega, for giving me this opportunity to go to the Sea of Eternal Life."

Gu Jianlin froze.

"Thank you for saving my brother. Thank you for standing in front of me and not giving up."

Lin Wanqiu lifted her head, her bright eyes brimming with crystalline tears—not from sadness, but overflowing joy. "I'm so grateful to have met you. Someone like me doesn't even deserve your help."

Gu Jianlin was stunned for a long moment before breaking into a self-deprecating smile. "It's alright. You are worthy."

Lin Wanqiu blinked in surprise.

"I didn't think much of you at first either until I saw that moment when you treated Wanwan's illness," Gu Jianlin said softly, gazing at her delicate features. "I'm good at profiling motives—truth and deceit are easy to distinguish for me."

The snowstorm howled around them as Lin Wanqiu blinked her luminous eyes, her gaze gradually reddening.

Perhaps it was because she realized someone understood her all along.

Or perhaps it was for another reason entirely.

"If I ever have the chance, I'll repay you," Lin Wanqiu said earnestly. "Just as you protected me and my brother, if one day you need me, I will shield you as well. No matter what, I will never back down—that's my promise."

Gu Jianlin instinctively wanted to decline but paused, realizing her sincerity. She genuinely wanted to repay him.

He nodded slightly. "Alright."

Lin Wanqiu suddenly leaned closer and whispered, "I'll tell you a secret. I know someone remarkable, someone beyond anyone's imagination. If you need it, I can negotiate with them on your behalf."

Gu Jianlin fell silent.

Alright, whatever makes her happy.

Then, Lin Wanqiu suddenly handed him a sealed wooden box, leaning into his ear with a breath that smelled like orchids. "This is the Lin Family's greatest secret, linked to the Penglai Ascension Array. After the family was destroyed, I found it in a basement in our rural old home. Not even my brother knows about this."

Gu Jianlin was stunned—he didn't expect her to reveal something so significant.

"I'm your Guardian. Good things naturally belong to you."

Lin Wanqiu smiled gently. "Even though I've been corrupted, there's new technology that should allow me to fully recover. For a long time ahead, I'll continue to protect you and fulfill my promise."

Then she said suddenly, "Can I be a little selfish?"

Gu Jianlin held the wooden box, puzzled.

In an instant, Lin Wanqiu stepped forward and tightly embraced him.

Gu Jianlin felt warmth and softness against his chest.

"Thank you."

Lin Wanqiu whispered, "If I were ten years younger, I wouldn't let you go. But now, I'm certainly unworthy of you. Your future is limitless. I'll just quietly watch over you from behind. Compared to me, Thunder and Moon Princess are the ones truly suited for you. They're wonderful girls—don't let them slip away."

Gu Jianlin froze slightly, watching as she let him go and stepped back into the snowstorm.

She waved at him with a lighthearted smile, turned around, and walked away with hands behind her back, her movements carefree and graceful, her hair billowing with each step.

After a long silence, Gu Jianlin had to admit this was one of the most unforgettable sights of his life.

He lowered his head and opened a narrow slit in the wooden box.

A simple, ancient slab of clay rested inside.

The Destiny Mud Tablet!

Just as he marveled at the discovery, his phone suddenly vibrated.

"Ding."

"Dear Investigator Gu Jianlin, you've been promoted to Omega Sequence First Tier and selected for the Sea of Eternal Life Strategy Group. Please immediately prepare your supplies and weapons and report to the camp headquarters."

Hearing this message, Gu Jianlin's heart sank.

If anyone else had been selected, they'd likely be ecstatic.

But not him.

He only wanted to act alone.

Because Minister Lu was still in the Sea of Eternal Life.

Especially since Moon Princess was accompanying her.

Gu Jianlin couldn't stop worrying, so he had discreetly given a fragment of the Qilin Wedge to the girl earlier.

With the fragment of the Qilin Wedge as a beacon, he could easily find his way there.

But with a large group, too many constraints would arise.

"What should I do now?"

Chapter 549: The Person Who Gave Away the Qilin Mask

Gu Jianlin glanced at the time on his phone. There was about an hour left until the assembly.

At this moment, he thought of his elementary school days. Back then, his parents hadn't divorced yet, and he had a lively personality. He would often fake being sick to skip school and stay home to play video games—a rather carefree time.

He didn't expect to have a similar experience now that he was grown up.

Only this time, faking illness was definitely useless. The camp was full of priests and alchemists.

He couldn't find an excuse to shirk his duties.

"So annoying."

He returned to his tent and casually released the Lock of Nonexistence. Silver-white chains crisscrossed and bridged the void.

Before setting off, he still needed to take a look at the contents of the Destiny Mud Tablet.

Yet, for a fleeting moment, a thought struck him.

"My teacher once told me that the doppelgänger created by the Qilin Forbidden Curse can't stray more than a kilometer from the original body, but that restriction only applies to humans. I wonder if my shadow can break this boundary. If it works, I could send my shadow to support Youzhu. As long as it doesn't sustain fatal injuries, it won't dissipate."

Gu Jianlin murmured to himself, "There's no need to have the shadow carry Jiuyin. The side effects are too severe. After a few uses, the shadow might collapse. It's better I hold onto it myself."

If he truly needed Jiuyin, he could summon a fragment of the Qilin Wedge and place Jiuyin inside it.

Then have the shadow summon back the fragment of the Qilin Wedge.

A flawless cycle!

Let's test it!

For an instant, all spirituality within his body evaporated, and a blood-red shadow condensed out of thin air.

This was quite fascinating.

If following the Divine Path, the shadow would be pitch black.

Conversely, if on the Ghost Slayer Path, the shadow would be blood-red.

The Qilin Forbidden Curse was indeed a heaven-defying ability, deserving of its title as one of the Five Original Forbidden Curses. Even a shadow conjured by it, though not of flesh and bone, possessed a solid physical form and spiritual circulation.

It could even use the Breathing Technique.

Its entire being was engulfed in a blood-red mist, making it unclear whether it was clothed or not.

An otherworldly, stunningly beautiful face framed by cascades of ink-black hair.

A beauty so breathtaking it felt suffocating.

The shadow rummaged through the tent and drew out a sheathed alchemy tachi, vanishing like a ghost in an instant.

Gu Jianlin manipulated the shadow, silently keeping track of time and distance.

For one following the Ghost Slayer Path, running a kilometer was hardly an effort.

Gu Jianlin multitasked, sensing that the distance between his main body and the doppelgänger had just reached its boundary.

The shadow continued to move in the opposite direction from him.

Ten meters, twenty meters, thirty meters!

Excellent, there truly was no distance limitation!

This was somewhat reminiscent of the Yin Yang Twin Jade.

Such were the perks of a supreme position—every ability came with unexpected surprises.

The only drawback was that Gu Jianlin had to split his mental focus.

When the doppelgänger was active, his main body would fall into a daze.

When his main body was occupied, the doppelgänger would also pause.

"No wonder Youzhu has such poor grades. She's actually quite smart."

Gu Jianlin muttered to himself.

The shadow was already dashing across an endless ice field, heading toward the depths of the Sea of Eternal Life.

After finishing this task, he felt a lot more at ease.

He sat on his military cot and opened the sealed wooden box.

The Destiny Mud Tablet.

The last time he looked at the Destiny Mud Tablet, it had been thanks to Thunder.

It was a tablet that Old Gu had brought back from the Qilin Immortal Palace, sealed within the Soul Skywell.

After studying that Destiny Mud Tablet, Gu Jianlin had uncovered an enormous secret.

Now, he wondered what he might gain this time.

This Destiny Mud Tablet was also inscribed with eerie, snake-like text that seemed alive, writhing and twisting, glimmering with a sinister light. When stared at, it even emitted wisps of black mist.

A thunderous boom!

Gu Jianlin's mind was in chaos. The text before his eyes twisted into a vortex, swallowing his consciousness. All he could see was a warped, kaleidoscopic tunnel, as if he were traversing time and space.

In the depths of endless darkness.

He faintly heard an ancient, deep voice, like a ghost rasping out a low laugh.

In that laugh, there was a hint of malice.

This seemed to be the voice of the Qilin Venerable!

A dark and profound tomb appeared, where massive black chains coiled like dragon bones around a golden coffin.

Inside that noble coffin lay a figure sealed within a mummy cloth!

No, not a person!

A god!

This scene was all too familiar to Gu Jianlin because it was the tomb imprisoning him.

Rumble!

In the silence, a roaring sound broke out as massive stones ground against each other, producing deafening noises.

Faintly, flames illuminated the hallowed golden coffin.

Within the golden coffin seemed to rest a male figure. When the light touched him, he opened a sliver of his fierce golden eyes, silently straightened his figure, and gazed downward.

Though imprisoned in the coffin, he resembled a king seated upon a throne.

A massive shadow loomed deep in the tomb, resembling a sinister and fearsome Black Qilin.

In the vast void, an enraged roar echoed.

"Two thousand years without sunlight, I presume, Venerable."

Someone spoke softly: "How terrifying. Even after being suppressed for over two millennia, your power remains so unfathomably strong. If not for your withdrawal into the Spiritual Domain, no one would dare set foot in this tomb. With such strength, you might soon even kill the Kui Dragon Ancestor of the first layer."

Their voice was so eerie and drifting that it blurred the line between male and female.

"Fortunately, you still maintain your sanity."

They paused: "Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to stand here."

Deep in the silence, the gigantic Qilin shadow quaked, sending dust cascading through the tomb.

The man within the golden coffin gazed down upon him, ancient murmurs reverberating in the darkness.

He seemed to be laughing, his laughter echoing like the voices from the depths of hell.

"Few can make it before me."

In those fierce golden eyes, a trace of mockery flickered:

"Even I didn't expect someone as peculiar as you to exist in this world."

His voice rumbled like rolling thunder, brimming with majesty and wrath.

"So many years have passed, it's not unusual for a few like me to emerge once in a while."

The mysterious man chuckled softly: "Of course, what I am may not matter much to you. What matters is that I found traces of the Vermilion Bird in the Qilin Immortal Palace. This is something you, Venerable, cannot tolerate. You likely realized its presence far earlier than I did, meaning you already know you've lost."

He paused: "Unfathomable wrath, tearing dimensions, descending from nothingness—it's truly terrifying."

The Qilin Venerable glared at the insignificant figure, his golden eyes swirling with destructive lightning.

Faint thunder rumbled.

The towering Black Qilin shadow writhed madly, the world seeming to fracture and teeter on collapse.

"But how could the Qilin Venerable lose?"

The mysterious man suddenly changed his tone: "I suspect you've already made your preparations, haven't you?"

The Qilin Venerable looked at him coldly. In the darkness, echoes of gleefully malicious laughter resounded.

"Transplantation, defying fate, unparalleled achievement—peerless throughout the ages."

The mysterious man sighed: "Even the Candle Dragon Venerable likely never anticipated you still had such methods. It's no wonder you've hidden so deeply, Ancient Supreme. Truly, the Qilin Venerable commands admiration!"

Rumble!

The Qilin Venerable raised his hand, and his form radiated rupturing golden light, as if a blazing sun was being birthed within his body. The dark tomb was pierced and illuminated, and the entire world seemed on the verge of collapse.

Like the rising sun!

The radiant light faded, instantly replaced by eternal blackness.

Eventually, a jet-black mask resembling polished obsidian coalesced, emanating ancient dignity. Its intricate patterns carved ominous hollows and sharp edges, with protrusions reminiscent of veins—strangely and eerily lifelike.

A deafening roar echoed like thunder.

The Qilin Venerable spoke coldly: "I have glimpsed your end, human."

"To one who holds dominion over life and death, seeing my conclusion would be natural."

The mysterious man replied softly: "But to me, life and death no longer matter. We share a common enemy. Across eons, for a mere human like me to cooperate with such a magnificent being as you is an unparalleled honor."

He dipped his head slightly, smiling: "Farewell."

Clutching the mask, this person turned into the light and disappeared without a trace.

Boom!

The vision before Gu Jianlin's eyes froze at that final scene.

A long silence followed, and he remained speechless for a while.

Chapter 550 The Gaze of the Qilin Venerable

Gu Jianlin wanted so desperately to see the face of that person, but it was beyond his ability.

After all, the principle of the Destiny Mud Tablet is only to show you visions that relate to your own fate—what you perceive is but a phantom of events that have already happened or are predetermined to occur. You remain merely an observer, a ghost that doesn't truly exist.

You can do nothing.

Nor can you change anything.

The figure was shrouded in indistinct gray mist, making it impossible to discern specific features or stature. All Gu Jianlin could faintly sense was that it appeared to be a human male, who had lived in modern society, speaking with a tone of utter indifference toward all.

The most crucial detail was—this person was unfathomable.

Fine, that was an obvious conclusion.

After all, anyone who could partner with an Ancient Supreme would naturally be unfathomable.

This time, Gu Jianlin's profiling ability entirely failed; he couldn't even sense a single trait. The man seemed absent of all individual characteristics—just a vague, elusive shadow, coming and going without a trace.

At some unknown moment, faint sounds arose again in this silent tomb, akin to grains of sand drifting through the wind, or waves rising and falling in the sea—so tranquil was everything.

The man sealed within the golden coffin remained incredibly calm. His form seemed to ignite in silent combustion, gradually scattering into ashes inch by inch. Countless golden dust particles withered and swayed in the darkness, cascading like a relentless rain, while the majestic Qilin's shadow collapsed quietly.

Vitality dissipated.

Death pervaded.

After the Qilin Venerable somehow created that mask, it seemed he headed toward death.

There was no earth-shattering roar of destruction.

Nor any cries of rage and resentment.

Everything unfolded in utter silence, a dissolution as ephemeral as breaking bubbles.

Yet, in that final instant, after the Qilin Venerable's body had disintegrated into ashes, he left behind an apparition resembling a soul. The shadow glimmered with an exalted gold hue, yet its aura was adrift and unstable.

A horrifying scene unfolded.

The Qilin Venerable took a single step forward, disregarding the seal that had imprisoned him for two thousand years.

Like a ghost, he passed through effortlessly.

In the blink of an eye, he emerged from the dark tomb, a brilliant golden radiance cascading from the heavens.

This was the uppermost layer of the Qilin Immortal Palace, where a massive Golden Tree grew, its vast canopy shrouding the sky entirely. Words fell short of capturing its enormity, the Sky Dome burned fiercely with its golden illumination, akin to the blazing Sun.

The pinnacle of majesty and splendor within this world.

Under the golden glow, the lifeless ancient city seemed to revive, towering and magnificent.

Threads upon threads of golden light swirled downward, draping like curtains.

He gently raised his hand, brushing the Void.

An ancient white bone coffin appeared out of thin air, its vague contours transforming into a golden Qilin.

He seemed to awaken from deep slumber and murmured in admiration, "There's wisdom in Humanity's saying: 'If you wish to wear the crown, you must bear its weight.' As the Ancient Supreme, the great master of the Deep Space of the Universe, I too carry my curse. Especially having descended into this world, that curse amplifies without end."

He paused briefly, adding, "There are no exceptions—not even the Candle Dragon Venerable."

The Qilin Venerable gave no reply but instead ascended toward the Sky Dome.

Bathed in golden brilliance, his bearing resembled that of an Ancient King.

"After endless torment, to finally escape your madness and prison—congratulations, Lord!"

The golden Qilin gazed up at the colossal Golden Tree towering skyward: "During the battle on the East Sea, the Primordial Authority you wielded and the Authority held by the Candle Dragon Venerable merged into one. Unfortunately, it lacked the most crucial core. Now, two thousand years have passed, and everything is complete—doomsday is imminent."

He fixed his gaze on the Golden Tree and said solemnly, "The union of the three shall recreate the Primordial Zhu Zhao Law. Though it hasn't yet revealed its true form, even now, it is immensely powerful."

The Qilin Venerable's phantom appeared to fly beyond the heavens, merging into the golden Sky Dome.

"The question is—how do we stop the Candle Dragon?"

The golden Qilin sighed, "Even though Xu Fu has discovered the antidote, it's ultimately the Candle Dragon's Divine Blood. He cannot achieve true liberation. And the Stairway to Immortality has already taken shape—the laws of the Human World can no longer restrict the Candle Dragon. He will become unprecedentedly powerful; no man or god can stand as his match."

He lamented, "This was meant to be yours to enjoy."

From the heavens above echoed a faint, raspy chuckle.

"I see now. It seems the Human World harbors an extraordinary figure. The one who freed me earlier must already have prepared everything."

In an instant, the white bone coffin crumbled with a thunderous roar. The golden Qilin surged skyward, colliding into the Golden Tree: "I offer up my bones and blood, sacrificing my soul to grant you my final aid."

The Qilin Venerable vanished within the golden brilliance.

It seemed he cast a glance toward some unknown direction.

Boom!

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Gu Jianlin felt his head would explode, his mind consumed by the earth-shattering golden brilliance. That enormous Golden Tree was so grand, words failed to describe it.

It was a divine miracle born in the domain of gods!

Even the World Tree in Nordic Mythology might pale in comparison.

As the golden radiance burst forth, in that instant, the Qilin Venerable seemed to glance his way!