

I CAN CONTROL RESOURCES

Chapter 15: This Pill... Is Poisonous

To put it simply, Magnetic Monopoles were the source of the Great Cataclysm.

When the first Magnetic Monopole appeared, the Great Cataclysm began!

As the "culprits" behind the Great Cataclysm, the Magnetic Monopoles could be said to have changed the once-peaceful world, plunging it into a century-long period of disaster.

But in a sense, the Magnetic Monopoles didn't actually harm the world. At least, from the current perspective, they don't pose a problem. They even brought humanity a new kind of civilization.

For example, the invention of high-dimensional capsules originated from the Magnetic Monopoles.

Not only that, but even the rise of the Energy Warriors was closely tied to the Magnetic Monopoles.

Without Magnetic Monopoles, it would have been impossible to create Energy Warriors. This was the first thing Principal Li Qingping said at the new student assembly when Gao Neng was in high school.

Gao Neng's knowledge of Magnetic Monopoles was limited to this.

It wasn't that he didn't study hard enough. Rather, his living situation didn't afford him the privilege of learning more. Beyond this textbook knowledge, the only other thing he knew was that the main reason the Forgotten Land was abandoned was because of the Magnetic Monopoles.

'Why is "Magnetic Monopole" marked on these diagrams? Could this be a Magnetic Monopole? But... that's not right... how could a Magnetic Monopole be a factory?' Gao Neng racked his brain but couldn't figure it out.

He continued scrolling through the pictures. When he reached the 50th image, his mouse cursor stopped again. A blurry sign had appeared in the picture.

'Dream Toy Factory?' Gao Neng found the name somewhat familiar. He often found discarded toys in the scrapyard—stuffed dolls and the like—that usually had this name printed on them.

A toy factory...

'What could it have to do with Magnetic Monopoles?'

Gao Neng rubbed his eyes and opened the remaining three pictures in one go.

The last one was an overview shot, looking like an aerial view, but for some reason, the spot where the sign should be had been deliberately erased.

If it weren't for the blurry words on the 50th picture, he wouldn't have been able to confirm it.

Gao Neng was a top student, not an Immortal. The contents of the pictures were too blurry for him to guess the connection, so he decided to search for more information on the Dream Toy Factory.

'The location is a bit far... huh? It closed four months ago?' Gao Neng clicked through all the online information about the Dream Toy Factory. Then, he noticed a suggested search below.

"Dream Toy Factory Supernatural Incidents."

'Supernatural incidents? No way... do people still believe in this stuff?' Gao Neng subconsciously clicked the search link. Soon, all sorts of content began popping up.

Things like ghost murder cases!

A dancing girl in a red dress!

A big-headed baby boy...

And they were all terrifying, high-definition, animated images.

However, there was a silver lining. Amidst the pile of terrifying pictures, Gao Neng spotted a beautiful woman. She had a pretty good figure, but her face was a little blurry.

Just as he was looking, the beauty in the large picture suddenly transformed into a female ghost with a long, lolling tongue. Gao Neng jumped, nearly dropping his mouse on the floor.

"Sigh. Not scary at all," Gao Neng said as he closed the webpage and took a sip of water to calm his nerves. 'Just a toy factory. How could it have so many different ghosts?'

He didn't believe any of it.

This was clearly just someone spreading rumors.

'Time is tight.'

'Three days to earn one hundred thousand Alliance Coins.'

'How am I going to earn it?' Gao Neng carefully organized his thoughts. 'The first clue should be the location. The second clue has the time, and the tools of the trade...'

'A closed-down factory?'

'They can't possibly expect me to become the factory manager, can they?'

Earning one hundred thousand Alliance Coins in three days through normal means was impossible. That brought him back to the original premise: he would have to "rob" someone.

'Go to a factory supposedly haunted by supernatural events... to rob someone?'

'What's the hammer for?'

'Bashing people!'

'The wrench?'

'Probably the same thing.'

'What about the shovel?'

'Right, the shovel must be for burying the bodies.'

Gao Neng felt his line of thinking was gradually getting closer to the truth. But there was still one problem: who was there to rob in a closed-down factory?

'I can't be expected to rob a "ghost," can I?'

'Wait a second!'

'Ghosts!'

"I get it!" As a top student, Gao Neng instantly connected all the clues. He had a plan, but it was already past two in the morning. It was too late to go out today; he would have to wait until tomorrow night to put his plan into action.

'So, what's next?'

'If I'm going to be robbing someone...'

'I can't do it with only enough strength to kill a chicken, can I?'

As he thought about this, Gao Neng's hand subconsciously reached for the Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill. He glanced at his Attribute Panel. Health and Energy were both full.

"Looks like... it's time for a midnight snack." Gao Neng gritted his teeth and slowly placed the Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill in his mouth. Feeling a bit uncertain, he decided to chew it first. It tasted a bit like a mint, cool and refreshing.

'Tastes pretty good.'

The coolness flowed down his throat and into his body.

'It's actually quite pleasant.'

But soon, Gao Neng felt that something was wrong. The coolness intensified, eventually turning into a chill—a chill that sank deep into his bones.

So cold!

Gao Neng was drenched in sweat.

His marrow felt as cold as an ice cellar, while his blood seemed to be boiling and on fire, giving him a true taste of what it felt like to be plunged into both ice and flames.

"This pill... is poison!" Gao Neng was in so much pain he was rolling on the floor, but he had to force himself to endure it quietly so as not to wake Xu Zilan.

At the same time, he noticed the maximum values for his Health and Energy on his Attribute Panel were rapidly increasing at a terrifying rate.

Health: 90/106

Energy: 41/53

...

Health: 78/125

Energy: 32/65

...

Health: 60/150

Energy: 25/73

...

"Whoa, I'm using a cheat, right?" Gao Neng's body was in agony, but his heart was filled with excitement. This feeling of using a cheat code made him feel both pain and pleasure.

However, he noticed that as his maximum Health and Energy increased, he was also constantly losing health. 'If this keeps up, am I going to die?'

...

Health: 40/175

Energy: 18/80

...

Health: 21/190

Energy: 10/90

...

'No way! It's still rising! I think I'm about to die, aren't I?' Gao Neng felt his consciousness begin to blur, and his bones felt like they were about to shatter.

"Stop!"

"Hurry up and stop!"

"..."

"BEEP. Host's maximum Health has reached 200. Do you wish to begin breaking through the first human limit?" a mechanical voice sounded.

"Break through my—"

"Roger that. Commencing breakthrough!"

Gao Neng's "Break through my ass! Let me catch my breath first!" hadn't even left his lips before the mechanical voice sounded again.

Then, he saw his Health and Energy plummeting.

Health: 18/200

Energy: 8/95

...

Health: 12/200

Energy: 5/95

...

Health: 9/200

Energy: 3/95

...

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Chapter 16: Breakthrough, the First Limit

"I'm really going to die!" Gao Neng had no doubt that if his Vitality dropped to "0," he stood absolutely no chance of survival.

'What should I do?'

'I have to do something!'

'Right, the Third Set of School Calisthenics: Youthful Dance.'

'No matter what, I have to give myself a boost!'

Gao Neng's body was wracked with excruciating pain, but he had to use the last of his strength. First set: Stretching... Begin!

...

Vitality: 11/200

Spirit: 5/95

...

Vitality: 7/200

Spirit: 2/95

...

'This is intense!'

Gao Neng felt like he was dancing on the edge of death. His Vitality would go up by 1 point, only to drop by 2. And the most terrifying part was the sense of pleasure that was blooming within him.

'Pleasure, my ass.'

"Ding, Host has successfully broken through the first human limit!"

As Gao Neng reached the sixth set—abdominals and back—the mechanical voice finally rang out. His body went slack, no longer able to hold on. His vision turned black, and he passed out.

While unconscious, he seemed to see all the bones in his body bathed in a metallic glow, with specks of light constantly flowing over them.

After an unknown amount of time, the pain finally ended.

What followed was pure bliss.

The transition from extreme agony to utter bliss felt like being enveloped in a soft, warm sponge, and Gao Neng couldn't help but let out a soft moan.

"I'm not dead?" Gao Neng's eyes shot open. His hands and feet were still there. He sucked in a huge breath. It felt so good to be alive.

He was overjoyed.

'But why does it stink so bad?'

Gao Neng sat up. He looked down and saw his body was covered in a thick layer of black, viscous sweat. The foul stench assaulted his nostrils.

"Ugh..." Gao Neng pinched his nose and ran straight for the bathroom. He turned on the faucet and began rinsing himself off frantically. Even as the cold water sluiced over his body, he felt no chill.

Huh?

'I think I've actually gotten stronger!'

Gao Neng looked at the Attribute Panel again.

Name: Gao Neng.

Vitality: 15/201. (Successfully broke through the first human limit. Aptitude Rating: Good. Vitality cultivation speed increased by 20%.)

Spirit: 8/96. (Successfully broke through the first human limit. Aptitude Rating: Good. Spirit cultivation speed increased by 17%.)

...

"My Vitality cap increased by 100 points?! And my Spirit by 46!" Gao Neng never imagined a single Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill could double his physical prowess.

What's more, he had broken through the first human limit.

'What does this mean?'

It meant Gao Neng now had the foundation to become an Energy Warrior. If he wanted to, he could become one as soon as he entered the City of Hope's Military University.

"This is insane! And this was just one Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill? If I had two, could I break through the second human limit?" Gao Neng had already forgotten the pain; he was too excited.

Rumor had it that someone who broke the first human limit before becoming an Energy Warrior could master basic energy combat methods, like the Energy Extraction Technique.

Breaking the human limit twice before becoming an Energy Warrior allowed one to master even more advanced methods, such as the Energy Synthesis Technique, the Energy Refining Technique, and so on.

And if you could break the human limit three times...

...then that person would have a chance to learn Energy Manifestation!

'Energy Manifestation!'

It was impossible for Gao Neng not to be excited.

This Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill was unbelievable.

Although the process had been agonizing and he'd nearly died, the result was a delightful surprise.

Best of all, he thought he finally understood what the pill's "refreshed rating" meant.

If he remembered correctly, the system had initially rated his Vitality and Spirit as "Average," but now they were "Good."

'My aptitude has improved, and my training speed has increased?!'

Gao Neng felt the impact of the Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill was beyond anything he could have imagined. It was like taking an untalented nobody and forging them into a martial arts genius!

'Okay, calm down.'

'I've gotta do some calisthenics to calm down.'

Gao Neng remembered that the calisthenics routine also increased his training speed by 50%. Now, with the additional 20% from his improved aptitude, he wondered just how much his max Vitality would increase if he kept at it all night.

The time was 2:30 AM.

"ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR... TWO, TWO, THREE, FOUR... THREE, TWO, THREE, FOUR..." Soft pants once again filled Gao Neng's small room, growing faster and more intense.

...

...

「Forgotten Land. Inside a renovated old villa.」

Tang De was bare-chested, wearing only a pair of floral shorts. He picked up a glass of red wine from the table, took a small sip, and resumed his artistic creation with a paintbrush in hand.

Before him, an equally naked woman lay with her eyes slightly closed, her face flushed. She let Tang De paint directly onto her body, a look of sublime enjoyment on her face.

Tang De's brushstrokes were fluid and graceful. Soon, he had sketched the outline of a red peony.

"Art... now this is art!" Tang De took another swig of red wine, but instead of swallowing, he sprayed it onto the red peony. PSST!

A blood-tinged peony!

Exquisitely vibrant!

The woman's body trembled lightly. She slowly opened her eyes, and as she gazed at the red peony on her skin, her face grew even more flushed.

Just then, his phone rang.

Tang De frowned. He detested being interrupted in the middle of his artistic process. It was a sign of disrespect, a desecration of art itself.

But when his gaze fell upon the phone's screen, he set down his brush nonetheless. He cleared his throat twice before answering. "Lieutenant Qin, what business could you have with Old Tang in the dead of night?"

"It's serious!" Qin Tianxiong's grave voice came through the phone.

"Oh? Don't scare me, Lieutenant Qin. I'm a timid man, you know." Tang De sat up straight and waved a dismissive hand at the woman before him.

"How annoying," the woman muttered, clearly displeased. She hummed in irritation, slowly sitting up and draping a sheer robe over her shoulders.

In the moonlight, her shadow stretched across the floor, long and bewitching.

But the strange thing was her eyes. They weren't a normal black, but a faint, spectral blue, as if they were portals to another dimension.

But most peculiar of all were her ears.

They were long and pointed, standing upright just like the elves of myth.

The woman rose slowly and walked a few steps to the table. She picked up a glass of wine and lit a cigar, drinking and smoking as she pleased, with no intention of asking for Tang De's permission.

Meanwhile, Tang De's expression grew increasingly grim.

"What did you say?! Wei'Er attacked a Major? What Major...? Shen Ning'Er? Isn't she one of your soldiers?! Qin Tianxiong, are you fucking with me?!"

CLICK!

The line went dead.

Tang De immediately kicked a nearby chair. CRACK! The chair snapped in two, the break so clean it looked as if it had been sliced through by a razor-sharp blade.

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"What trouble did that precious son of yours get into now?" the woman glanced over dismissively, then leaned back, propping one long leg high up.

"That old fox Qin Tianxiong actually hid Shen Ning'Er's identity! Now he's telling me that Shen Ning'Er is some Major, and he's saying my son assaulted her? He says they have an eyewitness and physical evidence, and they're going to take my son to the City of Hope for processing! Shit... Does he really think I'm a pushover?" Tang De was furious.

"A Major? It seems... your Human Alliance's purpose for coming to the Forgotten Land this time isn't so simple. You didn't happen to expose that 'thing,' did you?" The woman chuckled softly.

"Impossible!" Tang De denied it outright. Then, his eyes darted, and his expression gradually softened. "I don't know much about the intel on that thing. If it really was exposed, it must be a problem on Wang Ju's end. The Human Alliance's intelligence network is no joke... Are you sure there are no problems on Wang Ju's side?"

"Besides being impotent... what other problems could that old man have?" The woman covered her mouth with her hand and giggled, then stubbed out her cigar. "I still prefer you... Come on, let's continue our artistic creation..."

"Art requires inspiration. If there's no inspiration, what the hell is there to create? You head back to Wang Ju's factory first. I have to go to the Golden Grand Hotel!" Tang De waved his hand.

"I just love artsy men like you. Even your rejections are so domineering. Fine... I'll head back then. But you can't say no to me next time, okay? Hehe!" After speaking, the woman didn't wait for Tang De's reply, walked straight to the window, and with a SWISH, leaped out.

Tang De watched the spot where the woman had disappeared, his expression gradually turning grim. Gritting his teeth, he picked up his phone again and dialed Qin Tianxiong's number.

"What is it now?" Qin Tianxiong's voice sounded again.

"Qin Tianxiong, I know where to find the thing you're looking for. But on one condition: you must find a scapegoat for my son. No matter what, you have to save his life!"

"That's difficult."

"If you can't do it, the deal's off!"

"I'll try."

...

「Golden Grand Hotel.」

Qin Tianxiong hung up the phone and pushed open the door to the conference room.

Inside the conference room sat all the board members of the Golden Grand Hotel, the general manager, the lobby manager, and the on-duty servers. However, all their faces were a bit pale.

Qin Tianxiong didn't speak. He just picked up the guest registry from the table and flipped through it. Soon, his eyes landed on one particular entry.

'A temporary hourly room? Room 707, check-in time: 8:59 PM. Guest's name: Gao Neng.'

"Who checked in the guest for the hourly room, 707?" Qin Tianxiong looked up, his gaze sweeping over the people below.

"It... it was me. I checked them in..." A female server stood up, trembling.

"Who is this Gao Neng? How old is he?"

"Seventeen or... or eighteen, I think. He looked like a third-year student from the Third Senior High School. He wasn't here to ask about Shen Ning'Er. He said... he said he was here to see you... Don't you know him?"

'Here to see me? A student from the Third Senior High School?' Qin Tianxiong's eyes narrowed. He then turned to the soldier behind him and said, "Contact Li Qingping. Ask about this Gao Neng's situation."

"Yes, sir!" The soldier nodded and left the conference room.

...

「Early morning.」

Gao Neng had been doing calisthenics in his room all night, but he wasn't the least bit tired. In fact, he felt refreshed and full of energy. His stomach, however, was starting to feel a little empty.

He glanced at his Attribute Panel.

His Max HP had increased by 1 point, becoming 202/202, but his Energy hadn't changed.

'Only 1 point?' Gao Neng was a little dissatisfied. But after thinking about it, he decided it wasn't too bad. One point a day was 365 points a year. Ten years would be 3,650, a hundred years would be 36,500, a thousand years...

Cough, cough.

'Maybe it's not that great after all?'

'Still, once I complete this mission, maybe I can speed things up. What if I manage to grind out a 1000% speed boost? By that calculation, the progress isn't slow at all.'

Gao Neng left his room to find that Xu Zilan had already gone out for the day.

Gao Neng wasn't surprised by this. He knew that Xu Zilan worked five part-time jobs and basically only came home at night.

A warm breakfast was laid out on the table: a bowl of sweet tofu pudding and two pancakes made from flour and wild vegetables.

After washing up, Gao Neng finished the entire breakfast, washed the bowl, and then rummaged through the toolbox, pulling out a hammer, a wrench, an iron shovel...

'If I'm going to rob them, should I also bring a hemp rope?' Gao Neng wondered. He found a hemp rope, then dug out a worn-out leather belt. Finally, his gaze fell on the kitchen cleaver. 'Should I bring the cleaver too, just in case?'

Gao Neng hesitated for a moment, but ultimately decided against it.

'I'm just going to rob someone, not murder them. Why would I bring a cleaver?'

Before heading out, he left a note on the table.

"Going to a classmate's house to study tonight."

With everything prepared, Gao Neng slung the large bag over his shoulder, putting the hemp rope and leather belt inside first. As for the metal tools—the hammer, wrench, and shovel—he planned to put them in the bag when he reached the school gate to avoid tearing the backpack.

CREAK! Gao Neng pushed open the worn-out wooden door. Then, he noticed a familiar figure walking toward him from outside.

'My homeroom teacher, Zhang Dafan?'

'I don't think he lives here. He lives at the school, right?'

Gao Neng was a little confused.

Zhang Dafan was also taken aback for a moment. It wasn't because he was surprised to see Gao Neng—after all, finding Gao Neng was the entire reason he was here.

'But what's with this getup?'

Zhang Dafan stared at Gao Neng, who was holding a hammer in his left hand, clutching a wrench in his right, and had a large shovel slung over his shoulder. For a moment, he couldn't quite process the scene.

"Gao Neng, what are you... doing?"

"Good morning, Teacher Zhang! I was just heading to school," Gao Neng said with the expression of a perfectly behaved child.

"Going to school with a hammer?" Zhang Dafan's mouth twitched.

"Uh... I saw a rock on the road that looked like a safety hazard. So, I was thinking I'd use the hammer to flatten it so no one trips. Doesn't our teacher always say, 'To get rich, you must first build a road?'" Gao Neng quickly came up with an excuse.

"Flatten a rock?" Zhang Dafan's expression was strange. "Then what's the wrench for?"

"In case I can't flatten the rock with the hammer, I was going to try and pry it with the wrench," Gao Neng answered without missing a beat.

"Oh, so the shovel is for digging up dirt to fill the road, right?" Zhang Dafan nodded thoughtfully.

"Exactly! Teacher Zhang, you're amazing! You saw right through my plan. This shovel is indeed for digging dirt to fill the road," Gao Neng said, seizing the opportunity to suck up.

"..." Zhang Dafan's mouth twitched even more violently. He glanced behind him subconsciously and finally let out a sigh. "Gao Neng, let's put road maintenance on hold for now. You need to come with me."

Just as Zhang Dafan finished speaking, two soldiers in black military uniforms appeared to Gao Neng's left and right. Furthermore, on a nearby rooftop, a black figure lay prone.

The three soldiers stared at Gao Neng, their expressions solemn.

Gao Neng's expression changed slightly.

'They came for me this early in the morning? This is a little faster than I expected.'

He had a pretty good idea of what this was all about.

'The burden of being a top student...'

'...is that you're just a little too smart.'

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"Gao Neng, you're my student. I've been your homeroom teacher since the start of high school, so I know your character well. I'm sure you didn't do anything wrong, it's just... Ah, never mind. Just come with me and clear this up." Zhang Dafan sighed softly as he finished.

"Okay, Teacher." Gao Neng nodded. He chose not to run. Even if he could get away, Xu Zilan couldn't.

'Of course, the most important thing was...'

'With this kind of entourage, where could he possibly run anyway?'

Soon, Gao Neng was led to an open-top military jeep. However, they weren't heading toward Third Senior High School. Their destination was the Golden Grand Hotel.

Gao Neng tightened his grip on the hammer in his hand but eventually relaxed, putting the hammer and his other tools away. Then he started humming and began to stretch, warming up his muscles and joints.

"One, two, three, four... Two, two, three, four... Three, two, three, four..."

"..."

Of the three soldiers, one was driving while the other two sat on either side of Gao Neng. They watched him continuously exercising in the vehicle, their expressions growing increasingly perplexed.

But no one said a word or tried to stop him.

As for Zhang Dafan, he just kept sighing.

'Such a good kid...'

'Could the pressure have finally made him snap?'

「Twenty minutes later...」

The military jeep pulled up to the entrance of the Golden Grand Hotel.

One soldier and Zhang Dafan led the way, with two other soldiers flanking Gao Neng. The group entered the lobby and took the elevator.

Before long, Gao Neng was brought into a conference room.

A total of seven people were sitting inside.

Gao Neng recognized four of them: Third Senior High School's Principal Li Qingping, Vice-Principal Tang De, and Qin Tianxiong. The fourth was the waitress who had handled his check-in the previous night.

Shen Ning'Er was not present.

He didn't recognize the other three.

"Is that him?" Qin Tianxiong shot to his feet the moment he saw Gao Neng and asked the question.

"Y-Yes... it's him, but..." The waitress opened her mouth as if to say more, but ultimately decided against it and fell silent.

"As long as it's him, that's enough. You're Gao Neng, correct? Do you have any idea why we've brought you here?" Having confirmed Gao Neng's identity, Qin Tianxiong's gaze grew sharp.

Gao Neng, of course, knew exactly why Qin Tianxiong had summoned him.

But he didn't look at Qin Tianxiong. Instead, he first scanned the faces of everyone present. Li Qingping was quiet and reserved. Tang De, by contrast, looked completely amiable, a faint smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

The others remained silent.

'Looks like they've already gotten their stories straight.'

'But they probably don't have any concrete evidence yet. Otherwise, they wouldn't be treating me like this.'

Gao Neng began to reflect on life.

Most people in this situation—99% of them—would start trying to establish an alibi. Or they'd force themselves to stay calm and play dumb, denying everything to clear their name.

But Gao Neng had never been 'most people'.

So, he folded instantly.

"Lieutenant Qin, don't kill me! I was wrong... I did it! Principal... Principal, please don't expel me! I know I made a mistake! I'm begging you, don't expel me! I'll

never do it again!" Gao Neng promptly "collapsed" to the floor, his face pale with terror.

Of course, no matter how cowardly his act, he would not actually kneel.

His personal creed was simple: in this life, he would kneel to neither heaven nor earth, but only to the parents who gave him life!

'What the hell?'

'He confessed just like that?'

The three strangers looked at each other, utterly speechless.

"..." Qin Tianxiong was equally speechless. He had his whole "interrogation" planned out, but as it turned out, Gao Neng had caved the moment he walked through the door.

It's an awful feeling, being unable to deliver the lines you've spent all this time preparing.

More importantly, as a soldier, he despised spineless cowards—especially the kind like Gao Neng who went soft before the intimidation even began.

'Couldn't you at least show a little backbone?'

'I'm not asking you to be tough enough to take a beating, but at least argue your case a little, right?'

The three soldiers who had escorted Gao Neng in were also stunned by his behavior. He was just humming happily in the car a moment ago, so how did he turn into such a sniveling coward in an instant?

'So much for being a top student.'

'I heard he's always ranked number one in his year?'

'Students from the Forgotten Land...'

'Their caliber really is getting worse and worse!'

Qin Tianxiong and the soldiers were so taken aback by Gao Neng's immediate surrender that they failed to speak, giving Li Qingping an opening.

"Gao Neng, don't be afraid. The most important thing for a man is to take responsibility for his actions. Have some backbone. Tell us exactly what you did, from start to finish. If you've been wrongly accused of something, you can speak up about that, too." Li Qingping felt a little helpless himself. 'I don't remember Gao Neng being this way...'

'I suppose he's just too sheltered.'

When Tang De heard Li Qingping speak, a smile spread across his own face. "That's right, Gao Neng. Your academic performance at our school has always been excellent. Just tell us what you did wrong. A student who can admit their mistakes and learn from them is still a good student. Why don't you start by walking us through what happened."

'Walk them through it?'

Gao Neng's mind was racing. 'Tang De is here, so this must be related to Tang Weiwei.'

'Did something happen to Tang Weiwei?'

'Is she dead?'

'No, Tang De's goal here must be to find a scapegoat. If Tang Weiwei were dead, what would be the point of finding a scapegoat?'

'So she must be in a coma.'

Gao Neng quickly reached a conclusion. Then, he began to imagine...

He imagined being cornered in a dark alley by a bombshell of a woman in black leather. She had alluring eyes, a killer figure, and a long mane of hair. He was powerless to resist, with no path of retreat. The femme fatale was already starting to take off her clothes. He felt awful, pessimistic, and utterly helpless.

"WAAAAH!" Gao Neng burst into tears, looking for all the world like an eight-year-old child. "I... I'm the one who disappointed the principal, the vice-principal, and Teacher Zhang! I shouldn't have tried to take a shortcut! I shouldn't have come to the hotel to find Lieutenant Qin! I shouldn't have tried to get in through the back door..."

Tears streamed down Gao Neng's face as he threw himself forward and hugged Tang De's thigh. He then wiped a handful of snot on it, causing Tang De's lips to start twitching.

'Weak. Helpless. Utter wuss.'

Gao Neng projected every ounce of weakness he could muster onto his perfect features.

"'Get in through the back door'? What back door?" Qin Tianxiong froze for a second before it dawned on him. "What the hell are you talking about? What bullshit about getting in through the back door?!"

"I meant... Lieutenant Qin didn't let me get in through the back door... No, I'm the one who failed to get in through Lieutenant Qin's back door. That's what happened. I've disappointed the principals and my teacher..." Gao Neng's face grew even paler.

"Are you messing with me, you little brat?! Am I asking you about getting in through back doors?! I'm asking you why you rented a room by the hour at the Golden Grand Hotel!"

"I... I rented the room by the hour *to get in through the back door*?"

"Whose back door?!"

"Yours..."

Chapter 19: Left with No Choice

"..." Qin Tianxiong's gut twisted. After all that freaking back and forth, were they right back where they started?

"I was trying to take a shortcut," Gao Neng continued. "I thought if I built a good relationship with you, Lieutenant Qin, before the college entrance exams, I might have a chance to get into the Military University. But it didn't work out. After I got the room at the hotel, I never ran into you, Lieutenant Qin, so... so I just..."

"You just what?" Qin Tianxiong's gaze turned cold.

"I just left... The time for the hourly room was almost up, and I didn't have the money to extend it. Plus, my mom was waiting for me at home for dinner. I had no idea you could even investigate something like this... but I promise, I'll never try to pull strings again! I'm begging you, please don't disqualify me from the college entrance exams..." Gao Neng's face was a mask of fear as he wiped a handful of snot onto Tang De's other pant leg.

Tang De's lips trembled more violently.

He desperately wanted to kick Gao Neng away, but considering his status, he ultimately held back. Instead, he forced what he believed was a kind and amiable smile.

"Gao Neng, stop crying for a moment. You ran to the Golden Grand Hotel late at night and spent forty Alliance Coins on a room. You couldn't have done all that just to get in Lieutenant Qin's back... Oh, I mean, just to curry favor with Lieutenant Qin, right? Nobody would believe that. Also... can you please let go of my leg first?"

"Principal Tang, I was wrong, I was so wrong! Everything I said is true! From now on, I'll get into the Military University on my own merit. I'll never try to pull strings again! Please, I'm begging you, forgive me..." Gao Neng steadfastly refused to let go.

The few military NCOs and the four strangers watching this scene all shook their heads.

'Someone this pathetic wants to get into the Military University?'

'In his dreams!'

'What kind of place is the Military University? It's a place for tenacious men of iron will. How could they possibly accept such a sniveling coward?'

Everyone's hearts filled with contempt.

Gao Neng couldn't care less about any of that. Being despised was exactly what he wanted. Moreover, it wasn't just these people he wanted to disgust; his main target was the "behind-the-scenes" Shen Ning'Er.

If he guessed correctly, even though Shen Ning'Er wasn't in the conference room, she was definitely watching everything inside it via a camera.

Gao Neng had a rough grasp of the situation now.

'There's no concrete evidence.'

'But the looks in Tang De and Qin Tianxiong's eyes were off. Connecting that to Tang Weiwei's identity, it was obvious those two were involved in something. They were probably planning to pin the blame on him together.'

'So, how could he possibly win a direct confrontation with them?'

'Therefore, he could only gamble!'

'Gamble on Shen Ning'Er's pride!'

'As an Alliance Major, a chosen one, a being that incredible... how could Shen Ning'Er possibly allow a stain on her life story like being scared unconscious and pushed over?'

'And by someone this pathetic, no less!'

Gao Neng knew that the more pathetic he acted, the less patience Shen Ning'Er would have to keep watching. When that time came, he might just be saved.

'Still, it seems I need to keep crying for a bit longer, huh?'

Just as he was about to let out another wail, Li Qingping stepped forward at the right moment and offered a pack of clean tissues to Gao Neng.

"Gao Neng, get up first. We all know you want to get into the Military University, but you shouldn't resort to actions like pulling strings anymore. Understand?"

"I understand... Thank you, Principal!"

"Then don't just lie on the floor..."

"Hold it!" Qin Tianxiong frowned, his tone icy.

"Lieutenant Qin, the situation is already quite clear. You wanted to investigate Gao Neng for getting an hourly room at the hotel, and he's given his explanation. Honestly... our school was also shocked to hear that one of your people had an incident at the hotel, but this matter... hasn't it already been settled?"

As Li Qingping spoke, he shot a subtle glance at Tang De, then continued, "Frankly, this kid Gao Neng has always been a good student over the years. I think this whole thing is most likely a misunderstanding..."

"A misunderstanding? A high school senior runs to a hotel late at night and gets a room, all to get in my back... I mean, to curry favor with me. Do you really think that's possible?"

"The boy is simple-minded. I believe him..."

"Principal Li, you're a teacher, so it's natural for you to hold out hope for your students. I can understand that. But trying to pull one over on me, Qin Tianxiong, isn't that easy," Qin Tianxiong cut Li Qingping off.

"Old Li... I'm actually with you, I also think a kid like Gao Neng wouldn't make any serious mistakes. However, since the Military Department is involved, why don't we let Lieutenant Qin finish his interrogation?" Tang De chimed in at the right moment to smooth things over. Then, he forcefully yanked his leg free and sat off to the side.

"Sigh..." Li Qingping sighed and stepped back.

Gao Neng's hands were left empty.

With no "thigh to hug" anymore, he couldn't be bothered to cry out more snot. He just curled into a ball, shaking and shaking, his eyes filled with terror.

Qin Tianxiong paced a few steps around the room, seemingly pondering something. He appeared hesitant, but finally seemed to make up his mind.

He slowly walked over to Gao Neng.

He casually placed a hand on Gao Neng's shoulder, a faint smile playing on his lips.

"Kid, I wonder if you've ever heard how the Military Department conducts its interrogations..."

"AH!"

Qin Tianxiong hadn't even finished his sentence.

Gao Neng let out a blood-curdling scream, his head lolled to one side, his eyes rolled back, and his body convulsed as he passed out.

"..." Qin Tianxiong froze for a moment. He looked at the fainted Gao Neng on the floor, then at his own hand, unable to process what had just happened.

'He did use a little force, but not enough to make him faint, right?'

"Lieutenant Qin, what did you do to Gao Neng? Do you have any idea he's just an eighteen-year-old student?!" Li Qingping could no longer stand by.

"I used a small technique, but at most it would just cause him a bit of pain. It shouldn't have made him pass out, right?" Qin Tianxiong felt truly wronged.

"Using torture on a student, you..."

"Ah, don't kill me!"

Just as Li Qingping was about to berate him, Gao Neng shrieked again. He seemed to jolt awake, his legs flailing wildly with all his might.

One of his kicks accidentally landed squarely on Qin Tianxiong's family jewels.

Qin Tianxiong was completely unprepared.

The force of the kick made his face darken.

He was in agony!

A piercing pain!

It felt like his junk was about to explode!

"Lieutenant Qin, I didn't mean to... I really didn't mean to! Don't kill me, ah... please don't kill me! I don't want to die, I'm still young... I'm a future flower of the Alliance..." Gao Neng seemed to realize he had kicked the wrong person and scrambled backward in terror.

Of course, he knew Qin Tianxiong hadn't used any serious force on him, but the man had clearly shown his intent to do so.

With Qin Tianxiong's methods, if he had been allowed to press on his shoulder for long enough, he might have discovered the secret that Gao Neng had broken through the first human limit.

And the role he was playing was that of a weak, sniveling coward...

'This was a secret he couldn't let Qin Tianxiong know, at least not yet.'

'So, he could only feign passing out.'

But he also understood that feigning unconsciousness was only a temporary solution; it treated the symptom, not the root cause. Qin Tianxiong would surely have a way to "wake" him up and then apply his methods again.

'To truly survive this, he had to take a gamble and throw the situation into chaos.'

'He had no other choice...'

'Gao Neng had to deliver that vicious kick to force Qin Tianxiong into a rage.'

(Please vote with recommendation tickets!)

Chapter 20: New Mission: Confront

Qin Tianxiong was livid.

He, a lieutenant, no less, had been kicked by a student in broad daylight. He could barely contain his shame.

"Flowers, my ass! You little bastard, you dare kick me? Fucking hell, I'll cripple you!" Forcing back the pain, Qin Tianxiong threw a punch at Gao Neng.

Gao Neng had, after all, broken through the first human limit. If he were his old self, he probably wouldn't have landed the kick. Because of this, he could roughly gauge the force of Qin Tianxiong's punch.

Although he was in a fit of rage,

he wasn't actually trying to kill him.

'He's probably just venting.'

At this thought, Gao Neng gritted his teeth and turned to run, but he didn't escape.

BAM! With a muffled thud, Gao Neng was sent flying nearly ten feet high, like a kite with a snapped string, before slamming into the ceiling.

Then, SPLAT.

He lay sprawled on the floor.

Qin Tianxiong was stunned for a moment. 'I didn't use that much force, did I? Are this kid's bones that light? How was he sent flying so high?'

"..." The other soldiers were also stunned.

'Lieutenant Qin's attack...'

'Was it really that vicious?'

Gao Neng felt bitter as well. The punch to his back didn't actually hurt that much. It was just... he'd used the force to fly a little too high and had unfortunately hit his head on the ceiling lamp.

'The misery!'

'But since I've already hit it, I can't let it be for nothing.'

As he fell to the ground, he quickly fumbled inside his shirt, pulled out the small amount of blood left over from yesterday, and emptied it into his mouth.

"BLECH!" Gao Neng's body convulsed, and he spat out a large mouthful of fresh blood.

"..."

"Gao Neng! Are you okay?!" Zhang Dafan immediately rushed forward when he saw this. He had been in the conference room the whole time, and though he hadn't spoken, he hadn't left either.

"Kid, you're playing dead, aren't you? I barely used any force in that punch..." Qin Tianxiong's previously suppressed anger ignited once more.

"That's enough, Lieutenant Qin!" Li Qingping's expression turned grim. "You've already beaten Gao Neng into this state, and you still won't stop? Do you intend to keep beating on an innocent student? Even as a member of the Military Department, you should understand that you need evidence for everything!"

"That's right! If there's no evidence, we won't stand for it!" Zhang Dafan chimed in.

"This kid went to the Golden Grand Hotel to get a room in the middle of the night! His intentions are obviously suspect. Isn't that the best evidence?!" Qin Tianxiong's face was livid, and he could still feel the stinging pain from the kick.

"Getting a room is evidence now? Lieutenant Qin, that sounds a bit unreasonable, don't you think? Besides, are you sure Gao Neng even knew who was staying in the room next door?"

"Gao Neng didn't know... When I told him, I said Lieutenant Qin was staying next door..." the waitress, who had been silent until now, spoke up timidly.

"..." Qin Tianxiong's gaze turned cold as he shot a look at the waitress.

The waitress immediately shrank back.

But when her eyes fell on Gao Neng's perfect face, now pale with fright, her gaze hardened with resolve once more. "The truth is the truth! I can vouch for Gao Neng!"

"Lieutenant Qin, did you hear that? Gao Neng didn't know. What evidence do you have now? If you can't find any other evidence that Gao Neng had ulterior motives for getting a room at the hotel, then on behalf of all the students of Third Senior High School, I demand that you release him now!" Li Qingping nodded, his entire being radiating righteousness.

"..."

"Captain!" Just then, the conference room door was pushed open.

"What is it?!" Qin Tianxiong was in a terrible mood.

"Tang Weiwei and the one called Ah Si are awake."

"So they're awake. So what? I'll deal with those two brats after I sort things out here!" Qin Tianxiong waved his hand dismissively.

"But... Captain, they both said that Gao Neng was already in the room before they entered..." The soldier hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"Hmm?!" Qin Tianxiong's eyes narrowed.

He had handled the case of Tang Weiwei and Ah Si personally. Combined with the discovery of the knockout smoke and the many soldiers present at the time, the matter was essentially an ironclad case.

Qin Tianxiong was no fool.

He wasn't thinking of clearing Tang Weiwei's name right away.

His plan was to proceed step by step.

He would first introduce a "third party" into the matter. Then, he would slowly shift the focus, framing Gao Neng as the "mastermind," Ah Si as the "accomplice," and Tang Weiwei as merely an "immature accessory to the crime."

That was why he originally felt that until Tang De had communicated this plan to Tang Weiwei, there was no real point in Tang Weiwei waking up.

But now, things were different.

Tang Weiwei and Ah Si were claiming Gao Neng entered Shen Ning'Er's room before them? Did that mean the one who had truly "hurt" Shen Ning'Er wasn't Tang Weiwei and Ah Si, but Gao Neng?

But how was that possible?

'That guy is so weak and cowardly...'

'Could he really hurt Shen Ning'Er? How did he manage it?'

Even with his thirty years of life experience, Qin Tianxiong couldn't figure it out. But he still made a quick decision. "Since Tang Weiwei and Ah Si are awake, our subsequent handling of this matter will require the three of you—Principal Tang, Principal Li, and Teacher Zhang—to excuse yourselves."

"Heh heh, of course we should. With something like this happening in my Tang Family, I've lost face as well. Old Li, Old Zhang, let's go. We trust the Military Department, and we trust Lieutenant Qin, right?" Tang De chuckled as if this was no surprise at all and was the first to walk towards the door.

"Stepping aside is no problem, but you must at least be impartial! Until this matter is settled, I absolutely will not allow my student to suffer any physical punishment!" Li Qingping shot a venomous glare at Qin Tianxiong.

"Principal Li, rest assured. I promise I will not lay a hand on Gao Neng again." Qin Tianxiong nodded.

"Good. Lieutenant Qin is a soldier. I trust the Military Department!" Li Qingping said no more and turned to leave.

Zhang Dafan glanced at Gao Neng but ultimately said nothing. Just before he left, he gave Gao Neng a helpless smile.

"The Military Department is handling this now. You hotel staff should leave as well." After Li Qingping and Zhang Dafan had gone, Qin Tianxiong turned his gaze to the other three hotel employees and the waitress.

"Yes, yes, of course. We'll leave right away." The three nodded in unison, then dragged the somewhat reluctant waitress out of the conference room.

"You lot, go bring Tang Weiwei and Ah Si here. And guard the door!"

"Yes, sir!"

Three soldiers left the room.

Soon, only Qin Tianxiong and Gao Neng were left in the conference room.

"Student Gao Neng, let's just wait a little while," Qin Tianxiong said, seating himself on a chair. Surprisingly, he didn't lash out at Gao Neng again.

Gao Neng understood. 'This is probably because Shen Ning'Er is watching on camera from outside.'

Except, right now, he was a little stunned.

'Tang Weiwei actually woke up? What a fucking coincidence! I flew through the air, I coughed up blood, I was *this close* to clearing my name, and *now* Tang Weiwei wakes up? You couldn't write a story this contrived!'

'What do I do?'

'Is this it? Am I screwed?'

"Ding! Host's heart rate detected at 139 BPM. Would you like to unlock a side quest to calm your nerves?" a mechanical voice rang out at that moment.

"Unlock your..."

"Side quest function successfully enabled! (Side quests are triggered only under specific circumstances. There are no difficulty selections or mission hints. Rewards upon completion are random.)"

"Side Quest Unlocked: Confront!"

"In this world, there is more than just cowering in a corner; there is also confrontation! The mission of youth is to be bold! Burn, young man! You can no longer just cover. Facing challenges with passion is what you should be doing!"

"Mission Requirement: Within twenty minutes, loudly shout, 'I'm the real culprit who took down Shen Ning'Er! What can you do to me?!' to successfully complete the mission."

"Penalty for failure: Lose one level."

Gao Neng didn't even have time to mentally finish his curse when a string of mechanical notifications rang out. Then, he saw a countdown timer appear before his eyes.

20:00

19:59

19:58

...

TICK, TOCK. TICK, TOCK.

Just wonderful. A very "understanding" system!

Gao Neng tilted his head back, staring up at a forty-five-degree angle.

'I'm not panicking at all. I don't even want to curse anyone. I just want to use my talents as a top student to compose a poem.'

'Oh, pitter-pattering rain, you fall with a SPLISH-SPLASH. Oh, child of the golden autumn, running on the ridges of the fields of hope, your little feet sink into the mud, one deep, one shallow, one deep, one shallow, one deep, one shallow...'

Aaaaaah...

Waaaaah...

'My plot armor?!'

'Where the hell are you? AAAAAAAAAAH... Where the hell are you?!'

(Sob sob... acting cute and begging for recommendation votes!)