

Full-Time Public Enemy

#Chapter 31 The Curse from the Depths of the Star Sea - Read Full-Time Public Enemy Chapter 31 The Curse from the Depths of the Star Sea

Chapter 31: Chapter 31 The Curse from the Depths of the Star Sea

The next morning, after finishing his training, Chen Gu headed to school. Today, Chen Gu arrived a bit earlier than usual and didn't go directly to the classroom; instead, he waited at the school gates.

When Chen Zili arrived, Chen Gu grabbed him by the collar and dragged him to the bathroom.

Upon Chen Gu's entry, the students who were urinating hastened their efforts, quickly finished without shaking off, and hurried out.

Darkray and a few others, seeing Chen Gu hauling Chen Zili into the bathroom, followed and blocked the door. "Quick, quick, quick, the boss is about to handle something, everyone guard this place well!"

Chen Gu was unaware that he had become the head honcho of the school's delinquents. His presence now overshadowed Liu Shichan and Zhao Junzhi, the "celebrated pair." He slapped Chen Zili. "That's for being a smart-ass, for taking matters into your own hands! Today you'll learn what it means to weave your own noose!"

"OW, OW..."

Chen Zili covered his head and screamed, then shouted in a fit of anger, "Why are you hitting me? It's all your fault my dad is getting discharged! His future in the military is completely ruined!"

"Huh?" Chen Gu felt a weight in his heart. "Discharged? Tell me more."

Chen Zili knew very well that his father's future would determine if he could continue living as an arrogant and happy second-generation. Therefore, after Chen Jixian let something slip yesterday, Chen Zili made calls to several familiar uncles on his way to school. He found out Chen Jixian's professional prospects were bleak and, feeling downcast, reported everything to his grandfather.

Chen Gu didn't strike again but sighed internally, feeling low for the rest of the day.

To make matters worse, a holographic emoji became popular in the school that day. Some jerk had used the final moment of Chen Gu's fight with Liu Shichan, where Chen Gu ripped her stockings. They then altered the characters' expressions to make Chen Gu look like a lecherous

creep with a sleazy grin, while Liu Shichan appeared as though saying, "This little one is frightened."

Sometimes, fashion trends are just ridiculous, and this meaningless emoji instantly became all the rage at school, even showing signs of spreading beyond the campus.

Chen Gu caught a glimpse of it by accident, and his mood turned even more sullen.

That evening, as soon as he got home, Chen Gu immediately entered the gaming pod. *That "Beauty in the Mirror Prepares for War" said she was from the Central Operations Room, so she should have the ability to influence Chen Jixian's discharge arrangements, right? But by doing so, my own identity might be exposed.*

...

Bai Xianya's work diary:

"Day one of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—no response. He might have broken his hands."

"Day two of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—still no response. He might have broken his legs too."

"Day three of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—yet again no response. Surely it must be some old man's urinary system disorder acting up."

"Day four of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—still no response. He's probably developed dementia."

"Day five of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—NO! RESPONSE!"

"Day six of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—I'm not expecting a reply anymore. He must be dead—dead—dead—dead—dead—gone!"

"Day seven of spamming game messages at [Idol Actor]—let's end this. This task is impossible to complete. As a virtuous little fairy, I need to self-reflect. It was wrong of me to bear a grudge and to curse an old, decrepit man—weakened with age, his dignity waning like the setting sun, stumbling and bumbling along. He's an elder who I wished would get hit by a maglev train when he stepped out; be crushed by a ceiling collapse at home; choke on a chicken bone while eating; be poisoned by bleach in his water; die straining against a kidney stone while peeing; die of fright from a horror movie; get strangled by a tie while dressing; or be fatally injured by the equipment during a rectal exam. This was all wrong. Even though I don't feel a trace of remorse now, this... is really not right."

"Look at the vast Star Sea; our lives, all that we are, are so minute in comparison. Please be calm, you shouldn't be so irritable."

"May all these curses come true!"

Bai Xianya was completely fed up. Everything at the research institute was ready: promising researchers, substantial funds, advanced equipment... everything was set, yet the "lead sheep" had yet to respond.

You said you'd consider it, fine, but can you give a deadline? Are we supposed to wait indefinitely if you can't make up your mind, putting the whole research project on hold?

And yet her uncle was quite fond of this wretched old man. Although [Idol Actor] hadn't formally declined, her uncle was patient enough to just wait.

On the first day, Bai Xianya sent [Idol Actor] six game messages, eighteen the next day, and then the numbers soared, hundreds upon hundreds.

Another week went by. With no sign of [Idol Actor], it was as if he had vanished from the face of the earth. Bai Xianya pondered how to bring this matter up with her uncle and persuade him to give up on [Idol Actor], choosing instead some tactical master to lead the research institute. Suddenly, in her friends list, [Idol Actor], marked with a "special attention" sign, lit up!

[Idol Actor] logged in?!

Grinding her teeth, Bai Xianya's first reaction was to order the AI to send ten thousand messages cursing him out. But she held back.

Look at the vast Star Sea; our lives, all that we are, are so minute in comparison. Please be calm, you shouldn't be so irritable.

Stay composed, be ladylike.

She pretended not to see and sat there unwavering—acting unapproachable. *You're ignoring us, so we'll just have to show you that you're out of our league*, she thought.

A minute or so passed, and DING-DONG, the avatar for [Idol Actor] went dark again.

Bai Xianya's plush lips formed a big "O" as she completely lost it. *Are you blind to all those game messages? Can't you see them? Not even basic manners, you hateful, disgusting old fart! DIE! DIE! DIE! DIE!*

"War AI, search the entire Star Sea for every civilization's most savage, most vicious, most terrifying curse!"

Bai Xianya lifted her dainty hand, ready to blast off ten million messages, hoping to crash the detestable old man's game the next time he logged in!

But suddenly, DING-DONG, the [Idol Actor] avatar lit up again.

"Hmm?" Bai Xianya frowned, then calmed down. But this calm lasted even shorter than before; after half a minute, DING-DONG, the avatar went dark again—the guy had logged off.

Then "DING-DONG"... online again.

"DING-DONG"... offline again.

"DING-DONG"... Eh, I'm back again, surprise or what?

"DING-DONG"... Hey, I'm gone again, didn't expect that, did you?

"DING-DONG"

"DING-DONG"

"DING-DONG"

...

The [Idol Actor] was mercilessly tormenting the game's AI by incessantly logging in and out!

Bai Xianya couldn't take it anymore and spent three hundred Starshields for a top-up, blasting him with a huge font message:

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!!!

This time [Idol Actor] responded quickly, "Yo, isn't this pay-to-text feature known as the stupidest in-game purchase? Can't believe someone actually uses it."

"It really is true that all kinds of birds exist in a big forest."

"But with your intelligence, you're a strategist? Our military's think tank is worrisome."

Bai Xianya took a deep breath, gently wiped her smooth, delicate face with her hand, and composed herself.

Look at the vast Star Sea—our lives, everything we are, pale in comparison. You should remain calm and not be so irritable.

Then she stood up, grabbed the chair, and with all her might, smashed it on the ground dozens of times until it was in pieces!

Then once again, with a serene face, she ordered, "AI, send a new chair over, a sturdy one."

Bai Xianya sent a message using the plainest font, "What's with the logging in and out?"

[Idol Actor] replied swiftly, "Why'd you stop using that font? You've already spent the money; are you stupid to use it just once?"

"You're not falling apart because of what I said, are you? Are you reliable enough for crucial decisions with such a weak mentality?"

The AI delivered the chair, and Bai Xianya, with grace, grabbed it and smashed, smashed, smashed!

"Bring another, even sturdier!"

Bai Xianya, using the costly font she paid three hundred Starshields for, sent again, "What's with the logging in and out?"

DING-DONG, the reply came, "I just said a couple of things and you keep changing. So indecisive, little comrade. As a strategist, you should stick to your judgment..."

"That's enough!" Bai Xianya didn't even finish reading before she shut it off. "What's with this logging on and off, what are you trying to do?"

"Nothing much, just checking to see if you were around."

"I knew it, I've found you out," followed by a string of [Smug]+[Success]+[Saw Right Through You]+[I'm Such a Little Smarty] emojis!

Chapter 32: Chapter 32: People Leave and the Tea Goes Cold

Veins bulged on Bai Xianya's smooth forehead. "Couldn't you have just sent a simple message, 'Hello, are you there?' That would have done it, right?"

Or, if you, you old geezer, have no manners, even a 'You there?' would suffice.

Even if you're old and decrepit, shuffling about, in your twilight years, barely clinging to life, your thoughts and fingers gone stiff—a single '?' would work too!

The third chair was brought over, but Bai Xianya was too tired to smash it. Standing for so long was making her back ache.

She sat down and took a deep breath. "What's your decision?"

Chen Gu had intended to reveal his original plan, but a new idea suddenly struck him. "I have one requirement."

"Speak."

"I cannot appear in person. I can guide remotely, but I need someone trustworthy at the research institute to oversee this research for me."

"That's possible. Who do you have in mind?"

"Zhao Zhenhuai. Although I defeated him, the very fact that he lost to me speaks to his caliber."

Despite her contempt, an idea suddenly struck Bai Xianya. She replied, her expression unchanged, "I can agree to that for now. However, there will be some procedures. For instance, Zhao Zhenhuai must pass a security background check from the Central Operations Room. If everything checks out, he will be the deputy director of the research institute and act as your representative there."

"Good. I'll wait for your news."

After this message was sent, the avatar for "Idol Actor" went dark again—this time, the Game Maiden Avici was spared further merciless in-and-out torment.

Without delay, Bai Xianya went to see her uncle. "I remember you once made an assessment that 'Idol Actor' didn't choose Zhao Zhenhuai as an opponent at random. It now seems very likely that Zhao Zhenhuai is connected to 'Idol Actor.' I suggest we use Zhao Zhenhuai to uncover 'Idol Actor's' true identity."

And then you just wait for this little fairy's tempestuous retribution!

Bai Yunpeng had been very well-behaved these past few days, not daring to joke with his niece again. *Can you imagine? A man in his late forties, almost fifty, going home only to be beaten with a stick by the old man? The pain was real; my backside hurt, and my face ached too. I'm a marshal, for crying out loud! Don't I have any pride?*

"If he is related to Zhao Zhenhuai, why would he choose this method to bring Zhao Zhenhuai to our attention? This is disadvantageous for Zhao Zhenhuai," Bai Yunpeng raised his doubts.

Bai Xianya thought for a moment and offered a rather unconventional yet logical explanation, "'Idol Actor' is a tactical mastermind who thinks long-term. Perhaps he felt that Zhao Zhenhuai, having found success at a young age, lacked sufficient setbacks and tempering. By defeating Zhao Zhenhuai himself, causing him to fall from grace and forcing him to lie low and reflect, he could then enable him to soar to greater heights. And now, by giving Zhao Zhenhuai a hand in establishing this research institute, he's offering Zhao Zhenhuai a chance to rise from the ashes."

Bai Yunpeng nodded slowly. "But there's another possibility: 'Idol Actor' holds a grudge against Zhao Zhenhuai. He first crushes him, then, worried Zhao Zhenhuai might make a comeback and seek revenge, decides to keep him under his control instead."

Bai Xianya's eyes lit up. "Uncle, you are indeed deeply calculating... no, I mean, wise and insightful! But regardless of which possibility is true, there's definitely a connection between 'Idol Actor' and Zhao Zhenhuai."

After a moment's thought, Bai Yunpeng said, "You handle it. Use the opportunity of Zhao Zhenhuai's security review to investigate his connections and uncover the true identity of 'Idol Actor'!"

"Yes, sir!"

「...」

Chen Jixian was very wealthy; the conglomerate Chen Beiliu had left him was worth tens of billions of Starshield. Although Chen Jixian was not involved in the company's day-to-day management, he had hired excellent professional managers, and a board of directors kept an eye on things for him. Moreover, his military standing deterred those with ulterior motives from targeting his assets.

If Chen Jixian were willing to leverage his influence, spending a few hundred million Starshield could easily secure him a prominent local position. But Chen Jixian was unwilling to do so.

He had purchased a villa in a high-end community in Wuzhaoyin City. After the last Mutant attack incident, Chen Jixian's security level had been raised; he was usually protected by two squads operating a total of four armored maglev vehicles.

But today, after work, one squad had been dispatched for other duties.

Chen Jixian didn't bother to negotiate. It was a classic case of 'when the tree falls, the monkeys scatter.' The situation was gradually becoming clear: some were already preparing to kick him while he was down. He was mentally prepared for this.

But his aide was indignant. "A bunch of ingrates!"

Chen Jixian's eyelids drooped slightly as he gently shook his head.

When Chen Zili got home from school, he noticed that the number of guards at the villa had been reduced by a third. Perceptive for his age, he immediately sought out the head of security. "Where is everyone else?"

"They took some time off."

"Time off?" Chen Zili flared up instantly. "They're soldiers! How is our family's safety to be guaranteed? They ask for time off, and you just approve it?"

The head guard replied coldly, "I am a soldier, and you are not. Therefore, Chen Zili, you have no right to question me."

Xiao Jiangxia pulled her son away with a cold smirk.

Chen Zili seethed, "A bunch of opportunistic sycophants!"

Not long after, Chen Jixian returned home. Seeing the guard detail visibly reduced yet again, his aide, face grim, went to argue with the captain. Chen Jixian, however, merely said calmly, "Let's eat."

After dinner, Chen Jixian made a few phone calls. Within the hour, a group of retired veterans, carrying legal weapons, moved into the guest rooms of the Chen family villa.

In any era, while there are always opportunistic individuals who ride the tides of fortune, there is never a shortage of righteous people bound by unwavering loyalty.

After making these arrangements, Chen Jixian hesitated for a moment, about to make another call, but ultimately just sent a text message.

Chen Gu was exercising when, DING. He received a text message. To his surprise, it was from Chen Jixian: "At the school. Protect Zi Li."

Chen Gu managed a slight smile, then his expression gradually grew somber. *It seems my 'grown-up' son is in a rather dire situation.*

「...」

Zhao Junzhi had been discharged from the hospital but had spent the last couple of days recuperating at home—in truth, he just didn't want to go to school.

Zhao Zhenhuai still lived in the small courtyard arranged by the military. He had been in a good mood recently; some maneuvering had achieved his desired outcome.

The moment Zhao Zhenhuai returned home, Zhao Junzhi rushed up to him. "Dad, how much longer do I have to put up with that kid? Your son was severely beaten! Are we just going to let it go?"

Zhao Zhenhuai said calmly, "What's the rush? A gentleman's revenge can wait ten years!"

Zhao Junzhi's eyes lit up. "Dad, you have a plan?"

Zhao Zhenhuai hadn't wanted to reveal it prematurely, but pestered by his son, he relented and hinted, "Wait until I have control of Wuzhaoyin City's entire police system. Framing him with any crime will be easy then. Chen Jixian won't have another major military achievement to bail him out this time."

Zhao Junzhi was overjoyed. "Dad, you're the best!"

Chapter 33: Chapter 33: Stage 3

When Chen Gu rose the next morning, he suddenly discovered that he had completed the second stage of the "Star Battle Instructor" pre-training!

Another week, another stage completed.

"This speed... it's a bit astonishing," he muttered.

According to Griffin Wester's memory, the second stage for the Star Battle Instructors of the "Blue Blooded Thugs" usually took about two months on average. This timeframe also assumed the extensive use of high-tech potions to enhance their abilities.

In comparison, Chen Gu's progress in the second stage was much faster than even his own first stage. After completing this stage of training, Chen Gu's physical fitness had already quintupled!

Although this increase seemed less significant than during the first stage, all training followed this pattern: the more advanced one became, the harder it was to improve. A twofold increase was already quite remarkable.

That very morning, Chen Gu immediately began the third stage, and his doubts grew: the third stage still wasn't particularly difficult for him.

Normally, at this point, one would feel they had hit a limit. A long period of consolidation would then be needed before experiencing another surge of improvement in their abilities.

Yet, Chen Gu still managed to painfully complete the training—which meant he hadn't reached his limit.

The physical potential of the original body is extreme... It doesn't seem at all like that of a middle school hacker and homebody.

In the third stage, Chen Gu's appetite soared once again. At breakfast, he realized that ordinary food could no longer satisfy his body's needs; he needed to "add ingredients."

On the way to school, Chen Gu searched for "high-nutrient synthetic food" in the car.

In this era, "synthetic food" often meant cheap, a choice for the lower class. However, "high-nutrient synthetic food" was a different matter. Many companies were developing these products specifically for special groups, such as elite troops and fighting fanatics. A small piece could provide as much nutrition as several dozen pounds of ordinary food.

After only a short look, Chen Gu was dazzled by the variety of products packaged with novel scientific concepts, their prices skyrocketing. As for how much more effective they actually were compared to similar products, well, only Heaven knew.

As Chen Gu was hesitantly deciding which brand to buy, he suddenly received a call from Zhao Ji.

"Old Chen, be careful these days," Zhao Ji warned. "I heard some news—Zhao Zhenhuai is about to take power. He's a treacherous and ruthless man. Since you beat his son, he's sure to seek revenge on you."

Chen Gu asked, "What's going on with you? Are you under pressure? If so, why don't you pull your people back..."

"Bullshit!" Zhao Ji cursed nonchalantly. "I'm just giving you a heads-up. At Zhao Zhenhuai's level, he wouldn't dare trouble me; the Tao family could teach him a lesson in minutes!"

*Damn, having a powerful backer is truly something. Alright, a backer *does* make one powerful.*

Because of the text message from Chen Jixian the day before, Chen Gu waited at the school entrance until Chen Zili arrived. Silently observing, it didn't take long for Chen Gu to spot two individuals following behind Chen Zili, likely secret agents for his protection.

The situation was now clear: previously, Chen Gu had only guessed that someone was secretly protecting Chen Zili but had never actually spotted them, indicating those people were true elites. Today, however, they'd been replaced with amateurs, easily noticed even by Chen Gu.

What kind of protection could these rookies provide for Chen Zili?

No wonder Chen Jixian had no choice but to speak to him.

Shaking his head, Chen Gu entered the school.

During this period, Great Actor Chen was evolving into a top student, with rapid improvements across all his subjects. Even though the Lubei dark web now listed him as the top gang leader—ranking even above Liu Shichan and Zhao Junzhi—he had nonetheless become the new favorite of all the teachers.

Incidentally, ever since his "grandfather" had appeared, Chen Zili's own ranking had plummeted. He was now relegated to the fourth position among the school's delinquents.

During physics class, Teacher Dai specially admonished Chen Gu, "Next week is the monthly test. Review seriously, and strive for good results!"

"Of course, Teacher, I will give it my all."

Teacher Dai grew increasingly fond of this star pupil. As she was leaving, she suddenly thought of her six-year-old daughter. *What a pity her daughter was still too young; otherwise, recruiting him as a son-in-law wouldn't be a bad idea.*

During the afternoon physical tactics class, Chen Gu consulted Teacher Ouyang about high-nutrient synthetic food. Teacher Ouyang asked, somewhat surprised, "You already need to use this type of food?"

Chen Gu didn't dare to tell the whole truth, as it was too astonishing. "Normal food requires me to eat too much, wasting time, so I wanted to try high-nutrient food. My family... has a bit of money to spare and can afford it."

Teacher Ouyang nodded. "Then that's even better. Good high-nutrient synthetic food can greatly help improve training results. Wait a moment..." He then sent Chen Gu a website directly. "This is my comrade's company, genuine and without all the flashy stuff."

"Thank you, Teacher."

The students knew a little about Teacher Ouyang: he had retired from the military due to an injury. The cybernetic enhancements on his body were military-grade, far more powerful than common civilian ones. Rumor had it he was still on the military reserve list. If the war between humanity and the Alien Insect Race reached a critical juncture, individuals like Teacher Ouyang could be conscripted at any moment.

After school, Chen Gu secretly followed Chen Zili, escorting him home before letting the bodyguards turn back to his own residence.

On the way, Chen Gu ordered a few servings of high-nutrient synthetic meals from that company to try out.

As he entered his home, the delivery robot also arrived right on time. Chen Gu was holding the food, not yet having stored it in the fridge, when Ape's call came: "Tomorrow is the weekend. Our arranged visit is coming up, and you better come tomorrow. I'll be on a business trip next week."

"Sure, I'll make some arrangements." Chen Gu put the food away and gave it some more thought. *He still needed to seek the opinion of his older son on this matter.*

Chen Gu sent a text message. Not long after, a simple and straightforward reply came: "Okay."

Only then did Chen Gu call Chen Qingyu. His granddaughter was thrilled. After Chen Gu's promise last time, she had been full of anticipation. But that day, "the old gentleman" had been driven away by her father—or so it seemed. Chen Qingyu was torn by anxiety, not daring to blame her father; the usually lively little girl had become somewhat depressed these past few days.

Unexpectedly, Chen Gu asked them to visit Tengu Records over the weekend! *This at least indicated that Chen Gu's relationship with Gao Mengjiu was truly special!*

"YAY YAY YAY YAY!" Chen Qingyu excitedly waved her little hands and screamed. *Then she suddenly remembered her father might not agree.*

She timidly approached her father's study, peeking her small head around the door with a pitiable expression. "Dad..."

Chen Jixian, who knew why she had come, said without looking up, "Go on then."

"Yay!" Chen Qingyu jumped for joy.

That night, Chen Qingyu was so excited she couldn't sleep. *One moment she was fantasizing about her talent being discovered by the famous producer Gao Mengjiu and her rapid rise to stardom. The next, she worried if she wasn't good enough, whether she'd really have to give up her dream of singing. Then she became anxious again: Tengu Records had several stars she liked; if she met them all at once, whom should she ask for an autograph first?*

In the master bedroom of the villa, Chen Jixian and Xiao Jiangxia were also getting ready for bed. Chen Jixian suddenly said, "I'm on duty tomorrow. You take Zili and go with Qingyu."

Xiao Jiangxia was an understanding wife. "Your duty period lasts a week... Are you worried about our safety?" she asked.

Chen Jixian nodded slowly. Xiao Jiangxia forced a smile. "Don't worry," she said, "I'll take the children to stay at my father's place for a while."

Chen Jixian didn't reply. *In fact, he now felt that being near Chen Gu was even safer than being at his father-in-law's house.*

Chapter 34: Chapter 34 Audition

Chen Gu had consumed a meal of "high-nutrition synthetic food" the previous night and felt its effects this morning; completing the training program was a tad easier than yesterday.

Teacher Ouyang's comrade-in-arms is something else, Chen Gu thought. Not only were the effects immediate, but the taste wasn't bad either. He opened the website again and decided to order some more.

After that, Chen Gu had his bodyguards take him to his son's house.

His granddaughter, upon receiving a phone call and learning that Chen Gu was about to arrive, immediately ran to the door to welcome him.

"Hello!" Chen Qingyu's voice was clear and crisp—indeed that of a budding singer. She was dressed in a white T-shirt today, layered with a small vest, and wore tight jeans. A baseball cap sat on her head, her long ponytail poking out from the opening at the back, making her look lively and adorable, brimming with youthful vigor.

"Ready to go?" Chen Gu asked with a smile. "If you're ready, then let's set off."

Xiao Jiangxia came out with Chen Zili and said with a smile, "It won't disturb you if we all go together, will it?"

Chen Gu had already mentioned this over the phone, but he emphasized again, "It's fine. Even if it disturbs Gao Mengjiu, he'd be furious but wouldn't dare say a word."

Chen Zili, still harboring some resentment towards Chen Gu, pursed his lips and muttered under his breath, "Blowing his own trumpet."

Chen Qingyu, worried that her brother's careless words would spoil her good opportunity, glared at him and chided her younger brother, "No one is begging you to go!"

Chen Zili wanted to retort with, "I don't care about going anyway!" but thinking of the famous singers at Heavenly Dog Records, especially Man Suling—the leader of the new generation's Four Little Jade Ladies, whom he really liked—he couldn't bring himself to actually miss out.

Chen Gu glanced at his grandson. *This boy still hasn't learned his lesson*, he thought. *It seems the punishments at school weren't enough.*

"Then let's go."

Chen Gu noticed that the veterans accompanying them as bodyguards seemed rather indifferent to his family, simply following orders and safeguarding the villa.

...

Heavenly Dog Records was located in an arts district. This area had once been a factory zone during the "early development" stage of Empire River Star. Several enormous metal tanks, thousands of meters tall, stood in the central area, and various metal pipes were visible everywhere, filling the entire district with the heavy, decadent atmosphere of a post-industrial era.

Over the years, the rent here had skyrocketed; being able to establish a company in this location was a testament to its strength.

Gao Mengjiu of Heavenly Dog Records had been irritable lately. Man Suling's new album was critical. If successful, it could solidify her foundation, allowing her to shed the "Little Jade Lady" label and make a bid for diva status. If it failed... all her previous efforts might be wasted, and she could even fall into the ranks of second or third-tier singers.

He personally had high hopes for Man Suling. She was hardworking and disciplined, not plagued by the messy troubles and chaotic private lives common among many well-known singers.

However, while the album was nearly ready, with even the promotional plan finalized, the lead single was still undecided.

Gao Mengjiu had written a few songs but felt they were lacking something.

Man Suling, on the other hand, didn't rush him. She knew a creator's inspiration wasn't something that could be forced out on demand—the saying "squeeze and you'll always get some" refers to water in a sponge here, definitely nothing illicit.

If there wasn't a good song, she would rather postpone the new album's release.

Gao Mengjiu planned to go out tomorrow to seek inspiration.

Chen Gu's car parked in the district's general parking lot. A disadvantage of such districts was the inconvenience; individual companies didn't have their own private parking areas.

Chen Gu and the others got out of the car. Ken had already arranged for an assistant to meet them. When they arrived at the company, Ken tossed aside the manuscript he was working on, ruffled his messy hair, and said, "Come on, I'll show you around."

From the moment she stepped through the main entrance, Chen Qingyu's usual vivacity subsided. She approached the visit with the reverence of a pilgrim; this place was her dream!

Ken could see she was a bit nervous and lightly patted her shoulder. "Relax, kiddo. Your grandfather and I go way back. I brought you here to give you an inside look, to show you that this industry isn't just about the glitz and glamour that comes after fame. There's also..."

He led them to the trainees' practice room. Gesturing towards it, he continued, "...countless beads of sweat and tears shed before achieving fame."

Inside the practice room, trainees were diligently practicing their dance routines. The slightest mistake would draw loud reprimands from the instructor, as well as sarcastic remarks and complaints from other trainees in their group, accusing them of dragging down progress and telling them to quit if they couldn't keep up.

This was a place of naked competition for entry into the world of fame and fortune. Most of the time, what it revealed—once all pretenses and masks were torn away—was the most direct, undisguised malice.

After they witnessed this harsh reality, Ken took them to the recording studios. Heavenly Dog Records had deep pockets; the company housed twelve high-standard recording studios. Among them, one named "Island in the Sky" was the largest and equipped with the most expensive gear.

"Throughout the entire Confederation, this setup is absolutely top-tier. This one recording studio, built for two hundred million Starshield, is used by only one person," Ken said slowly.

Chen Qingyu guessed, "An Huini?"

Ken nodded. An Huini was Heavenly Dog Records' biggest star, an undeniable super-diva, the record label's "ace."

Every major record company has such a figure, someone who alone can carry the entire company.

"This is the kind of treatment one gets after truly making it big!" Ken pointed to Island in the Sky and said to Chen Qingyu.

Then Ken said to her, "Alright, you've seen pretty much everything. Let's go have you try singing a piece."

"Ah!" Chen Qingyu was taken aback, a mix of excitement and unease flooding her. Chen Gu had only told her they were coming for a tour; he hadn't said anything about an audition. This was an audition at a major record label, personally overseen by its owner and top producer! *So, what a newcomer would consider an invaluable opportunity, one they'd be willing to trade everything for, was just a whim for a true industry titan, decided with a single word...*

"What's wrong?" Ken asked. Chen Qingyu quickly replied, "Nothing, nothing, I... which song should I sing?"

Ken casually flipped through some sheet music and handed her a page. "How about this one."

Chen Qingyu took it and was stunned. "This... this is a new song?"

"Right. It was originally written for Man Suling, but I'm not quite satisfied with it and don't plan to use it. You give it a try."

Chen Qingyu realized something. *If I sing this well, will this song be mine?* she thought. Her body trembled slightly, a mix of nervousness and eager anticipation.

Chen Gu, however, remained unconcerned. *Ken is being a true friend*, he thought. *I'll definitely find a way to repay him.*

Xiao Jiangxia, however, looked at her father-in-law in astonishment. *He has *this* much influence?* she thought. *That's a song by Gao Mengjiu, and Ken's just giving it to Qingyu after meeting her for the first time?*

Among everyone present, only Chen Zili was slow to react. He was still looking around, lost in a daydream, imagining an unexpected encounter with his idol and goddess, Man Suling, in some corner of the company...

Chen Qingyu took a moment to prepare before entering the recording studio.

Ken reassured her, "Don't be nervous. It's just a trial run. You're Chen Gu's granddaughter; you're always three steps ahead of other girls."

Chen Qingyu nodded, did a quick vocal warm-up, and then her clear, agile voice flowed out like a mountain spring.

Chen Gu's expression suddenly changed, but everyone's attention was on Chen Qingyu, so no one noticed. By the time Chen Qingyu finished singing, Chen Gu's composure had returned to normal.

Chapter 35: Chapter Thirty-Five Freelancers (1)

Xiao Jiangxia vigorously applauded her daughter. When she saw her son by her side remaining indifferent, she glared at him fiercely. Chen Zili rolled his eyes and clapped unwillingly.

Xiao Jiangxia then looked over at her father-in-law and noticed Chen Gu clapping excitedly, his palms turning red, which warmed her heart.

Gao Mengjiu had been lost in thought. When Chen Qingyu emerged from the recording studio, she noticed his expression was somewhat uneasy. "Hey, how about you give us an answer? What's with the brooding act? You think you're still seventeen?" Chen Gu barked impatiently.

Ape shot him a glare. "Rush, rush, rush! Are you trying to rush me to death?"

He ignored Chen Gu and, with a friendly smile, beckoned to Chen Qingyu. "Qingyu, your uncle..."

Chen Gu chuckled. "Good nephew!"

"Damn it!" Ape was greatly annoyed; a slip of the tongue had let that scoundrel get the better of him. Damn these generational titles!

"Qingyu, Grandpa Gao has a contract here, exceptionally generous and lenient. Why don't you take a look? We're family; I definitely won't let you down..."

"Really?" Chen Qingyu exclaimed in surprise and, like a little rabbit, hopped over to him, hands clasped over her heart. "You... you're planning to sign me?"

Chen Gu reached out between them. "Hold on, let me see that first!"

Ape retorted angrily, "What do you mean by that? Are you insulting our sixty years of friendship? Do you think I would swindle our own granddaughter?"

"Yes!" Chen Gu didn't mince his words, leaving Ape speechless and rolling his eyes while the little assistant behind him giggled, covering her mouth.

Ape was fuming. "You—"

Before he could continue, Chen Gu spoke softly, "Next time I organize a family gathering, I'll have Old Sa bring his wife and daughter."

See, you can discuss music and the horizon with your confidante, I can care for my niece's studies and life, and Old Sa can relax on the boundless grasslands. How harmonious and wonderful.

"Here." Ape immediately struck a dirty deal with him.

Chen Gu examined the contract meticulously, then muttered to himself, *When it comes to the laws of this era, I don't understand a damn thing!*

He just had to put on an act, to show he took his granddaughter's affairs seriously—indeed, the instincts of an award-winning actor run deep.

Chen Gu's haggling with Ape was just for show. From their very first reunion, Chen Gu had seen that Ape harbored no malicious intentions; he was merely a little fixated on past regrets and cherished the chance to see the woman of his dreams again.

Standing behind Chen Gu, Chen Qingyu was enveloped in a feeling of unreality. *Am I about to sign a contract? Have I become a singer for Heavenly Dog Records? Did Gao Mengjiu write a song for me?*

Before she came, it was supposed to be just an ordinary tour. How had her dream suddenly biu—come true in an instant!

She couldn't help but look at the back of the figure in front of her, this grandfather who had suddenly appeared... *He looks quite handsome, seriously reviewing the contract for me.*

Chen Qingyu's heart felt warm. *Our family is practically three generations under one roof now, huh. It's just a shame Great-grandpa already passed away.*

After scrutinizing for a good while, Chen Gu finally nodded in satisfaction. "Good, no problems here." He pulled Chen Qingyu toward him. "Girl, what about you? Do you want to be a singer? Don't rush into a decision; think it over. After all, you're still in school..."

"I want to!" Chen Qingyu replied without hesitation.

Chen Gu then looked at Xiao Jiangxia. His daughter-in-law smiled gently. "This girl has always loved singing. Her father and I have always supported her in this."

Chen Gu suddenly remembered; the family had assets worth tens of billions. *His own children had certainly been qualified to freely pursue their dreams back then.*

"Sign it," Chen Gu handed the contract to his granddaughter and said to Xiao Jiangxia, "Don't worry, I'll look after her and make sure she isn't taken advantage of."

"Thank you," Xiao Jiangxia said, her words truly heartfelt.

It was impossible for Xiao Jiangxia to hold no grudge, as Chen Gu had hindered her husband's career. However, her gentle and virtuous nature prevented her from showing it.

This time, seeing Chen Gu busy himself with Chen Qingyu's affairs, the resentment in her heart had dissipated a little.

Signing a singer was no small matter. Heavenly Dog Records would subsequently formulate a series of training and promotional plans for Chen Qingyu, all requiring her cooperation. Gao Mengjiu specially assigned an agent to coordinate with Chen Qingyu.

Chen Gu didn't concern himself with these details. He waved goodbye to Ape. "Alright, if there's nothing else, we'll head off. We'll get together when you're back."

"It doesn't matter if we get together or not, as long as our Qingyu is willing to come to Heavenly Dog, that's all that counts!" Ape immediately burned that bridge.

After leaving the record company, Chen Qingyu walked all the way to the parking lot before she seemed to snap back to reality. Waving her small fists, she jumped up excitedly, yelling, "Mom, Mom, I'm a signed artist with Heavenly Dog Records now! AH AH AH—"

Just like when she was little, she threw herself into Xiao Jiangxia's arms, brimming with happiness.

"It's just a signing, not like you're a superstar already," Chen Zili teased his sister, as was their usual banter.

Once their excitement died down, Chen Gu said, "You all head back first. I still have some things to take care of."

Chen Gu returned to Heavenly Dog Records with his bodyguards, who naturally waited outside. He took this opportunity to elude them, silently slipping out through a window of the record company.

Below the window was a quiet alley. Following his earlier intuition, Chen Gu moved silently between the ancient, massive open-air machinery and the mottled walls of the factory buildings. The memories of Griffin Wester surfaced, and he became the Star Battle Instructor!

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Before long, Chen Gu entered a secluded courtyard. Several large native trees of Empire River Star grew there, their huge, bottle-shaped trunks and lush, reddish foliage particularly striking.

The ground was covered in a thick layer of fallen leaves, clearly unswept for a long time.

This place, with its many twists and turns, was hard to find, which was why it hadn't been rented out. It was also unclear what it had been used for; every room was narrow, and there were two long, deep trenches in the courtyard.

Chen Gu stood in the center of the courtyard, closed his eyes, and sensed the extremely faint residual energy fluctuations around him, like little sprites guiding him towards a door.

After Milna Katerina's memories merged with his, her Mind Belief skill seemed to have permanently heightened Chen Gu's perception.

The room was about seven or eight square meters, with a square manhole cover in the center.

As Chen Gu pulled open the manhole cover, he darted to the side. However, all was calm below; there was no ambush.

DRIP... DRIP... DRIP...

The sound of dripping water came from below. Chen Gu cautiously peered down. The square basement's interior was clear at a glance: two people lay unconscious.

One lay face down on the floor; the other was slumped against the wall, head lolling, fresh blood dripping from their forehead.

Now as the Star Battle Instructor, Chen Gu possessed exceptional battlefield insight. He could tell at a glance from the traces in the basement. *A fight between professionals!*