

# **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!*

## **Chapter 36: Chapter Thirty-Six Freelancers (2)**

The victor, surprisingly, was the person lying face down on the ground. Their breathing was very faint, but they were indeed still alive.

The one sitting against the wall had suffered massive blood loss from the head and had long been brain-dead.

When Chen Qingyu was auditioning earlier, Chen Gu suddenly sensed a special energy fluctuation emanating from a Professional's battle. So, after Chen Gu finished his business, he dismissed everyone and came to investigate himself.

Chen Gu knew it was dangerous. However, aside from his own adult son, he had never encountered any other Professionals. Ultimately, he decided to take the risk and see.

With a flick of his feet, Chen Gu's powerful physique allowed him to drift down like a falling leaf, landing softly in the basement.

The surrounding walls were covered with cracks. The abilities of these two individuals were not wide-ranging, but their lethality was astonishing.

The woman sitting against the wall wore a fitted professional suit, its fabric clearly expensive. Her hairstyle was disheveled, but her intricate makeup was still discernible. This was a highly successful career woman, likely with a considerable income and high social status.

Chen Gu subconsciously performed a character analysis.

Chen Gu felt around the body and found several small electronic devices, which he casually pocketed. Then he went to check the other person. After turning her over, Chen Gu was stunned—it was a woman, and someone he knew: Man Suling!

*This top singer was actually a Professional?*

*No wonder I didn't see her at Sky Dog Records today. I specifically told the Star Battle Instructor that my grandson greatly admired Man Suling; the Star Battle Instructor was supposed to arrange a meeting for them.*

*The Star Battle Instructor is probably panicking now, searching everywhere for her.*

*No wonder when we last met, Man Suling, a big star, didn't bring any bodyguards or a driver.*

*She was confident in her own abilities. Besides, as a Professional, having a few ordinary people around would indeed be inconvenient.*

Man Suling was in bad shape. Something had pierced her stomach, and an area two to three inches around the wound was frozen solid.

*Should I save her?* It wasn't that Chen Gu lacked compassion; his first thought was of his friend.

*Having someone like her around the Star Battle Instructor is like a ticking time bomb!*

*If a battle can happen right outside Sky Dog Records today, the Star Battle Instructor could get dragged into it at any moment.*

*Moreover, Professionals are mysterious and unpredictable. I don't know who was right or wrong in the fight between Man Suling and her opponent.*

But the next moment, Chen Gu recalled other details: *The Star Battle Instructor also doesn't like having bodyguards...*

*Old Sa told me that the Star Battle Instructor only became a producer and started his own record company twenty years ago. I used to think it was just a small company, but judging by Chen Qingyu's reaction today, Sky Dog Records is an industry giant.*

*In just twenty years, the Star Battle Instructor built this up from scratch... That guy probably has a few secrets of his own.*

Chen Gu chuckled, no longer conflicted. He switched to Milna Katerina's memories, slowly raising his left hand as a soft, warm glow gathered in his palm.

Chen Gu pressed down, and the light merged into Man Suling's wound.

The frozen wound quickly thawed, and the damaged body slowly began to self-repair.

This was Milna Katerina's "Atomic Life" ability, a healing power that disregarded the type of injury or symptom. One application of the skill, and if it could heal, it would; if not... one could only rely on faith.

Nearly all of the Nuclear Explosion Nun's abilities were this direct and brutal.

Chen Gu shivered and hurriedly pushed Milna Katerina's memories back. He was already mentally critiquing Man Suling's makeup, and he feared that in another moment, he wouldn't be able to resist giving the unconscious Man Suling a touch-up.

*Between women, differing aesthetics are practically warfare.*

After patching Man Suling's wounds, Chen Gu felt a wave of exhaustion. Since Man Suling was stable, Chen Gu dared not delay. He swiftly exited the basement and returned to Sky Dog Records, meticulously covering his tracks.

With the skills of the Star Battle Instructor persona, Chen Gu would leave no slip-ups when it came to concealing his tracks.

Back at the record company, Chen Gu casually inquired and was told, "President Gao had some urgent business and rushed off just a moment ago."

Chen Gu nodded. *He's definitely gone to find Man Suling*, he thought.

The bodyguards were still waiting outside. Chen Gu got into the car, instructed, "Let's go home," and sprawled across the back seat, not wanting to move at all.

Having undergone two memory possessions in a row and used the "Atomic Life" skill, he felt completely drained, thoroughly spent.



Upon returning to his apartment, Chen Gu devoured a highly nutritious synthetic meal. Moments later, he had regained his vigor, instantly feeling so energized he believed he could go another three hundred rounds!

Then, Chen Gu drew the curtains and pulled out the few electronic devices from his pocket. One was an electronic access card, seemingly the "key" to some top-secret location; another was a private account.

In this era, accounts were directly bound to one's genetic code, with no need for additional carriers like chips. This account, however, appeared to be special, likely a secret account for Professionals. Uncertain of the amount it held, Chen Gu didn't dare to check for fear of being tracked.

The original body was a hacker, so Chen Gu had checked these electronic devices before bringing them back; they had no tracking or localization modules. However, accessing the account could lead to network tracking.

There was one more item, its purpose unclear even to Chen Gu. It was finger-length, as thick as an AA battery, with a smooth surface engraved with six distinct symbols.

The material resembled transparent mica but also had the texture of jade.

As Chen Gu examined it, the object suddenly rotated, and one of the symbols—a flying skull—projected a circle of light.

Chen Gu's heart skipped a beat. *Not good! I've been careful, yet it seems I'm still being tracked! Clearly, my understanding of the Professionals' world is still insufficient!*

Within the circle of light, pitch-black text appeared:

"I look up at the starry sky from the nineteenth layer of hell."

Below the text, there was even an accompanying illustration! A dense array of vertical lines of varying lengths depicted darkness, with a blurry figure kneeling helplessly in the center, long hair veiling its face.

Chen Gu was puzzled. *What does this mean?*

He clutched the short, thick cylinder tightly and quickly moved to the window, peeking outside. He was ready to throw it far away at the first sign of trouble, at least to buy some time.

However, after flickering once, the circle of light vanished.

Outside, all was quiet; nothing had happened.

Chen Gu looked down at it. *What's going on?* He felt that the flying skull symbol on the short, thick cylinder seemed slightly more animated.

He couldn't resist touching it with his finger. Immediately, rings of light danced out, apparently arranged in some order, with the phrase "I look up at the starry sky from the nineteenth layer of hell" at the very top.

There were dozens more rings of light, all containing cryptic, angsty phrases like, "The dark moon casts no light; who stands alone for me? Tonight's wind is so loud," and "Never defeated, never understood; lonely yet brave, leaving only emptiness behind."

As Chen Gu was examining them, he suddenly noticed a peculiar footprint appearing in the topmost ring of light.

That bare footprint even had its big toe cocked up, as if gesturing a thumbs-up with its foot.

And the symbol before it was the "steam locomotive" from the surface of the short, thick cylinder.

### **Chapter 37: Chapter Thirty-Seven Freelancers (3)**

Chen Gu suddenly felt an eerie sense of familiarity. Looking down, he saw that in each ring of light from the Flying Skull, there was the Steam Locomotive's 'toe-print' of approval!

Chen Gu's fingers gently touched the Steam Locomotive icon, and SWOOSH—many more rings of light flew out. However, unlike the Flying Skull's, these were all... loaded with merchandise.

"No need for much talk about these potent wares! The ultra-weapon [Scorpio Hook] ray gun—powerful, rapid-firing, one shot blasts pursuers to the Skeletal Dragon Star Domain! Limited quantity; miss out and you'll be slapping your thigh in regret!"

Below was a picture of several dozen large-caliber energy ray guns arrayed together.

"\$Huge stock arrived!\$

\$Huge stock arrived!\$

\$Huge stock arrived!\$

[Rejuvenation II] stamina recovery potion, the highly reputed 'Little Red Bottle.' Zero-profit, a boon for our customers—don't ask; it just shows our strength!"

Beneath was a picture of a warehouse piled high with boxes of medicine.

"[Special channel leak] Mysterious mineral from Kuigu Kill Star, 'Heaven's Magnetite,' imbued with mysterious energy. You all know how to use it; if you don't, don't ask too many questions.

Pricey, serious inquiries only!"

Below was a pile of unidentifiable stones.

"[Exceedingly rare] Supermaterial from the Giant Tree series, weighing 6.78 grams—a pillow!

A priceless treasure, over ten million per gram!

No time-wasters. Straight to business."

Beneath was a picture of a piece of decaying wood under lights. In the corner, watermarks were layered one upon another, at least a dozen deep, with a steam locomotive at the very top.

These were the kinds of listings Chen Gu scrolled through. In just four entries, he found four typos, averaging one per ring—a clear testament to the seller's consistently terrible copywriting skills.

But what truly interested Chen Gu was the information on one of the supermaterials! With a per-gram price of over ten million, this 6.78-gram piece was conservatively estimated to be worth seventy million Starshield!

Chen Gu subconsciously touched his pocket. *I originally thought that with the one billion from my filial adult son, I wouldn't have to worry about making a living for the rest of my life. I didn't expect that in the eyes of Professionals, this sum really isn't much...*

Chen Gu had already reached the third preliminary training phase for the Star Battle Instructor role; it was time to consider the matter of his official investiture.

Supermaterial was not only needed for the investiture but also for every subsequent promotion. The more supermaterial one had, the safer the process. Moreover, according to the memories of Milna Katerina and Griffin Wester, using a large amount of supermaterial during promotion, or using rare varieties, offered a chance to awaken some rather uncommon skills.

And according to Griffin Wester's memory, the minimum amount of supermaterial required for the Star Battle Instructor's investiture ceremony was 3 grams. However, the failure rate with the minimum amount was too high. A safer quantity was 5.5 grams, and ideally, it should be above 6.5 grams.

As for the type of supermaterial, those from the Demonic Hound series were best. Supermaterials from any animal-aspected branch could be used, but those from plant-aspected branches like the Giant Tree series or Ghost Vine series were unsuitable.

Given Chen Gu's cautious nature, safer was always better; he wished he could use over 10 grams of supermaterial for the investiture! In other words, even without considering the price differences between various supermaterials, Chen Gu's material expenses for a single investiture ceremony could easily exceed one hundred million!

His wealth would instantly shrink by a tenth.

*I need to figure something out; I can't just keep asking my son for money.* Even an award-winning actor had his pride.

Chen Gu's gaze returned to that secret account. If he truly ran out of money, he might have no choice but to take a risk.

Chen Gu carefully examined all of the Steam Locomotive's light rings. They advertised various ultra-weapons and prohibited drugs. In short... if it's legal, I don't sell it!

Making money wasn't the main point; what mattered was appearing sufficiently villainous. Anything less was a loss of face.

Among the hundreds of light rings, supermaterial listings appeared only three times. Two of the older ones were marked at the end with: Claimed.

Chen Gu thought for a moment, then tapped open the other four symbols.

These four were "Radiant Cross Sword," "Comical Fish Head," "Big Gold-Toothed Cowboy Rabbit," and "Matchstick Man Pianist."

Three of them didn't post many light rings and seemed like normal individuals. Only "Big Gold-Toothed Cowboy Rabbit" was somewhat different, its wording extremely suggestive, making Chen Gu momentarily suspect it was a "little match girl" selling something illicit.

Then it suddenly dawned on him: *This guy is a Professional mercenary!*

Chen Gu internally fumed, *What a talent! How do you manage to make selling your life sound like hawking seafood?*

That Steam Locomotive was also a real character; every light ring from every person had his 'footprint' like.

Not a single one was missed.

After this bit of investigation, Chen Gu also understood the purpose of this short, thick cylinder: it was a social networking tool for Professionals.

However, the individuals on it were probably not what one would call legitimate Professionals.

No, that was a bit discriminatory. It should be said that they weren't exactly legal Professionals... which amounted to pretty much the same thing. Anyway, that was the gist.

They didn't belong to the government, nor to any major organizations.

Chen Gu pondered for a moment, then carefully left a message in the Steam Locomotive's light ring: How much?

As soon as he sent it, Chen Gu felt the short, thick cylinder in his hand begin to vibrate uncontrollably. Then, WHOOSH, it projected a silvery-white screen of light.

Lively characters rapidly scrolled out:

"Hello, Mr. President!"

"The tycoon hasn't graced us with his presence in a long time."

"As expected, when you make a move, it's always a big one! Supermaterial, eh? So expensive. Have you taken a liking to it?"

"Are you preparing for a promotion? This little bit of supermaterial probably isn't enough. I'll keep an eye out for you and make sure to gather enough."

It was a long, rambling message, every word oozing the excitement of having hooked a big spender, yet it never got to the point: how much?

This exchange, however, gave Chen Gu an important insight for his persona: *A female President? She's probably the aloof type.*

Still, anyone who could become a President would naturally understand worldly wisdom and human relationships, so the aloofness of this character needed to be moderated appropriately.

Chen Gu carefully formulated his reply: "Hmm, give me a price."

He adopted the posture of an all-business commercial negotiation.

The Steam Locomotive's reply came quickly: "You know this stuff is hard to get. It's all controlled by the government, the military, the Bureau of Mystic Security, and those big organizations."

"The price definitely won't be cheap, but with your capabilities, Mr. President, it's certainly not an issue."

"I also had to pester a friend endlessly to get just a little bit. Since it's for you, Mr. President, I won't make a profit. Just give me one hundred thirty million."

"Just look after my business more in the future."

Chen Gu knew it would be expensive, but he hadn't expected it to be *\*this\** expensive! It was double his anticipation.

"Alright, I'll consider it."

First, he had to maintain the persona.

A clatter of text flew over from the Steam Locomotive:

"Mr. President, don't hesitate! This stuff really sells out the moment it's available. Who knows when you'll find it again."

"Money is important, of course, but promotion is even more so! If you miss this chance, you might never be able to advance."

"If you're sincere about buying, I'll give you a discount of 200,000!"

"I really can't go any lower. At this price, I'm already taking a loss..."

Chen Gu replied, "I'll get back to you once I've considered it," and then directly closed the dialogue.

After waiting in the apartment for a while longer and confirming that everything was calm with no unusual activity nearby, Chen Gu finally relaxed.

On second thought, items like these were unlikely to have tracking modules. These freelance (illegal) Professionals were probably even more cautious than he was; they wouldn't carry something on them that could be traced.

The biggest gain this time was undoubtedly this social networking tool. It provided Chen Gu with a bridge to communicate with Professionals, allowing him to observe the Professionals of this era up close.

And Chen Gu's first impression was: *Money flows like water...*

Chen Gu packed up these items, keeping only the social networking tool with him. He put the rest into a small iron box, not intending to keep it in his apartment. He would find an opportunity to bury it outside.

### **Chapter 38: Chapter Thirty-Eight: Secret Identity**

Man Suling awoke. Her first reaction was to spring to her feet, agile as a civet cat. Her hands pressed against the ground like forepaws, her legs coiled, feet braced to push off, poised to unleash terrifying power at any moment.

Then, she looked around and discovered her opponent's body.

She let out a sigh of relief and cautiously moved forward to check, confirming the opponent was indeed long dead. She searched the opponent's pockets but found nothing. Man Suling's expression changed. Then, checking the wound on her lower abdomen, she discovered it had already healed!

*Someone has been here!* She was keenly aware of her injury; she had been treated. *Could it be the Boss? No, if it was the Boss, he would have taken me with him directly.*

She was mystified but had nonetheless received a life-saving favor.

She cautiously crawled out of the basement. It was now nighttime. In the small courtyard, she called Gao Mengjiu. He answered the moment the call connected, "How are you?"

Man Suling said, "Still alive, Boss. There's something strange about this incident..."

"Where are you? I'm coming to pick you up immediately!"

"No need, I'm near the company."

"Alright, let's meet at the company then."

Many people were still working overtime at Tengu Records. The two met in Gao Mengjiu's office. Man Suling had already changed into clean clothes.

Gao Mengjiu asked, "Was it someone from the Bureau of Mystic Security?"

"No, just a Vulture," replied Man Suling. They referred to lone, unlicensed hunters as Vultures.

After Man Suling reported what had transpired, Gao Mengjiu frowned. "Don't dwell on it. This person saved your life and, at the very least, showed goodwill. If they share our ideals, they'll contact us sooner or later."



Man Suling nodded. "Boss, this place isn't safe anymore. You should leave immediately."

"You're coming with me. We'll announce that I'm going to write songs for you, and you'll accompany me to find inspiration."

Man Suling didn't demur. "Okay."

Although she had escaped death this time, her strength was greatly depleted. She, too, needed time to lie low and recover.

Gao Mengjiu opened a very discreet safe in his office. He took out a palm-sized metal box, inspected its contents, then tucked it into his breast pocket. "Let's go."

Inside the box was an ancient badge: Radiant Bow and Arrow.

...

When the weekend was over, Chen Gu returned to school. Chen Zili found him and roughly shoved a lunchbox at him. "My sister made it."

Chen Gu smiled. "She still has some sense of filial duty." He then jabbed at Chen Zili, "More conscience than you, at least."

Chen Zili's eyes bulged, but in the end, he didn't dare challenge his overbearing grandfather. Puffing his cheeks, he walked away.

*So what! Isn't it just that I've never eaten a bento personally made by my sister until now, and that guy got there first? This young master doesn't care! This young master is a second-generation scion; in the future, plenty of girls will make bentos for me! I'm not jealous, I'm not bitter, I'm perfectly fine. I'll go back to class and hit on the girls, get them to make me a breakfast made with love!*

But when he returned to the classroom, he just buried his head in his arms on his desk.

Today, an important piece of news appeared on the Lubei dark web: He's back.

Zhao Junzhi had returned to class, finally ending his "convalescence."

As a result, the Lubei dark web forums erupted. Everyone was speculating how Zhao Junzhi might retaliate against Chen Gu. However, some students who had seen Chen Gu's bodyguards and car suspected Zhao Junzhi wouldn't do anything too drastic.

Coincidentally, the last class this afternoon was again the combat exchange class.

After the last morning class, Chen Zili headed to the cafeteria with his entourage. Looking back, he saw only two lackeys following him and asked in surprise, "Where are Jiang Yue and Gu Chaoning?"

The two lackeys exchanged a glance and stammered, "They... they went over to Zhao Ergou's side..."

A surge of anger rushed to Chen Zili's head. He wanted to erupt with curses but quickly realized this would only make him seem like he was throwing a powerless tantrum.

*They don't think our family will make it either, huh?* Chen Zili sneered. The two lackeys hurriedly said, "Don't worry, Chen, we are absolutely loyal to you."

Chen Zili found it odd. *Why would those two switch sides now, of all times?*

One of the lackeys sighed inwardly and said, "News has already spread. Zhao Zhenhuai is going to retire and assume the position of Deputy Chief of the Municipal Police Department. When the old Chief retires next year, he will officially take over as Chief, controlling the entire Wuzhaoyin City police system."

Chen Zili was stunned for a moment. *Has my dad really lost?*

Among the few paths available to retired military personnel, the police system was undoubtedly one of the best. Moreover, retiring directly into the role of a municipal police chief was extremely rare throughout the Confederation.

"That Zhao Ergou's old man really knows how to pull strings!"

Chen Zili headed to the cafeteria in silence. The largest table in the center was already surrounded by people. Besides Jiang Yue and Gu Chaoning, who were fawning on the periphery, Chen Zili also spotted Zhou Yiteng.

The Zhou family was a local power in Wuzhaoyin City, deeply entrenched and influential. Zhou Yiteng had previously been on good terms with Chen Zili. However, after Chen Jixian was removed from the priority development list, Zhou Yiteng stopped associating with him. But now, he was sitting there, chatting and laughing amicably with Zhao Junzhi. This clearly signaled that the matter was settled and had even swayed the Zhou family's stance.

...

The boundless wasteland stretched as far as the eye could see. Its surface was strewn with jagged, yellow-red grotesque stones. Mountain ranges and ravines were tangled together in a deadly embrace, winding away into the far distance.

Several steam-powered mechanical species belched thick smoke, their roars deafening, as they lumbered about, gnawing on rocks rich in metallic elements.

These were a peculiar type of silicon-based, steam-powered lifeform. They resembled wild beasts, possessing low intelligence but formidable combat strength. Their temperament was as volatile as their steam-powered heart-furnaces.

These were the indigenous life forms of Empire River Star.

Empire River Star was a third-class colonial planet. It initially possessed a terraformable atmosphere, but its surface environment was harsh and barren, though indigenous life had already emerged.

One of the terror-pig-like steam-powered mechanical species suddenly sensed something. It jerked its head up to look towards a distant, colossal, ring-shaped structure it could not comprehend.

In the words of Wuzhaoyin City's inhabitants, this enormous, ring-shaped composite-armor outer wall was the city's guardian deity, known as the 'Peace Ring.'

Inside the Peace Ring lay the urban zone; beyond it was the dangerous wilderness.

Besides the steam-powered mechanical species, various dangerous and bizarre alien life forms roamed. Moreover, the Alien Insect Race could land outside the city at any moment to launch terrifying assaults.

Approximately twenty kilometers outside the Peace Ring, a chain of outpost military forts was arrayed.

Chen Jixian stood on the highest platform of one such fort, gazing into the distance. The telescope on his helmet was merely for show; as an Abyssal Blacksmith, his physical abilities far surpassed those of ordinary humans. Chen Jixian could see farther with his naked eyes than any telescope could.

Chen Jixian was currently observing that terror-pig-like steam-powered mechanical species.

His adjutant, who had loyally served Chen Jixian for ten years, stood beside him and said in a low voice, "Sir, the delivery of the six standard units of 'Sky Spear' missiles you requisitioned will be delayed by three days."

### **Chapter 39: Chapter Thirty-Nine: Goliath Potion**

"Additionally, our left wing's Fourth Regiment refused your request for a joint sweep."

"The Seventh Regiment on the right wing replied very politely, stating they would cooperate as long as there were orders from above. However, in reality, they also refused."

The aide chose his words carefully and spoke with great caution. During this time, messages from all sides were unfavorable to the colonel. Situations like delayed military supplies or lack of cooperation from allied forces were absolutely impossible back when the colonel was still on the priority candidate list. Now, with retirement imminent and no favorable arrangements in sight, many were quick to kick him while he was down.

Chen Jixian silently concluded his inspection, saying, "Let's go. Stand your last watch."

After descending the platform and entering a deserted corridor, Chen Jixian abruptly said, "Sorry for dragging you into this."

Traditionally, when a senior officer like Chen Jixian retired and transferred to another post, he would either ensure a bright future for his aide within the military or take them along to enjoy a comfortable civilian life; this was after many years of loyal service. But now, Chen Jixian was no longer able to do either.

The aide's eyes welled up, and he stood firmly at attention. "No, Colonel, I have no regrets at all!"

Chen Jixian's eyelids lifted a few millimeters, and the corner of his mouth twitched almost imperceptibly, resembling a smile.

「...」

In the afternoon, Chen Gu trained brutally and ferociously in the military physical training area, reviewing the results of the third phase of his "Star Battle Instructor" preliminary training. He was very satisfied with his progress, estimating that in just three or four more days, the preliminary training would be complete, and his physical fitness would be more than six times that of an ordinary person.

*Generators and super matter... I need to get them ready soon,* he thought.

Teacher Ouyang, his huge mechanical arms at his sides, walked over with a serious face, slightly irritated. "Everyone, come with me! Today's combat exchange lesson has a change in opponent—it's now Class Four!"

Chen Gu wasn't surprised at all. *If Zhao Ergou wasn't up to something, that would be the real surprise,* he thought.

Clearly, Teacher Ouyang intended to bring all his military physical education students to support him, and this filled Chen Gu with a sense of warmth. In his previous life, Chen Gu had read reports about many teachers who were wolves in sheep's clothing.

However, in this life, the Teachers Dai, Zhou, and Ouyang he had encountered were all genuinely good people, true exemplars of their profession.

Of course, there were also individuals like the Dean of Instruction, a black sheep staining the flock.

Darkray and other classmates eagerly showed their support, pounding their chests and roaring, "Does Zhao Ergou really think his dad can cover the sky with one hand? Screw that son of a bitch! The Confederation has the Supreme Tribunal, after all, and everything must follow the law. Brother Chen, we've got your back!"

Chen Gu brushed the damp hair from his forehead and grinned. *He wasn't worried at all; he'd made preparations early on.*

At the entrance to the combat classroom, Chen Gu's group was stopped. Zhao Junzhi's lackeys blocked their way. He stood with his hands clasped behind his back, surrounded by his entourage, wearing a smirk he might have copied from a movie—the kind supposedly worn by "superiors." With the condescending pity of a victor, he said to Chen Gu, "Kneel down, kowtow, and apologize. Then I might consider letting you off."

Chen Gu turned to ask Teacher Ouyang, "They are preventing me from attending class. How should I handle this?"

"You can report it to the school," Teacher Ouyang replied. "They'll face disciplinary action according to school regulations, ranging from a warning to expulsion, depending on the severity."

Chen Gu nodded, then looked back at the group once more.

Zhao Junzhi let out a cold laugh and gestured for his people to go in, sneering, "You're courting death!"

After Chen Gu entered, he suddenly felt a piercing gaze, like ice knives, directed at him—it was Liu Shichan. This was their first meeting since that "little accident."

Liu Shichan was wearing a pair of long boots made of high-polymer bulletproof material that extended above her knees. Gritting her silver teeth, she silently fumed, *Tear them! Let's see if you can tear these this time!*

Chen Gu still felt a bit guilty, so he ducked his head to avoid Liu Shichan's gaze and obediently stood behind Class Nine.

"Today's combat exchange—" Teacher Zhou had barely started when Zhao Junzhi rudely interrupted him. "No need for small talk, Teacher Zhou. Let's just start; we're ready over here."

A sturdy boy stepped forward first. Teacher Zhou glanced over; it was one of Zhao Junzhi's henchmen.

Teacher Zhou selected a boy from Class Nine who was in good physical condition. However, as soon as the match began, the Class Nine student was immediately on the defensive, sparking a wave of murmurs from the onlookers:

"That's not right! This Liang Mochao from Class Four wasn't that strong before..."

"He was never a match for our class's Hu Qianlin."

"He's on drugs! Definitely on drugs!"

Liang Mochao grew fiercer as the battle continued, his roars putting Hu Qianlin in an extremely awkward position. Then, with a combination of kicks—THWACK! THWACK! THWACK!—he struck Hu Qianlin's scoring zones repeatedly, instantly knocking him to the ground. Even with protective gear, Hu Qianlin had gone pale and was struggling to catch his breath.

Class Nine's students quickly helped Hu Qianlin up, while Liang Mochao, smugly whistling, returned to his group of shameless cronies to exchange high-fives and celebrate.

Zhao Junzhi smiled triumphantly. At his glance, another henchman stood up. "I'll take the second round."

His key subordinates were indeed using a special drug: "Goliath V." This was an enhancer primarily intended for law enforcement personnel.

News that Zhao Zhenhuai was poised to become the new police chief of Wuzhaoyin City had already spread, and a pharmaceutical company had preemptively sent a batch of "samples" to the Zhao family.

These so-called samples were genuine "Goliath V," even more potent than the version available for public sale.

Zhao Junzhi, not needing all of it for himself, had "bestowed" it upon a few of his most sycophantic henchmen.

A few indignant boys from Class Nine vied to be the first to fight, but Chen Gu stopped them, saying, "Leave it to me."

*Zhao Junzhi clearly came prepared, and Zhao Ergou's grudge is against me, Chen Gu thought. There's no point in letting the other classmates get beaten up. Do I really have to wait for Zhao Junzhi's flunkies to beat up all my classmates before I step up to face him like some final boss?*

Chen Gu stepped forward, not bothering with any protective gear, and gestured to his opponent with a finger. "Come on."

Before Teacher Zhou could even speak, the opponent charged with a roar. Without so much as a glance, Chen Gu shot out his fist. His opponent's vision blurred, and with a THUMP, the fist landed squarely on his eye. He collapsed without a sound.

*Even with "Goliath V," his physical abilities are only about fifty percent better than an average person, Chen Gu assessed. I'm now at five times the strength of an ordinary person; I didn't even need to use the "Ancient Martial Great Nine Styles" to beat him.*

Then Chen Gu, having no interest in continuing to dispatch minor lackeys, gestured directly to Zhao Junzhi. "Got the guts for another round? I'll even fight you with one hand."

Zhao Junzhi walked out with a sneer. "It seems you really don't understand what kind of situation you're in, do you?"

#### **Chapter 40: Chapter 40 Orders Issued**

Chen Gu couldn't be bothered to say much to this little brat who knew nothing, struck a starting pose, and suddenly threw a punch.

Standing opposite Chen Gu, Zhao Junzhi suddenly felt as if he were standing in front of a collapsing mountain!

The punch was like an exploding landslide, as swift as lightning. Zhao Junzhi hadn't even had time to react before the punch had already heavily struck his chest.

His chest guard visibly caved in, and then Zhao Junzhi was sent flying, crashing into his group of cronies three meters away; immediately, there were screams of pain as all the cronies were knocked down.

As Zhao Junzhi fell to the ground, his eyes glazed over, immobile, and blood gushed from his mouth and nose.

The physical arts instructor for the fourth class turned pale with shock and screamed, "You've killed someone—"

Chen Gu remained calm and composed, while Liu Shichan frowned in disgust, "With today's medical technology, injuries like these won't kill."

*You're a grown man, even a physical arts instructor, acting like a sissy. Trash like you wouldn't last half a minute out in the world before getting killed.*



The school doctor rushed over and quickly took Zhao Junzhi to the hospital. His cronies glared at Chen Gu with malice, "You're dead meat! Do you know Uncle Zhao will... anyway, just wait to be messed up in prison!"

Chen Gu put on an extremely horrified expression, trembling uncontrollably as he asked in a lost voice, "Really? Is my life... over?"

The cronies' arrogance intensified, ready to continue their threats, when Chen Gu suddenly burst into laughter and turned to Darkray, "How's my acting?"

Darkray, truly like a top-tier comic sidekick, exclaimed, "The Best Actor of Lubei!"

"Hahaha..."

The cronies walked away, teeth clenched with rage, but Chen Gu couldn't bask in his triumph for long before he saw Liu Shichan approaching.

Suddenly, Chen Gu's legs went weak, and Darkray and Mao Yisheng hurriedly stepped forward to support him. Chen Gu's body was limp like noodles, held up by the two military students to avoid slipping to the ground. He spoke feebly, "That move just now... it was so draining. I'm so hungry, I need to replenish..."

"Let's go, let's go, we'll take you to Xianwei Residence."

Liu Shichan was dumbfounded. *In such a situation, as a key figure of the Phoenix Gang and the second-in-command of the Lubei ruffians, she couldn't possibly ignore the underworld code and attack Chen Gu now, could she? His way of avoiding the fight was perfectly reasonable.*

Chen Gu was escorted away, feeling exceedingly proud inside. *What is acting? This is acting!*

He wasn't actually afraid of Liu Shichan; it was just that after their last battle, he felt somewhat guilty facing her again.

It took only about ten or twenty minutes for Chen Gu and his group to leave the school and arrive at Xianwei Residence, when suddenly a series of police sirens sounded outside the restaurant.

Chen Gu looked out the window to see two police cars had arrived and blocked the entrance.

Darkray was indignant, "These parasites, these scum, living off taxpayers' money, doing the dirty work for the privileged!"

Chen Gu, who had already started eating, casually commented, "Nice brownnosing."

...

Zhao Zhenhuai was furious when he got the message.

His son had just left the hospital a few days ago and was again severely injured by that little bastard. This time the injuries were even more severe, requiring several months for a full recovery.

"Dad! Dad! I want to kill him..." On the phone, his son, who had just regained consciousness, weakly cried and cursed to him.

Zhao Zhenhuai felt immense heartache. "You just focus on healing. Leave these matters to me. This time, we'll settle the new grudges and old scores together. I will make sure he rots in jail!"

Zhao Zhenhuai hung up the phone and took a deep breath. He instructed his aide, "Get me the director of the Seventh Bureau..."

Suddenly, a guard outside reported, "Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel Anderson is here."

Lieutenant Colonel Anderson was a man of a certain major general, the very major general who was Zhao Zhenhuai's backing. It was with the major general's strong support that Zhao Zhenhuai was able to retire and transition to the civilian sector as planned.

Zhao Zhenhuai did not dare to neglect him; since the kid couldn't escape anyway, he said, "Please let him in quickly."

Lieutenant Colonel Anderson strode in with his military cap under his arm and announced loudly, "Colonel Zhao Zhenhuai, I'm here on behalf of the Central Operations Room to inform you that you have been appointed as the deputy director of the newly established 745 Research Institute. Please hand over your military duties immediately and report to Capital Star at once!"

Right after that, Anderson displayed the military order of reassignment.

Zhao Zhenhuai was dumbfounded. *What on earth was the 745 Research Institute? Wasn't he supposed to retire and take over as the top police official in Wuzhaoyin City?*

*Just a colonel, going to Capital Star only to be some obscure deputy director of a research institute... That counted for nothing. Who would take him seriously from now on?*

"Anderson..." Zhao Zhenhuai wanted to ask for clarification, but Anderson, fearing he might say something detrimental to the major general, interrupted him, "This is a direct order from the Central Operations Room, Colonel Zhao Zhenhuai. Carry out the order."

The aide behind Zhao Zhenhuai, too, stood there with his mouth agape. *How could things have turned out this way? According to the original plan, he would have been at least a deputy director in a cushy position, but now... deputy director of a numbered research institute? Just from that number, one could tell how many such institutes there were throughout the Confederation! What was the point of being a deputy?*

Zhao Zhenhuai opened his mouth but could only suppress the plethora of questions and rage within him and inquired, "What exactly does this 745 Research Institute do?"

"Sorry, it's a high-level military secret; we have no idea."

He emphasized the word "we," hinting that the major general also had no clue about the inside story.

Zhao Zhenhuai despaired and slowly sank into his seat, appearing to have aged ten years in an instant. The only voice in his head kept incessantly questioning: *How could this have happened? How could this have happened?*

Anderson looked sympathetically at Zhao Zhenhuai. As the major general's confidant, he knew that Zhao Zhenhuai had spent millions of Starshields for his post-retirement plans, money that couldn't possibly be refunded to him.

"Get to Capital Star and report in as soon as possible," Anderson said. "You only have three days to report, and any delays could lead to a military tribunal."

...

Chen Jixian was resting in the barracks while his aide handled some paperwork in the office outside. Suddenly, the sound of heavy military vehicles arriving and departing caught their attention.

The aide stepped out for a look and returned with a puzzled expression, "Colonel, the missiles we requested have arrived."

Chen Jixian's eyelids remained firmly in place, not out of composure, but because he was also baffled. *Why had they suddenly arrived when the supply department had previously been intentionally delaying?*

The aide's phone suddenly rang. After speaking a few words, his expression turned to one of surprise as he kept agreeing.

Before he even finished the first call, another came in. He hurriedly ended the previous call and quickly answered the new one, growing even more astonished after a couple of sentences.

After the aide finished, he somewhat stutteringly reported to Chen Jixian, "The Fourth and Seventh Battalions both expressed their willingness to cooperate with your previous plan for a joint sweep. They have already applied independently for the ammunition required for the operation.

"Moreover, their commanders will personally call you to discuss the operational plan, expressing their desire to help you make your last battle before retirement a splendid one..."

The aide felt an intense, gnawing curiosity. *There had to be some secret he wasn't privy to; otherwise, those fence-sitters wouldn't have suddenly changed their attitudes so drastically.*

"Colonel," the aide sidled up and whispered, making a face, "Did you... pull some strings?"

"No."

About fifteen minutes later, the news finally reached the somewhat slow-to-react Chen Jixian: Zhao Zhenhuai had suddenly been transferred to some research institute, and someone had to fill the director position that was prepared for him. As it happened, Chen Jixian, who was simultaneously retiring, ended up with the role.