

Full Time 311

Chapter 311: Let me count

"We've reached the limit."

"Tsk! The higher the voltage, the stronger the defense, yet it still tore through with one claw? This thing is incredible!"

"I have a bad feeling about this mission. I don't want the allowance this time; I just want to go home."

But Gong Shuxie's expression was rather peculiar as he tugged at his colleagues. "This Energy Gathering Mechanical Species is unexpectedly obedient."

"What do you mean?"

"This Energy Gathering Mechanical Species can participate in the beast battle competition!"

His colleagues held their breath. That's right, this creature doesn't have the biggest drawbacks of Energy Gathering Mechanical Species—their irritability and inability to communicate.

And its strength was unmatched.

They weren't bragging to Gong Shuxu. Indeed, even champion-level beasts couldn't escape this cage, yet in front of this Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, it was like paper.

"I think it's feasible!" everyone agreed. Gong Shuxie smiled and said, "This is our collective achievement. I'll talk to the boss and buy this Energy Gathering Mechanical Species. If we win the championship, the prize money will be shared by all!"

Someone hesitated. "But will that guy be willing to sell?"

Gong Shuxie laughed again. "He's already in such a bind; he could get a large sum of money. Why wouldn't he sell?"

"I think it's feasible!"

Gong Shuxie had his colleague explain to his father while he secretly phoned the club's boss. Meanwhile, the unfortunate Landing Craft had already started its return journey and could not enter Capital Star.

The club's boss was also interested when he heard about it. He immediately told Gong Shuxie, "I'll send someone over to negotiate right away!"

By the time the Landing Craft was returning to its port of departure, the club's negotiators had arrived with remarkable speed.

They observed the cage, riddled with holes by the Combat Rooster, and gasped internally. So powerful.

Then they immediately reported back to the boss. After receiving authorization, Gong Shuxie led them to his father.

Gong Shuxu's expression turned a bit strange after hearing their proposal.

Gong Shuxie said, "Dad, this is good for him too. He's in this state. Leaving some money for his family isn't a bad idea."

Gong Shuxu asked, "How much are you planning to offer?"

The negotiator gave a restrained smile, but their tone carried a hint of pride. "The boss said we could offer over one hundred million."

This price couldn't be called high. Chen Gu's one beast egg had sold for ten billion, but an Energy Gathering Mechanical Species still posed significant hidden risks. It was a risky investment, so an offer exceeding one hundred million Starshields was already quite generous.

The club had performed poorly last season, so this year they had invested heavily in two expensive giant beasts, hoping to turn their fortunes around, and their funds were running low.

And for ordinary people, a sum exceeding one hundred million was already incredibly intimidating.

A prisoner like Chen Gu, receiving over one hundred million Starshields out of thin air—how could he possibly refuse to sell? That's what the people from the Dilin Club were thinking.

Gong Shuxu coughed. "Fine, go and see what he says."

Then the old man emphasized again, "No direct contact."

「...」

Separated by thick protective glass, Gong Shuxie and the negotiators met Chen Gu. Chen Gu was somewhat puzzled. What do these people want from me?

When they started talking, Chen Gu found it quite amusing.

"You want to buy the Combat Rooster?"

"Yes," the negotiator smiled. "Rest assured, our boss is very sincere and has offered a very generous price."

Chen Gu leaned back in his chair and asked lazily, "How much?"

"Thirty million Starshields!" The negotiator felt a rush of adrenaline as he stated this number. Such a large sum of money would take him several lifetimes to earn! Yet, what had the person on the other side of the glass done? They had merely gotten lucky, finding an obedient Energy Gathering Mechanical Species.

With a sneer, Chen Gu stood up and turned to leave. "Not selling."

The negotiator was stunned. What's going on? That's thirty million, not three thousand! You don't even want to discuss it?

"Hey, hey..." he called out hastily. "Don't hurry off! We can still negotiate, discuss it!"

"Forty million!"

Chen Gu still didn't turn back.

"Fifty million!"

Chen Gu still didn't turn back.

"Eighty million!" He raised the offer by thirty million in one breath, believing that this time Chen Gu would surely return. However, Chen Gu didn't even pause. Seeing him about to actually leave, the negotiator steeled himself. "One hundred million!"

Chen Gu did stop then, turned around, and came back to the glass.

The negotiator was ecstatic. "You're willing to sell?"

Without a word, Chen Gu opened his private account. The string of zeroes on display nearly blinded everyone watching!

Billions...

Then Chen Gu said indifferently, "Don't waste your effort. I'm not selling."

Of course, Chen Gu was never going to sell. Everyone believed the victor had the potential to eventually become a super lifeform. Only a fool would sell that.

He showed his private account merely to make them give up, to tell them he didn't need the money.

He turned and walked away again. This time, even the negotiator didn't know what to do. The highest budget the boss had given them was one hundred and twenty million, as that was all the club had left after deducting necessary operating expenses.

But clearly, that price was not going to satisfy the other party.

Gong Shuxie, standing to the side, gritted his teeth and called out to Chen Gu, "I am Gong Shuxu's third son!"

Chen Gu stopped. He had to give some face to Gong Shuxu's son. He turned around and asked, "Hmm?"

Gong Shuxie didn't want to resort to this, but he was exceptionally keen on this Energy Gathering Mechanical Species. Moreover, he had been the one to suggest this deal to the boss, insisting they acquire the creature at any cost.

"The trouble you're in isn't minor, is it?" Gong Shuxie pointed at the security collar on him, then said, "My father can help you. Just sell us that Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, and I can convince him to find a way to lighten your charges..."

Chen Gu burst into laughter and turned away.

Gong Shuxie was baffled. What is this guy laughing about? What's so funny? Hey, hey, hey, you're locked up, and you're still this optimistic?

It could only be said that Gong Shuxie wasn't from the Bureau of Mystic Security. Although, due to his family, he had some vague knowledge about Professionals, he didn't recognize the highest-level security collar. Otherwise, he never would have tried to "negotiate" with Chen Gu like this.

The negotiators left, dejected. Gong Shuxie and his colleagues were also disheartened, racking their brains for a way to make Chen Gu comply.

But before they could devise a plan, Gong Shuxu found out from the surveillance footage what his third son had done.

Gong Shuxie was dragged away by him and given a severe beating. With a bruised and swollen face, he was too ashamed to show himself to his colleagues for several days.

And Gong Shuxu, too, was too ashamed to show his face to Chen Gu for several days.

Chen Gu and the Combat Rooster, however, were happy with the peace and quiet. But soon, the main bureau came up with a solution, and a brand-new cage was sent over.

Gong Shuxu introduced it to Chen Gu. "This is a prototype developed based on the abilities of a Quantum Wizard: the Dimensional Cage."

Chapter 312: Pollution Detection (1)

Chen Gu glanced around. He felt that since it was a sample, there might be something "improper" about it, but as the "Quantum Wizard," he was fearless and entered with the Combat Rooster in tow.

This time, he finally entered Capital Star safe and sound.

When Gong Shuxu was "escorting" Chen Gu into the Bureau of Mystic Security building, he saw Bai Yunpeng in his crisp military uniform, brazenly standing at the entrance, saying to Aviloya, "We had an agreement beforehand. If anything happens to Chen Gu, both Marshal Nan Zhendong and I will have a bone to pick with you!"

Aviloya bit her lip. "Do you think this is some kind of illegal human experimentation crime syndicate?"

"Humph," Bai Yunpeng, a military heavyweight, though no longer young, made a face that read "like hell I trust you" and glanced sidelong at Aviloya. However, when the Valkyrie's aura began to turn increasingly fierce, he instantly became serious. "I demand the military appoint a representative to supervise the entire process of Chen Gu's examination!"

Playing the tactics game, of course. Being flexible and knowing when to make a strategic retreat—that's basic.

Aviloya was indeed angry, her cool, handsome face covered with frost. Although she did not draw her sword due to the public setting, her entire being radiated sharp sword intent.

The two warriors behind Bai Yunpeng gritted their teeth and stepped forward to protect Marshal Bai, who was recklessly testing limits on the verge of provoking death.

Bai Yunpeng, however, stood with his hands behind his back, face cold, and humphed softly as he brushed away non-existent dust from his marshal's epaulets.

Tactics: Bluffing.

He just didn't believe Aviloya would dare to lay a hand on him in the middle of the street. Still, when this woman got angry, she really was frightening—second only to the tigress back home.

Aviloya took a deep breath, suppressing her rage, and said sternly, "Bai Yunpeng, you've crossed the line. Is the military trying to intervene in the internal affairs of the Bureau of Mystic Security?"

This charge was quite heavy. If mishandled, it could spark a full-blown conflict between the Bureau of Mystic Security and the military. Bai Yunpeng immediately denied, "You know very well that's not my intention; I'm just worried about Chen Gu."

Aviloya replied coolly, "I have already informed Chen Jixian, and he will accompany Chen Gu throughout."

Bai Yunpeng could find no other pretext. Besides, his presence today was merely to exert pressure on Aviloya; he hadn't really expected any substantial gains.

"Humph." He snorted coldly and gestured for his men to leave. "Aviloya, you are also a supreme powerhouse. Please make sure your word is your bond!"

Aviloya waited until he was far away before she let out a soft exhale. She had managed to drive Bai Yunpeng away but was also thoroughly infuriated by the bastard.

Gong Shuxu stepped forward. "Director-General, I have brought Chen Gu back."

Aviloya, relieved, nodded and said, "This journey has been hard on you, elder. Take Chen Gu to the underground laboratory. Dr. Meng Ji is waiting for him."

Gong Shuxu nodded. Dr. Meng Ji was a renowned figure in the Bureau of Mystic Security. Though not a practitioner, his research in the field of contamination was unique.

Moreover, his personality was somewhat similar to Gong Shuxu's; he was uncompromising and fair in dealing with mutants. No mutant could ever escape scrutiny under his watch.

In Dr. Meng Ji's laboratory were many instruments he had personally crafted, capable of detecting even the most deeply hidden signs of contamination.

The elevator descended rapidly, soon arriving at Dr. Meng Ji's lab. However, when Gong Shuxu saw the doctor, his expression was grim.

"I'm very busy!"

"Every minute is precious for an expert of my level. Any of our discoveries could alter the course of history!"

"But to have me waste my precious time overseeing a mere Second Energy Level pollution monitoring experiment? Aviloya has lost her mind!"

In the entire Bureau of Mystic Security, perhaps only Dr. Meng Ji had the audacity to "evaluate" the Valkyrie in such a manner.

...

Slanted above this laboratory was a huge one-way mirror. Behind this glass stood Aviloya and Chen Jixian, who could see and hear everything below, while those beneath remained unaware of their presence.

Of course, Dr. Meng Ji knew that Aviloya was above, clearly hearing his "evaluation" of her. Yet Meng Ji didn't care. On the contrary, he deliberately let her hear it as a way of expressing his discontent.

Meanwhile, Chen Jixian stood quietly in front of the glass, watching everything below, his half-lowered eyelids as still as the surface of an ancient well.

Gong Shuxu brought Chen Gu out; the Combat Rooster was still inside the Dimensional Cage. It took quite a bit of soothing from Chen Gu for the rooster to agree to stay calmly inside by itself.

Chen Jixian's expression and body remained motionless, but Aviloya sensed a complete emotional relaxation wash over him.

Below, Dr. Meng Ji cast only a glance at Chen Gu, "That's it? Hah!"

Facing someone even more "smelly and tough" than himself, Gong Shuxu could only urge, "Let's start the check quickly. Finishing earlier can also save your time."

Dr. Meng Ji found this reasonable and immediately adopted the idea, gesturing with his hand, "Start right away!"

"Begin with the most basic physical fitness test, then proceed to the professional ability assessment."

One machine after another powered up, and his researchers sprang into action like fleeing rabbits. Everyone understood clearly that at this time, whoever caused a delay would be wasting Dr. Meng Ji's time—and to waste his time was to invite his deadliest wrath.

Aviloya might at most receive a few complaints, but their futures were all in the hands of Dr. Meng Ji.

Chen Gu was laid down on a metallic flatbed, which then moved along a maglev track, sliding him inside a huge, spherical device.

It started to rotate, emitting a soft hum of electric current.

After a while, he heard Dr. Meng Ji ranting outside, "Do you all not want to work anymore? How can you be so careless? He is Second Energy Level, not Fourth Energy Level! Is this his data?"

"You've wasted a full twenty minutes of my time!

"Go and retest immediately—carefully, carefully, carefully! If there's another mistake, whoever is responsible can get lost. I don't have that much time to correct your errors!"

Then, Chen Gu felt the spherical device commence rotation once more, the hum of current resuming...

When the device stopped again, there was still no sound from outside. Dr. Meng Ji's loud voice returned, "What's happening? Is the data not out yet? Are you all useless? Can't you do such a simple task properly?"

"It, it's out..." an older researcher said with trepidation, "It's the same as last time."

"Nonsense!" Meng Ji was furious, pushing aside the other researchers to begin testing personally.

Chen Gu rolled his eyes on the metallic flatbed. Sure enough, the spherical device began to rotate for the third time.

When the device stopped once more, silence filled the air again. After a while, Dr. Meng Ji yelled again, "This data is wrong! There is definitely no mistake in my operation. The device must be faulty!"

Chapter 313: Pollution Detection (2)

Chen Gu chuckled from within the instrument. When others produce such data, it's because they operated it incorrectly; but when *he* does it, it's the instrument that's at fault.

Dr. Meng Ji, on the other hand, couldn't care less what others thought of him. He remained stubbornly absorbed in his own logic, vigorously waving his arms as if he were a lion commanding his pride. "Everyone, get moving! Check this instrument!" he roared.

"Who's normally responsible for maintaining these instruments? I must hold them accountable for wasting so much of our time..."

Chen Gu was brought out. Seeing Dr. Meng Ji's extreme displeasure, he asked with a smile, "Why can't my physical fitness be equivalent to the Fourth Energy Level?"

Dr. Meng Ji clearly felt that speaking to someone at the Second Energy Level was a waste of his energy, so he replied quickly and tersely, "Absolutely impossible. Even the most outstanding individuals at the Second Energy Level can only achieve the physical fitness of a Third Energy Level."

He was an expert. Being with the Bureau of Mystic Security, he had seen countless special agents and various professionals. Some professions inherently focused on physical fitness, so it wasn't uncommon for someone at the Second Energy Level to be on par with the Third Energy Level in terms of physical conditioning.

What was rare was for a Second Energy Level individual to match the *limits* of the Third Energy Level.

For a Second Energy Level to match the limits of the Fourth Energy Level, however, was simply unreasonable; it violated the fundamental common sense of the professional field.

But I know it wasn't an instrument malfunction, Chen Gu thought. It's because of... my damned gluttony. On that planet, I ate so many strange and exotic things. Although it was a bit embarrassing, it must have had a miraculous effect on improving my physical fitness.

But Dr. Meng Ji refused to believe it, and Chen Gu couldn't be bothered to explain.

Behind the pane of glass, Aviloya gently touched her chin. Could it be the traits of multiple professions?

A group of researchers had been fussing around for a long time, but none of them dared to report to Dr. Meng Ji. Seeing their timid appearance, Dr. Meng Ji flew into a rage. "What's going on? Isn't there a single man among you brave enough to speak up?"

Finally, they all spoke in unison, "Doctor, there's nothing wrong with the instrument."

Even the arrogant and obstinate Dr. Meng Ji finally realized something was amiss. Without a word, he personally rushed to re-examine the instrument, recalibrated it with the baseline data, and indeed found there was no problem!

He whirled around. As he looked at Chen Gu's body again, his eyes were now filled with a burning eagerness!

"So, you're a treasure after all!" Dr. Meng Ji zipped to Chen Gu's side in an instant. He folded his arms, stroked his chin, and chuckled eerily.

A mad scientist, and an unbearably sleazy one at that, Chen Gu thought, goosebumps rising all over his skin. "What are you doing? Stay away from me..."

Dr. Meng Ji pointed to another instrument. "Put him in there. Next, we'll test his fundamental energy units."

The results came out quickly. This time, Dr. Meng Ji exclaimed, "One hundred and thirty-two fundamental energy units!"

He no longer questioned his researchers but still went forward to personally re-test. The result was the same.

These fundamental energy units were a metric uniquely created by Dr. Meng Ji, used to assess the "strength" of professionals.

According to his research, the First Energy Level was typically above twenty units but usually below forty. Only a very few could reach around fifty.

The Second Energy Level was above forty and below sixty; similarly, only an extremely small number could reach eighty.

The fundamental energy units did not increase regularly between each Energy Level.

The Third Energy Level ranged from sixty to ninety units, with a limit of one hundred and five.

Chen Gu's fundamental energy unit data, however, had already exceeded the limit of the Third Energy Level! Although it hadn't reached the limit of the Fourth Energy Level, and wasn't as outrageously high as his physical conditioning, this... this was already incredibly abnormal. Searching through the entire history of the Bureau of Mystic Security, even the entire history of the Confederation, no Second Energy Level individual had ever reached such a level.

Dr. Meng Ji's hands trembled, and the wolf-like glint in his eyes grew even brighter and more intense!

Aviloya pressed a communication button, her cool and pleasant voice filling the entire laboratory. "Dr. Meng Ji, do you still think I'm wasting your time?"

"Don't disturb me!" Dr. Meng Ji bellowed, his full attention on Chen Gu. He seemed to be muttering to himself in thought, "Is pollution the cause? It's possible, but based on the data I have, even pollution couldn't bring about such a significant increase. No, this little boy is too interesting! I must figure him out completely, inside and out!"

Chen Gu broke out in a cold sweat. Are all mad scientists this unhinged?!

Dr. Meng Ji once again waved his arm forcefully, berating all his researchers. "All of you, get moving! Use every piece of equipment on him! I need to understand exactly what's going on with him!"

Aviloya's dissatisfied voice sounded again. "Dr. Meng Ji, I expect you to first ascertain whether he has mutated!"

Dr. Meng Ji grumbled in displeasure but still said, "Fine."

The researchers swiftly arranged various instruments, and the checks were carried out one by one.

When the final results came out, Dr. Meng Ji vigorously scratched his nest-like hair. He spun around abruptly and waved his arms exaggeratedly at the glass pane in frustration. "Aviloya! Director-General! Your Excellency Valkyrie! Are you joking with me?"

"My time is so precious! Why must you insist on having me waste it on such meaningless matters?"

Aviloya was unmoved, simply asking, "And the results?"

"The result is that his mental purity has reached 98.45 percent!" Dr. Meng Ji roared. "I've never seen a professional with such high mental purity in my entire life! His likelihood of succumbing to corruption is even lower than yours!"

Aviloya's first reaction was: That's absolutely impossible! With those sixteen adult films, this guy's mental purity couldn't possibly be that high!

But she couldn't voice this thought. Besides, it didn't make sense logically. Just based on the countless times he has pushed past his limits and overused his professional skills, he shouldn't have such a high purity level.

Aviloya pondered for a moment, then asked, "Why is it so high?"

Dr. Meng Ji waved his hand impatiently. "How would I know? Perhaps this delightful little boy has an inherently pure soul. Perhaps this delightful little boy possesses an unwavering conviction. Or maybe this delightful little boy is simply a genuinely good and pure person... I don't care about all that! In any case, I've completed the task you assigned me. Now, this delightful little boy... he's mine!"

Hearing Dr. Meng Ji repeat "delightful little boy" made Chen Gu's skin crawl. The chilling sensation completely shattered the joy he'd felt knowing he had no risk of corruption, leaving him with the dreadful thought that if he fell into this mad scientist's hands, his virtue would truly be in peril.

He howled, "Your Excellency Aviloya! Director-General! I pledge my firm loyalty to the Bureau of Mystic Security! I'll never defect to the military! Save me, please!"

Then he shouted again, "Your Excellency Gong Shuxu! You owe me! You said if anything came up, you'd be here with one call! Well, I have a very serious problem right now...!"

Chapter 314: Admission

Dr. Meng Ji lightly pressed a button. With a ZIZZ from the equipment, Chen Gu realized his voice could no longer be heard.

Dr. Meng Ji rubbed his hands together, an excited twinkle in his eyes. "Let's get everything moving! I want to figure out what little secrets this adorable little boy has!"

But at that moment, the airtight doors of the laboratory slid open with a HISS, and Aviloya quickly entered with Chen Jixian in tow.

"Everyone, out!" Aviloya commanded.

Dr. Meng Ji nearly jumped to his feet. "What did you say? You want to kick me out of my own laboratory?"

This time, Aviloya did not indulge him. Her eyes, deep as the ocean, stared directly at him. "Yes. This is an order from the Director-General of the Bureau of Mystic Security: everyone, including you, Dr. Meng Ji, out!"

Dr. Meng Ji's mouth fell open. He almost tore off his lab coat to resign on the spot, but he quickly convinced himself. Where else but the Bureau of Mystic Security could he pursue his unbridled research on Professionals? Besides, there was this adorable little boy, like a treasure waiting for him to explore and develop.

He forcefully restrained himself and said fiercely to Aviloya, "Don't break anything in my lab!"

"Go," Dr. Meng Ji called out and led his people away.

Aviloya approached Chen Gu. Gong Shuxu, who had been silent all along, stepped forward to advise, "Director-General, it's dangerous!"

Aviloya waved her hand. "Since Dr. Meng Ji said *he* poses absolutely no danger of corruption, then there won't be. I won't be corrupted. Don't worry."

She pressed a button lightly, and Chen Gu could communicate with the outside world again.

Chen Gu instinctively shrank back, his reaction even more exaggerated than the last time he'd faced Aviloya directly. Yet Aviloya remained unfazed, her expression like still water. She looked straight at him and asked calmly, "Chen Gu, on behalf of the entire Bureau of Mystic Security, I need to ask you some questions. This is very important. You must answer truthfully."

She stepped aside to reveal Chen Jixian. "Director Chen is here as a witness."

Chen Gu glanced at his older son, noticing the latter's usual half-lidded, unchanging expression. Chen Gu nodded slightly, having already guessed what Aviloya was about to ask.

Indeed, Aviloya immediately continued, "Chen Gu, do you hold multiple professions?"

At this point, Chen Gu didn't beat around the bush and nodded frankly. "Yes."

Even though she had guessed it, the answer still made Aviloya's breath catch.

"How did you accomplish this? Besides being a Radiation Missionary, what other professions do you have?" Aviloya pressed, her voice laced with an eagerness she couldn't quite hide despite herself.

Chen Gu, in contrast, was quite calm. He knew he had to push his acting skills to the absolute limit to emerge unscathed from Aviloya's intense questioning.

"I will first answer the questions I can. Besides Radiation Missionary, I also have three other professions: Star Battle Instructor, Quantum Wizard, and Brain Domain Hacker."

Chen Jixian's eyelids abruptly lifted, an incredulous light flashing in his eyes.

Aviloya also exclaimed, "Four professions in total?" She had originally suspected Chen Gu held three.

Chen Gu nodded. "Yes, but Brain Domain Hacker was newly awakened during this operation."

Awakening... Aviloya silently repeated the word to herself. Indeed, Professionals can awaken naturally, but this mostly occurs with older professions. In the realm of new professions, such occurrences are rare.

Moreover, the awakening of new professions often required replicating the special environment in which that profession first emerged. So, what was the special environment that gave birth to the Brain Domain Hacker?

Aviloya carefully recalled. It was back in the Mother Star Era, when humanity was about to embark on its grand interstellar exploration. An explosion occurred at a large particle collider laboratory, set up by a major consortium outside a city, leading to a terrible disaster. During that disaster, a reclusive programmer in the city was experimenting with linking the human brain to computers. He then became the first Brain Domain Hacker. But where on that planet could a similar special environment be found?

She looked at Chen Gu doubtfully. Chen Gu remained calm, his eyes clear and without a trace of guilt as he met the Valkyrie's gaze. "I know this is hard to believe. In fact, what I'm about to say is something I can't answer myself: I don't know how I did it either.

"Apart from Radiation Missionary, which I awakened to methodically in the generator, all my other professions awakened inexplicably at critical moments.

"Moreover, these awakening processes bore little resemblance to the original awakening environments of the first-generation Professionals.

"If the Bureau needs this information, I can record the details of each process and submit them to you."

Aviloya nodded. "Alright."

After a pause, she asked, "Why didn't you confess to the Bureau earlier?"

Chen Gu gave a bitter smile. "I didn't dare."

Aviloya's lips moved slightly, but she didn't voice the question forming in her mind: So why did you willingly expose yourself this time?

On that planet, everyone understood that Chen Gu could have fled on his own using his Professional abilities. He wouldn't have needed to expose his secret and could have survived comfortably. Yet, he made a choice. He fought alongside all the warriors until the very last moment, securing a glimmer of hope for the others to survive.

Thinking of such a person, Aviloya once again felt that peculiar sense of incongruity. Was he really the same shameless little thief from all those years ago? Or had he... grown up?

Aviloya couldn't find the answer. But setting aside his checkered past and looking at him now—not only his steadfast defense of the cave stronghold but also all his subsequent actions on the planet—everything could only be described as outstanding.

Such a hero deserved his due, rather than being confined to a laboratory, Aviloya couldn't help but think.

However, she was the Director-General. She needed to consider the bigger picture and couldn't let Chen Gu off so easily.

After a moment's contemplation, she continued, "The benefits previously promised to you will be honored in full. Furthermore, I will grant you the status of a Senior Advisor within the Bureau—a rank equal to that of Lord Gong Shuxu."

Chen Gu looked at Gong Shuxu, who smiled and nodded at him.

Senior Advisor? Chen Gu speculated. Isn't that about the same status as an 'old venerable' from the fantasy novels of my previous life? I guess I'm at the 'old monster' level now! Well, if I count the time spent in Soul Imprisonment, I'm really not young at all.

"Your situation must remain confidential for now. Otherwise, if word gets out before we understand how you can hold multiple professions, it could send massive shockwaves through the entire Professional field and potentially lead to disaster."

Chen Gu nodded. "I understand."

"Also, we need your full cooperation with Dr. Meng Ji's research. Can you do that?"

Chen Gu instinctively replied, "I guarantee it."

Chapter 315: Bargaining

Aviloya and Gong Shuxu exchanged a glance, their minds on high alert. This isn't good, this guy is almost brainwashed by the military. We must be careful not to let him be poached by them!

"Alright, then, Chen Jixian will stay here with you," Aviloya said and turned to leave. Chen Gu tentatively asked from behind, "Um... Director-General, may I ask about that special research fund you mentioned before, approximately how much is it?"

In that instant, Aviloya thought: As expected, he's still that little thief.

She turned around again, gazing at Chen Gu with a half-mocking smile and asked, "How much do you want it to be?"

Chen Gu knew that at this time, he should of course say whatever amount the leader gave was fine. But remembering his own hardships and near-death experiences, only to return without a hero's welcome and instead be treated as an experimental guinea pig, he couldn't suppress his dissatisfaction and quipped, "Our Bureau of Mystic Security is a big organization, and after all, you, our Director-General, have made a promise. It should be at least eight hundred million or a billion, right?"

Let me tell you, that character standing next to you—my son—he kicked me out of the house and still gave me one billion.

"Haha," Aviloya chuckled coldly and said indifferently, "One million two hundred thousand."

"How much?" Chen Gu exclaimed. "That won't do, absolutely not!" He rolled his eyes. Aviloya's anger seemed to almost tangibly float around her. "What did you say?"

Her voice was icy cold.

Chen Gu glared. "That price won't work!"

At that price, aren't you basically trying to get my services for free?!

Aviloya pressed forward. "Say that again!"

Chen Gu went all in. "I refuse to cooperate! I could say it ten thousand times, and it'd still be the same. If it comes to it, I might as well turn to Bai Yunpeng!"

On Aviloya's smooth forehead, a vein throbbed again. "Who are you pulling that 'I'm your father' act with?"

Chen Gu cowered instantly, pointing at Chen Jixian. "With him!"

Chen Jixian: "???"

Gong Shuxu: "???" Chen Jixian didn't even rebut.

Aviloya gnashed her teeth, weighing her options. "Five million, and not a penny more."

"Two hundred million, or it's no deal!"

Aviloya snapped, "The Bureau of Mystic Security is not a flea market!"

Chen Gu shot back, "And I'm no cabbage!"

Aviloya said ominously, "Do you really think you can be so fearless just because Bai Yunpeng has your back?"

Chen Gu said, "My contribution this time wasn't small, right? Even as a bonus, it should be more than five million. If you're reluctant to give it, then I'll have to ask the military for it. That's right, after all, the main merit this time lies with the military."

Aviloya, hearing him mention Bai Yunpeng and the military over and over, felt her shoulders beginning to tremble.

If she were just a simple Valkyrie, she would have already struck this little thief and seriously injured him with a single sword blow. Regardless of how many professions he held, he certainly couldn't have withstood one strike from her.

But again, she was the Director-General and had to consider the whole picture. Most of the time, she had to cast aside her personal feelings.

Chen Gu held multiple professions, and this secret had to be kept in the hands of the Bureau of Mystic Security. Otherwise, future work would be impossible to carry out.

"Thirty million, that's my bottom line!"

Chen Gu's mentality from his past life made him instinctively want to say, Sister, you can give it a try. Actually, your bottom line might be lower than you predict. Fortunately, he realized in time who he was dealing with. Had he actually said that out loud, he probably would have met a glorious end on the spot.

So he ramped up his acting skills. After displaying an exaggerated mix of "deliberation," "conflict," "difficulty," and "reluctance" on his face, he suddenly pointed at Chen Jixian. "It's a deal, but with one additional condition: the Bureau will cover all resources for his next advancement."

Chen Jixian didn't expect to be brought up again. He had already been figuratively shot while lying down, and now he was hit by a golden pie while still down.

Indeed, Aviloya had once promised Chen Jixian this condition, but Chen Jixian had never agreed. Now that Chen Gu suddenly brought it up, she almost suspected that this father and son were colluding to trick her.

But she quickly realized that was impossible. Chen Gu was under strict control and couldn't possibly have secretly contacted Chen Jixian.

What Chen Gu didn't know was how expensive this condition he proposed was! It wasn't a matter of just eight hundred million or a billion...

Of course, the majority of such resources were in the hands of the Bureau of Mystic Security. If the Bureau had to choose between these resources and tens of billions of Starshields, they would definitely choose to give up the Starshields.

Aviloya looked meaningfully at Chen Jixian, then said to Chen Gu, "Do you know how many resources his next advancement will require? Even selling Chen's Biotech might not cover it."

Chen Gu was startled. He knew about Chen's Biotech; its value had recently risen, getting close to one hundred billion.

He internally yelled: Just great, Chen Jixian, you can't even be honest with your own father! You told me last time you were at the Second Energy Level! Can the Second Energy Level be so powerful as to easily obliterate an Angel Envoy of the True Knowledge Sin? Could an advancement at the Second Energy Level really burn through over a hundred billion? You're trying to bankrupt your father!

But what could he do? This was his own son, after all.

Alright, although that's undeniable, saying it like this still doesn't make me feel very confident...

However, to Chen Gu's surprise, Aviloya agreed to his condition with a nod. "There's no more funding for research. You will fully cooperate with Dr. Meng Ji's research, and the Bureau will bear all expenses for Director Chen's next advancement."

Chen Gu paused, not knowing this was a condition Aviloya had originally offered to Chen Jixian.

For the Bureau of Mystic Security, coming up with a billion in cash could be tight, but producing resources worth ten billion was not a problem.

Those rare materials were all controlled by the Star Nation, so it would be incredibly costly for others to acquire them—the price difference could be tenfold, even a hundredfold on the market! For the Bureau, it was just a matter of using some of their yearly quota.

If Chen Gu could be kept content within the Bureau, then it was all worth it.

"Deal," Chen Gu agreed after a moment's thought. He admitted he had become somewhat conceited; after all, there were still several hundred million in cash in his account, so he could do without the Bureau's thirty million.

As long as his adult son could advance.

However, after this matter was settled, he definitely needed to have a talk with that crafty son of his, Chen Jixian, about what his profession really entailed.

「Outside the laboratory.」

Dr. Meng Ji's research assistants were sitting in small groups, each holding various kinds of drinks. Dr. Meng Ji, however, was by himself, approached by no one. In his hand, he held a cup of "Energy Potion."

It was a concoction of his own making that could greatly stimulate brain activity.

Its effect was almost equivalent to... a stimulant. Despite Dr. Meng Ji's strong promotion, no one in the entire lab dared drink it except for himself.

Dr. Meng Ji kept checking the time, almost every second, growing very impatient. Aviloya had actually made him wait outside for two minutes and forty seconds!

Chapter 316: Being an Animal in the Zoo, Undergoing Research at the Institute (1)

Just as the doctor was about to lose his composure, the laboratory's airtight door opened. Without being summoned, the doctor stormed in, bellowing accusations, "Aviloya, you know how precious my time is..."

Aviloya had a high tolerance for his impatience. She waited without a change in expression for all the researchers to enter, then closed the airtight door again before instructing the management AI of the central bureau building, "Top-level secrecy measures!"

In an instant, the laboratory was completely isolated from the outside world.

Dr. Meng Ji frowned. "What do you mean?"

Aviloya said, "Doctor, what I am about to say is the highest secret of the Bureau of Mystic Security. Everyone present, if anyone dares to leak this information, it is an act of treason!"

"Don't try to scare me with such empty and grand accusations. You've already wasted nearly three minutes of my time. If you have something important, just say it," the doctor said impatiently.

Aviloya, though somewhat displeased, maintained an even tone as she said, "Since you consistently feel that I'm wasting your time, I'll take Chen Gu, who holds four positions, with me. I believe Dr. Ferdinand from the Highland Research Institute would be very happy to take over this research. Gong Shuxu, take Chen Gu, and let's go."

Dr. Meng Ji's ears visibly twitched. With a sudden display of unexpected agility, he darted forward and intercepted Aviloya, a hint of madness in his eyes. "What did you say? Tell me I misheard. What does 'holding four positions' mean?"

Aviloya inwardly chuckled. You lose your temper so easily; a fish like you takes the bait too readily.

"You heard me correctly. And by 'holding four positions,' I mean just that. Chen Gu is the first in the history of professionals to multi-class, and he holds four positions at that. And... I don't know whether he will awaken a fifth or sixth profession."

She waved her hand lightly. "Alright, I've said too much already, wasting another minute of your precious time. My apologies. Gong Shuxu, let's hurry. We don't want to be a nuisance here."

Gong Shuxu tried to contain his laughter as he pretended to lead Chen Gu away.

THUMP!

Dr. Meng Ji, clutching at Aviloya's pants leg, knelt on one knee.

Aviloya said indifferently, "Doctor, what are you doing? You understand clearly that our relationship is purely professional; we're not suitable for each other."

The researchers behind them snickered. The Director-General was a woman, after all. You can't offend a woman, especially a beautiful one. Look, even someone like the doctor was being toyed with.

Dr. Meng Ji looked at her imploringly. "I was wrong. Director-General, my time is entirely at your disposal. Please, feel free to waste it as you wish!"

"Leave this lovely little boy to me, and I will uncover the secret behind his ability to multi-class."

"We are on the same side here. If you hand him over to the Highland Research Institute, you'll have to share this tremendous achievement with those decrepit members of the Senate."

"Besides, what could that incompetent Ferdinand possibly discover? His skill level is far below mine, as you know. I'm at the pinnacle of this field!"

Aviloya looked at him with a half-smirk. "Let go."

"Yes!" Dr. Meng Ji promptly released his grip.

"Get up."

"Yes!" The doctor obediently complied once more. Then, sticking his tongue out playfully, he asked, "So, can I have him?"

"He is yours," Aviloya said as she walked towards the exit. "Doctor, remember: no unconventional research methods are allowed."

"What?" Dr. Meng Ji was dumbfounded. "Such a cute little boy, and you won't let me do as I please? How am I supposed to make any breakthroughs then?"

Aviloya stressed again, "If there's even a hint of you breaking the rules, he goes to Dr. Ferdinand."

Chen Gu felt like a piece of merchandise being passed around by Aviloya, which was quite unpleasant. Moreover, Dr. Meng Ji didn't seem to be the sharpest tool in the shed; everything out of his mouth gushed like an unstoppable torrent, spewing all sorts of outrageous statements that sent shivers down Great Actor Chen's spine.

"Perhaps..." Chen Gu timidly interjected, "I should just go to the Highland Research Institute."

Aviloya suddenly turned, beaming brilliantly at Chen Gu. "Don't forget, you just sold yourself at a very high price. You no longer have any say in the matter."

Chen Gu was speechless, glaring resentfully at his grown son, who remained completely calm, not even glancing his way.

Well, at least the selling price wasn't too bad, Chen Gu consoled himself.

Aviloya left, while Chen Jixian and Gong Shuxu remained. Truthfully, Gong Shuxu wasn't needed at this point, but the old man was still a bit worried about Chen Gu, the annoying Brain Domain Hacker. Since he had no other pressing tasks, he decided to stay as well.

Dr. Meng Ji clapped his hands, bellowing at his researchers, "Get to work! Let's thoroughly explore the little secrets of this adorable little boy's body!"

Over the next ten days or so, Chen Gu experienced incredible suffering. Due to Aviloya's warning and the constant oversight of Chen Jixian and Gong Shuxu, Dr. Meng Ji only managed to tentatively push the boundaries of prohibited experiments a dozen times. After being resolutely rebuffed by the two observers each time, he finally gave up and resignedly conducted his research using conventional methods.

Even so, his "conventional" methods were far crazier than most. Various extreme procedures caused Chen Gu immense pain.

Blood draws were a given; spinal fluid extractions were just basic operations.

Drawing on his past experiences, Chen Gu fabricated a story about how he had awakened his secondary occupations during major battles.

Dr. Meng Ji, unaware that his research was doomed to fail, continued with high enthusiasm but could never find the right approach.

The most routine part of the research involved Chen Gu repeatedly using the professional skills of his four different occupations inside a huge machine every day. Dr. Meng Ji, never considering Chen Gu's fatigue, pushed him to his limits daily to collect various data.

He even planned to have Chen Gu use his skills beyond his limits to gather more comprehensive data, reasoning that Chen Gu's mental purity was very high, so a slight "transgression" wouldn't pose too much risk of anomalous mutation.

However, Gong Shuxu and Chen Jixian joined forces to stop him.

After a painful ordeal, Dr. Meng Ji obtained all the data he wanted, yet he remained clueless as to why Chen Gu could awaken multiple occupations.

This drove Dr. Meng Ji to exert even more pressure on Chen Gu, and he began to push himself even more frantically. He firmly believed that every puzzle had an answer, and he was undoubtedly the genius capable of finding it.

And so, Chen Gu was dragged through another half month of this, until he awkwardly realized that, under Dr. Meng Ji's coercion, he had accumulated the skill points needed to advance to the Third Energy Level at the fastest possible rate!

Chapter 317: Being an Animal in the Zoo, Undergoing Research at the Institute (2)

But Dr. Meng Ji collapsed first.

He had been drinking seven or eight bottles of his own concoction each day—a potent mixture akin to a stimulant—which led to severe overexertion. Eventually, he swayed and collapsed during his research.

Thus, Dr. Meng Ji was urgently rushed to the hospital, and Chen Gu suddenly found himself with unexpected free time.

The entire research project ground to a halt due to Dr. Meng Ji's illness. Dr. Meng Ji had never bothered to train a second-in-command or successor; his researchers were merely tools to him. All that was required of them was to be obedient, diligent, and error-free.

Consequently, with him gone, there was no one to lead. Everyone was at a loss, unsure how to proceed.

Gong Shuxu reported the matter to Aviloya. By this time, most of the data had been collected. Aviloya considered it and, with a resigned shake of her head, said, "It's time to let him out. Bai Yunpeng has already visited seven or eight times."

If his cooperation was needed, Chen Gu could be summoned back at any time.

After Gong Shuxu left, Aviloya called Qing Ruyan in. "Continue your assignment, and don't forget your responsibilities."

"Yes!"

Aviloya looked at her intently. "I hope you won't forget to report something again, using the poor excuse that you believed I should already be aware of it, rendering your report unnecessary."

Qing Ruyan's heart skipped a beat. She stood at attention and said, "Please rest assured, Director-General, I won't be negligent again."

Aviloya watched her with a playful gaze. "I really wish your previous mistake was simply due to negligence."

「...」

It was Qing Ruyan, armed with the Director-General's authorization, who brought Chen Gu out. Aviloya didn't want to see him again.

When Chen Gu saw her, he smiled warmly, then said with a touch of helplessness, "All those tasty treats I brought for you were unfortunately lost in that star battle. But it doesn't matter. We can go to Witch Star together in the future. I'll show you around and make sure you eat your fill."

Qing Ruyan managed a faint smile. "Let's talk about that later."

Then, she adopted a strictly professional tone. "The Director-General has arranged for you to work at the Bureau. The Bureau will also enroll you in the college entrance exam. Regardless of your results, a university on Capital Star will admit you."

In this era, Capital Star was exceptionally crowded, and its universities had very high admission scores. Qing Ruyan and the others assumed that with Chen Gu frequently skipping classes, his grades wouldn't be good enough to get into a Capital Star university, so they had arranged everything for him.

Transferring him to the Bureau served two purposes: to keep him under close surveillance and to facilitate Dr. Meng Ji's research once he recovered.

Chen Gu nodded. There seems to be some distance between Qing Ruyan and me now, he thought, not as close as before my promotion. He was vaguely aware of some underlying reasons and could only sigh inwardly.

"There's still over half a month until this year's college entrance exam. You can go back to Empire River Star first to hand over your work."

"Okay."

Before returning to Empire River Star, Chen Gu called Bai Yunpeng. After all, he had emerged from the Bureau of Mystic Security's laboratory unscathed largely thanks to Marshal Bai's strong protection.

Bai Yunpeng was overjoyed and immediately arranged to meet Chen Gu, choosing a high-end restaurant and even bringing along his niece, Bai Xianya.

Bai Xianya had no idea she was the bait her unscrupulous uncle was using to lure in Chen Gu, the "big fish." She assumed she was brought along simply because she had always been the liaison with the "Idol Actor" for work purposes.

When the three of them met at the restaurant, Bai Yunpeng immediately let out a hearty laugh and firmly patted Chen Gu on both arms. "Good lad! Tough and audacious—that's a fine soldier!"

"So, are you willing to join the military? You're already the head of our 745 Research Institute, so it's perfectly justifiable to transfer you. I'll go talk to some of the old-timers; Aviloya will have to give them face."

Chen Gu replied with a wry smile, "It's not my decision to make. Chen Jixian is also at the Bureau of Mystic Security."

Bai Yunpeng raised an eyebrow. "Then bring Chen Jixian over too."

Could this mean my 'older son' might have a chance to fulfill his dream? Chen Gu wondered.

He hesitated. "But he only recently transferred his service, and besides... the Bureau of Mystic Security probably won't let him go so easily."

They just paid such a steep price to prepare for Chen Jixian's promotion, only to have him poached right away? The Bureau of Mystic Security would never agree to that.

After Chen Gu explained in detail, Bai Yunpeng frowned. "This Aviloya, she really is a handful. She probably foresaw this step when she agreed to your conditions."

Then he waved his hand dismissively. "No matter. The military's doors are always open to you both. I'll keep an eye out, and if an opportunity arises, I'll definitely scoop you both up. I've seen Chen Jixian's resume; he'd make a great general. He's just been held back by factors unrelated to the battlefield."

They settled down at the table. Bai Yunpeng, in high spirits, slapped the table and boomed, "Bring me four bottles of 'Northwind Inferno' to start!"

Chen Gu nearly dove under the table.

'Northwind Inferno' was a famous liquor in the Confederation. It had a smooth yet potent taste, an extremely high alcohol content, and a long-lasting aftereffect.

Bai Xianya frowned and, quite unceremoniously, advised, "Uncle, you don't handle your liquor well. To leave a good impression on Chen Gu, as both your subordinate and family member, I urge you to... exercise caution."

Bai Yunpeng glared. "Nonsense! Slander! Who says I can't handle my drink?"

Bai Xianya started counting on her fingers. "Seven years ago, at the celebration banquet for the 'Defensive Battle of Shuobei Star,' four honored generals from the front lines had to be rushed to emergency care. Five years ago, during the Central Operations Room's annual dinner, you ended up paying about 960,000 Starshield to repair the enormous sculpture you smashed at the hotel entrance. Four years ago, when the main fleet formation for 'Red Brilliance Sky' was completed, you hosted a dinner for the key contributors, and subsequently, seven technical military officers started keeping their distance from our family..."

"Enough, enough!" Bai Yunpeng's face grew awkward. "If they can't hold their liquor, is that my fault? And as for them keeping their distance, I couldn't care less about being friends with those lightweights! Hmph!"

Then he looked expectantly at Chen Gu. "A master tactician should be able to drink like a fish, right?"

"Uh..." Marshal Bai, I might just be unqualified to be your friend, Chen Gu thought.

Bai Xianya interjected, her eyebrows raised sternly, "Uncle! Chen Gu hasn't even finished high school! If you keep this up, I'm calling Auntie."

"Forget it," Bai Yunpeng pouted. "No drinking then. Let's just eat." He then grumbled, "How boring."

Chen Gu wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and shot Bai Xianya a grateful look.

While they were eating, Bai Yunpeng discussed the final outcome of the great battle. "...The Insect Race abandoned their ground forces. We dispatched a Close Range Attack Fleet, but a combat queen insect hatched inside the primary hive. We lost four Close Range Attack Ships before we managed to kill it."

Chapter 318: Expensive Intelligence (1)

"Boles took his Mutant swarm underground. After searching the globe three times without finding them, we had to give up and withdraw the fleet. We constructed sixteen surveillance bases on the planet's surface, installed four orbital cannons in orbit, and stationed a platoon. The moment their traces are detected, we can immediately fire and eliminate them."

Chen Gu hesitated for a moment before asking, "Is there any news about the Super lifeform within the Confederation?"

Bai Yunpeng took a bite of his food and said, "I was going to discuss this with you anyway. You know how immensely beneficial capturing a Super lifeform can be, so ever since the fleet was recalled, many influential people have been eager to act."

He put down his chopsticks and said to Chen Gu, "From now on, I am not speaking to you as a military marshal, but simply asking as a friend."

Chen Gu promptly nodded. "Please, go ahead."

"Someone has asked me to inquire if they could purchase firsthand information about that Super lifeform from you."

Chen Gu was taken aback. "Me?"

"Yes, you witnessed the Super lifeform with your own eyes, and you even captured one of its offspring," Bai Yunpeng said. "It's not just you. I suspect it won't be long before people approach Gong Shuxu, and even Ma Shuwen."

Chen Gu suddenly understood. "Any detail is crucial when it comes to hunting a Super lifeform."

"Right," Bai Yunpeng nodded. "That's the point. The profits from hunting a Super lifeform are unimaginable, but this is a Super lifeform we're talking about. One misstep, and you could lose your life. So, what are your thoughts? You don't need to have any reservations; I'm just the messenger."

After thinking it over, Chen Gu looked at Bai Yunpeng and asked, "I'd like to hear your advice. I haven't even graduated from high school; I really don't have much experience with this kind of thing."

Bai Yunpeng stroked his chin, feeling somewhat dissatisfied without any alcohol.

"If you really want my advice, I'd tell you to cooperate with them. With me around, I can at least ensure they offer you a fair price."

A Super lifeform is immensely valuable. However, right now you don't have the capability to join this feast. Don't feel resentful; they've built their power and influence over generations of life-or-death struggles."

Chen Gu wasn't naive in this regard; after all, he had lived through two lifetimes.

He nodded. "Alright, please relay to them that as long as the price is fair, I'll tell them whatever they want to know."

Bai Yunpeng nodded. "I knew you wouldn't be impulsive. We're both tacticians; we understand how to weigh the pros and cons."

Bai Xianya, on the other hand, had a hint of regret in her eyes. A Super lifeform, no less!

...

The other party was quite sincere. Knowing Chen Gu was due to return to Empire River Star the day after tomorrow, they immediately asked Bai Yunpeng to arrange a dinner meeting for the following evening.

During the day, Qing Ruyan took the opportunity to show Chen Gu around Capital Star, leading him past the entrance of a university.

"This is the National Second College of Agriculture and Forestry. If nothing unexpected happens, you'll be studying here in the second half of the year."

Chen Gu knew Qing Ruyan wouldn't have asked him out for nothing. He looked at the university with neither fondness nor displeasure.

It was a third-rate university with no particularly strong disciplines. But since it was located on Capital Star, its admission scores were still high.

He looked at Qing Ruyan. They probably all think I can't even get into a university like this, he mused.

In the evening, Chen Gu went to the appointment alone. He was aware he was likely being followed covertly, but he paid it no mind.

This time, the restaurant on Capital Star could be considered top-notch. The other party was a young man who looked to be in his thirties, accompanied by four individuals who seemed to be experts.

To avoid any appearance of partiality, Bai Yunpeng introduced both parties and then excused himself.

The young man leading the other party was named Qiao Shuangmu. The surname "Qiao" was somewhat familiar to Chen Gu; he knew that family wielded considerable influence within the Confederation.

Qiao Shuangmu possessed a natural charisma. Once Bai Yunpeng had left, he gestured towards Chen Gu and said with a smile, "Let's eat first. There's nothing more important than eating. That's how I am—I have to be well-fed before discussing anything."

Chen Gu wholeheartedly agreed. Though his "binge-eating disorder" hadn't flared up recently, his appetite was still astounding.

As they ate, Qiao Shuangmu's eyes lit up. "It seems you and I will have a lot to talk about, Chen," he said with a laugh. "Hahaha!"

Chen Gu gave a "bashful" smile; he'd noticed Qiao Shuangmu's appetite was hardly any smaller than his own.

The four experts had long finished eating and had to wait almost two hours for the two gourmands to demolish their meal. It was nearly 10 p.m. when the two finally wiped their mouths and declared themselves finished.

This shared love for food helped foster an initial sense of trust between them.

Qiao Shuangmu got straight to the point. "Chen Gu, your performance in the recent operation was outstanding. That's why we believe you're the most reliable source of information."

"Let's start with our offer: one hundred million Starshields in cash, a villa on Capital Star, and one more thing—a promise. If you ever need our help in your career, we can assist you once."

"Whatever your thoughts are, we can discuss them."

The offer is fair, Chen Gu thought, but not overly generous.

Successfully hunting a Super lifeform yields an astonishing value in exotic materials alone.

Chen Gu pondered for a moment and then said, "I have one more requirement: I'm about to advance to the Third Energy Level. I hope you can provide all the resources I'll need for it."

Qiao Shuangmu frowned slightly. "Let me calculate that." He then gave a wry smile. "As you know, hunting a Super lifeform is ultimately a business. I have to ensure my 'investors' don't end up at a loss."

Chen Gu nodded with a smile.

After some mental calculation, Qiao Shuangmu nodded. "That's doable."

Chen Gu continued, "And my final request: do a favor for Tau Industrial." That idiot Zhao Ji has helped me several times. As his friend, I want to repay him if I get the chance.

Qiao Shuangmu's expression changed slightly. "Now, that request... is genuinely a bit tricky," he said, looking reluctant.

Chen Gu earnestly pleaded, "Please, trust me. I'm not asking for the impossible. The intelligence I provide will absolutely be worth your investment. I know something no one else does."

Qiao Shuangmu nodded slowly and made a phone call in front of Chen Gu. "Uncle Delos, I need to ask about something. Is Tau Industrial currently in negotiations for any military procurement contracts?"

A steady voice answered over the phone, "Among the six recent tender projects, Tau Industrial has participated in two. One is for the auxiliary cannon systems on main battleships, with a total value of one hundred twenty billion Starshields. The second is for the procurement of First-Class War Chariots, valued at four hundred billion Starshields."

Chapter 319: Expensive Intelligence (2)

Qiao Shuangmu said, "Can the first project be given to Tao Industries?"

The voice on the other end asked, "Does your family know about this?"

"They know. I can represent the Qiao Family this time."

"Okay," the person replied and then hung up.

Qiao Shuangmu gestured to Chen Gu. "Now, can you talk about your exclusive intelligence? You should be very clear that if we're not satisfied, I can call off this deal at any time."

Chen Gu smiled. "Believe me, you won't do that."

The four experts immediately started recording and analyzing, hanging on Chen Gu's every word. They often asked repeatedly about a single term.

When Chen Gu mentioned the mechanical lung, they suddenly became excited. "Is that really so?"

"Absolutely true. And I can tell you the approximate location. With your capabilities, you should be able to find it easily."

Qiao Shuangmu's eyes sparkled, and he smiled. "This piece of intelligence is worth it!"

「At midnight.」

Chen Gu left the restaurant and immediately called Zhao Ji. Zhao Ji asked in a low voice, "What's up?"

Chen Gu asked in surprise, "What are you doing?"

"SHH..." Zhao Ji seemed to move elsewhere before raising his voice slightly. "My wife has fallen asleep. She's been having insomnia lately, and it's not easy for her to fall asleep. I can't disturb her."

Chen Gu silently ridiculed this 'king of moochers' for being surprisingly considerate, then briskly told him, "I've secured the order for Tao Industries for the main Starship's secondary cannons. Go find your wife tomorrow and take the credit."

"HMM?" Zhao Ji, surprised, repeatedly asked, "What? What was that?"

After Chen Gu repeated himself, Zhao Ji was still perplexed. "Oh, okay. I'll tell her tomorrow."

Chen Gu knew from Zhao Ji's reaction that he had no clue about business matters and was completely ignorant of this bid.

After hanging up with Chen Gu, Zhao Ji cautiously returned to the bedroom and gazed at his sleeping wife, sighing tenderly. Tao Industries was a large family business, and his wife was a powerful woman, possibly one of the next leaders of Tao Industries. Outsiders thought he was a 'king of moochers' with a very low status in the family, but Zhao Ji himself knew that to accommodate his homesickness, they lived on Empire River Star, a remote planet, for at least three months a year.

His wife's recent insomnia was due to immense business pressure. Tao Industries was strong, so its competitors were equally formidable and hard to deal with. Each bid and every order involved multiple rounds of intense competition. He doted on his wife, and although it pained him, he knew he had limited ability to help.

He didn't return to bed, fearing he might disturb her, so he lay down on the sofa nearby. The bid for the main Starship's secondary cannons? he thought. It seems to be a business matter, but... what exactly is it? Nevermind, I'll tell Tao Tao tomorrow morning.

Zhao Ji's wife, Tao Tao, could only be considered pretty. Next to Zhao Ji, who had the looks of an idol, they seemed "mismatched," leading to much gossip. Perhaps the couple intentionally created this impression as a protective facade. If they hadn't, outsiders would realize just how important Zhao Ji was to Tao Tao, making him her vulnerability and attracting many overt and covert attacks. But only they knew how good their relationship was; despite decades of marriage, they were as close as when they first met.

「The next morning.」

Zhao Ji was, as usual, helping Tao Tao comb her hair while she applied makeup in front of the mirror. Gently grasping his hand, she said apologetically, "I have to make a trip to Capital Star today. I had promised to spend three more days with you, but there's some business there that I must attend to..."

Zhao Ji suddenly remembered. "That's right, last night Chen Gu, that idiot... AHEM, well, men always have a few roguish friends."

Tao Tao smiled, her lips pursed.

"That guy told me he's secured the bid for the main Starship's secondary cannons for us," Zhao Ji said, then noticed his wife had frozen. "What's wrong?"

Upon hearing the news, Tao Tao's first reaction was, You've got to be kidding!

But then she remembered something: The bid was top secret; I hadn't even mentioned it to Zhao Ji—how did Chen Gu know about it?

Tao Tao said in disbelief, "Aji, could you please call Chen Gu to confirm? That's a business deal worth over a hundred billion..."

Zhao Ji shivered. "How much?"

"The military plans to replace about ten percent of the main Starships' entire secondary cannon systems—a total of one hundred twenty billion Starshields!" Tao Tao reported truthfully.

Even for Tao Industries, this was a sizable deal, and it was a first-mover advantage. Since the military had decided on an upgrade, it certainly meant that all the main Starships would gradually need replacement. This was the first contract. If Tao Industries secured it and the military was satisfied with the results, subsequent orders would very likely be directly awarded to them.

Her trip to Capital Star was specifically for this project. As for another bid involving War Constructs, Tao Industries didn't have much hope, as they lacked a competitive edge in that area.

Yet, she hadn't expected to receive such significant news first thing in the morning. If true, it was an absolute windfall.

"Alright." Zhao Ji also recognized the gravity of the situation. He stopped combing his wife's hair and urgently called Chen Gu. Chen Gu was on a ship heading back to Empire River Star. When he picked up Zhao Ji's call, he asked, "Idiot, what do you need from Dad?"

Zhao Ji had the speakerphone on. Tao Tao burst into laughter at Chen Gu's words, leaving Zhao Ji embarrassed and irritated. He gritted his teeth. "Jerk, my wife is listening right here!"

"OH, OH, OH," Chen Gu said carelessly. "Fine, I'll do you a favor and not call you by your *real* name."

Tao Tao kept laughing, looking at her husband with an expression that clearly said, I understand the friendship between you men.

Zhao Ji felt helpless. "I'm asking you, that thing you mentioned last night, the bid... is it true?"

"It should be true. Someone from the Qiao Family promised me in person," Chen Gu replied, not seeming to care much. It's not a big deal, he thought. A business deal worth one hundred twenty billion Starshields is, of course, significant, but it's a deal that has to be made eventually. The Qiao Family's mediation only required a favor, not any real monetary investment on their part.

Tao Tao couldn't help asking from the side, "Someone from the Qiao Family? May I ask which one?"

Chen Gu decided to clarify. "Qiao Shuangmu. He called Delos in front of me, and Delos agreed to give the secondary cannon bid to you. There's also another one for War Constructs, four hundred billion... I can't do anything about that one."

Tao Tao's breath hitched. She knew it was true. As one of the future leaders being groomed by Tao Industries, she was very familiar with the Confederation's personnel and affairs.

Chapter 320: About to Disperse

The Qiao Family's power within the Confederation was undeniable. Although Qiao Shuangmu wasn't a direct descendant, his role in the family was crucial, especially in handling matters that officials couldn't address directly. Delos, meanwhile, was a general in charge of military equipment procurement.

Tao Tao quickly said, "Thank you so much, your help is a true godsend..."

She hadn't finished speaking when Zhao Ji pushed her aside. "Why are you being so polite to this moron? Hey, hey, hey, Chen Gu, it's me. Mhm, mhm, mhm, you did well this time. When you get back, I might do you the honor of joining you for a meal. Okay, that's it."

Chen Gu burst into laughter and cursed, "Get lost!"

Then, unprompted, both of them hung up the phone with a CLICK.

Tao Tao blinked. What just happened? It seems I still don't quite understand the foolish friendship between men.

"That... isn't good, is it?"

Zhao Ji laughed. "It's fine. You're being too polite; it actually makes him uncomfortable."

Tao Tao's eyes flickered. "Your friend is impressive; he can already leverage the Qiao Family for such a big deal..."

Zhao Ji knew what his wife meant and intended to refuse, but Tao Tao put on such a pitiful expression, which Zhao Ji couldn't resist. He said helplessly, "Alright, alright. When he gets back, I'll invite him to dinner and bring you along. You can ask him yourself if he can introduce Qiao Shuangmu to you."

"That's great! Thank you, husband!"

SMACK! A kiss.

「 」

Chen Gu finally returned to Wuzhaoyin City.

Although his time away hadn't been long, he'd experienced so much that it felt like a lifetime had passed.

He first reported back to the sub-bureau. Melincha and Joseph were overjoyed. "You're finally back! You two were talking about promotions, then the team leader got locked up, and you disappeared. We thought... this team was going to disband."

Chen Gu sighed internally. He really almost hadn't made it back.

Outwardly, however, he offered a reassuring smile. "It's fine. The team leader will definitely pull through."

Selena, ever the little vixen, still feigned indifference, but her gaze involuntarily drifted towards Chen Gu.

"How is the team leader?" Chen Gu asked. "I heard the contamination level is slowly decreasing, but no one knows when he'll be released."

Chen Gu fell silent. Melincha was right; the team was likely to disband.

After this incident, even if Marcus was rescued, the risk of him mutating in the future would be significantly higher. Not only would promotion be difficult, but he would also likely be transferred to a desk job.

And he himself was about to leave Empire River Star soon.

The five-person team was now down to three.

"I'll go see the team leader," Chen Gu said somberly, then headed to the special solitary confinement room.

He could only view a heavily vetted segment of security footage. Marcus looked bored but seemed to be in decent spirits. He had started to gain weight.

As he sighed, Qing Ruyan's voice came from behind him. "Director Mei wants to see you."

When Chen Gu arrived at Mei Lixue's office, the director looked at him with puzzlement. "What exactly happened during this trip? Why did Headquarters decide to transfer you?"

Chen Gu shrugged. "You understand. I can't say."

Mei Lixue didn't blame him. Instead, she seemed somewhat emotional, looking at him with a complex expression. "I truly didn't expect you to be a completely different person after your release from prison. Capital Star is a grand stage; seize this opportunity."

After leaving Mei Lixue's office, Chen Gu went straight to find Chen Jixian.

The Bureau Chief's secretary tried to stop him, but Chen Gu was feeling rather full of himself now. He had made a huge sacrifice to help his 'adult son' with his promotion, so he barged in without a second thought.

Chen Jixian maintained his usual impassive expression and waved his hand, dismissing the secretary.

Chen Gu sat down and got straight to the point. "What's your real Energy Level?"

Chen Jixian regarded him for a moment before answering, "Second Energy Level."

"Bullshit!" Chen Gu scoffed.

Chen Jixian then said, "But I was originally Fifth Energy Level." He took a deep breath, his eyelids half-lowered as he looked at Chen Gu. "During the surprise attack on the Insect Race on Thousand Grass Star, I was gravely injured. My strength has been declining ever since, dropping to the Second Energy Level."

Chen Gu's heart skipped a beat. This was the great meritorious deed that had secured his own release!

He suddenly felt a little ashamed to meet his 'adult son's' gaze. But that wasn't Chen Jixian's implication. He continued, "Back then, I was just like you at the cave stronghold—fighting alone, launching repeated assaults."

Chen Gu almost blurted out, 'Truly worthy of being my son!' but the more he thought about it, the 'order' of things felt... off.

But Chen Jixian wasn't finished. He added, "After pushing my abilities to the limit multiple times, I survived by relying on a soldier's sheer willpower. However, my strength deteriorated, falling from the Fifth Energy Level to the Second."

Chen Gu suddenly noticed a flicker in his 'adult son's' eyes as they brightened, and he instantly realized the man was curious about how he himself had survived.

Chen Gu snorted. Now, here he was, the father, pressing his son about a Professional's Energy Level. Yet, he still replied, "It was quite similar to your experience. I always had an unwavering conviction that saw me through."

His conviction was that he was a hero! This was rather embarrassing and not something he could easily tell his 'adult son' outright.

Chen Jixian nodded and then formally answered Chen Gu's earlier question. "After I came to the Bureau of Mystic Security, I gained access to an artifact from the sub-bureau. This item is unnumbered, and its power is unconventional. While most people would find it useless, it's perfectly suited for me. With this artifact, I can wield the full strength of my prime!"

A realization dawned on Chen Gu. "Your... willingness to retire and join the police force... was that also for this artifact?"

Chen Jixian was silent for a moment before finally nodding.

"When we were attacked by the Mutant at our doorstep, I only possessed Second Energy Level strength. You saved us. I wasn't hiding my abilities; at that moment, that was genuinely all the power I had."

"After that incident, I resolved to retire. Even if you hadn't helped me find a way into the police force, I would have applied to join the Bureau of Mystic Security. I couldn't bear being powerless to protect my own family."

Chen Gu grinned inwardly. Things had certainly taken an ironic twist.

The Mutants had ambushed Chen Jixian and Zhao Zhenhuai because of rumors that one of them would retire and join the police force, posing a threat. However, the Mutants didn't expect that Chen Jixian hadn't actually decided to retire at that time. He probably still wanted to remain in the military, awaiting an opportunity for his dream of becoming a general. Ultimately, the Mutant attack thoroughly provoked Chen Jixian, solidifying his decision to change careers.

Then, through a series of fortunate coincidences—Chen Gu's covert help and Zhao Ji's idiotic yet divine assist—he became the leading figure in the police system. He also concurrently held the position of Director of the Wuzhaoyin City Sub-Bureau of the Bureau of Mystic Security.

His first act upon taking office was to vigorously sweep for lurking Mutants.