

## **Full Time 331**

### Chapter 331: Arriving at Capital Star

"Hmm? But why can't I find my name on the admission interface? And why is the admission information blank?"

Bai Yunpeng smiled and said, "It's completely normal that you can't find or check it. Open the website for the Tiangong Military Division."

It was already displayed in front of Chen Gu.

"Look at the top right corner, at the very edge. There's a link to the Huai Shan Branch School; click on it."

Chen Gu did as instructed, and a subpage popped up. However, this subpage was completely different in style from the rest of the Tiangong Military Division website—pale gray without much content, just a few sparse options:

[Instructors]

[Curriculum]

[Students]

Bai Yunpeng continued, "Click on the [Students] option."

Chen Gu clicked and found an even more detailed choice: [New Students].

He clicked into it and then let out a long sigh of relief. "Found it."

It was immediately clear that there were only about a dozen new students this year, with Chen Gu listed first.

Bai Yunpeng chuckled and advised, "I have a suggestion for you: when you enroll and choose an instructor, pick Zhong Yuanbei."

Then Bai Yunpeng didn't explain further and directly hung up the call, leaving Chen Gu utterly baffled. He then explored the Huai Shan Branch School a bit more and found that it couldn't be located anywhere on the interstellar network—as if the Tiangong Military Division didn't have a Huai Shan Branch School at all.

Chen Gu also noticed that even on the Tiangong Military Division's website, the subpage for the Huai Shan Branch School was very "inconspicuous," with a design seemingly intended to make people overlook that such a button even existed on the site.

Then he further examined the page for the Huai Shan Branch School.

Oddly, the school's curriculum lasted only three years, with a clear delineation: a year and a half of classroom learning and a year and a half of practical lessons.

Under the [Instructors] page, only about seven or eight names were listed, including Zhong Yuanbei, as expected, but again, there was no further information.

Independent from the normal recruitment of the Tiangong Military Division and with unsearchable admission information... quite mysterious.

Chen Gu speculated, A school specifically targeting professionals?

Regardless, he had at least avoided failing admission, and he heaved another sigh of relief.

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Chen Gu couldn't stay on Empire River Star during the long summer vacation. Dr. Meng Ji had been incessantly urging him to return to Capital Star, almost to the point of cursing.

Before leaving, Chen Gu tried to call Chen Jixian, but surprisingly, no one picked up! He had no choice but to call Chen Zili, who, to his surprise, answered with a chuckle, "Heh, I got admitted to the Tiangong Military Division."

The admission scores were generally lower this year, and Chen Zili had just scraped in at the bottom of the list.

Chen Gu asked, "What about your dad?"

"He went on a business trip before my college entrance exams. Didn't he tell you?"

Chen Gu's heart suddenly sank. "He still hasn't come back?"

"Nope. Probably some secret mission; his phone is unreachable too." Chen Zili had grown up with Chen Jixian frequently undertaking secret missions, so he didn't think much of it. But it occurred to Chen Gu. Chen Jixian might be off for a promotion! This current one will likely be incredibly perilous. He hadn't told me, most likely to prevent me from worrying and to avoid affecting my exams.

"Sigh—" Chen Gu exhaled deeply and silently ended the call.

"Hello? Hello..." Chen Zili curled his lips. "What's with elders, huh? Just because they're older, they think they can hang up on people whenever they want? No manners! It's just bad people who've grown old!"

Qing Ruyan booked tickets for Chen Gu. He gathered his colleagues from the team to say their farewells, and then quietly left Empire River Star with Qing Ruyan on a starship.

As he stood on the starship looking back at Empire River Star, a notification chimed on his Bureau of Mystic Security account. Chen Gu opened it and was stunned; a considerable sum of contribution points had been credited to his account.

Mei Lixue had repaid her debt.

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Sitting in her office, Mei Lixue felt a sharp pain in her wallet.

Sigh, I really didn't want to pay him back. Wait, has Marcus paid him yet? Definitely not. That guy switched to administrative work, so he'll have even fewer contribution points now; he definitely can't pay it back. If he can default, so can I! Sigh, sigh, sigh, I regret it so much, my heart aches...

Amidst her lamentations, she opened the day's official assignments and then paused. "Why are they all up for promotion?"

Joseph, Dora, and Boluo had all submitted promotion applications.

She thought for a moment and realized Melincha and Selena were also close to being promoted. The only one still pending was Silver Eagle Charles.

"Approve them."

「...」

Hours later, the starship landed on the bustling Capital Star.

When disembarking, Qing Ruyan started to rattle off instructions to Chen Gu, "I'll take you to the apartment arranged for you by the Bureau first..."

"No need. Let's head to this place," Chen Gu gave her an address; it was the house Qiao Shuangmu had initially promised him.

Qing Ruyan, a native of Capital Star, was stunned when she saw the location. "This place... the rent for houses here is very expensive."

Chen Gu just smiled and said nothing.

Qing Ruyan grumbled, "Lucky dog." Then, carrying her own luggage, she looked at Chen Gu, miffed. "Aren't you going to help? Not very gentlemanly of you."

Chen Gu rolled his eyes at her. Miss, you're a professional; can't you even handle your own luggage? We're all ancient foxes here, why play the fragile damsel with me?

Seeing Chen Gu unmoved, Qing Ruyan resigned herself to her fate and, with one hand, hefted her large suitcase onto her shoulder.

Chen Gu smiled. Much better.

"When will my car be delivered?" These matters were all handled by the Bureau.

"It will likely take a few more days. Today, a car was arranged by the Bureau."

As it turned out, they got into the car, and just as they were halfway there, Chen Gu received a call from Dr. Meng Ji. "You've arrived? Great, come over right now!"

Chen Gu gave a wry smile. "I need to settle in first..."

"What's there for a young man like you, with no family to drag along, to settle? Don't waste my time! Come over now, and I promise to be gentle with you."

Chen Gu verbally agreed but didn't change their route. The Bureau's maglev car took them to Chen Gu's villa.

Qing Ruyan was completely flabbergasted. "Why?! I'm gorgeous, I work my tail off, I have a Capital Star residence permit, and I still only live in an apartment! Yet you, fresh out of high school, get such a huge house!"

The villa Qiao Shuangmu had given him certainly wasn't the most expensive in Capital Star. However, in this era, such a detached house was already very rare, especially in a place like Capital Star. It wasn't simply a matter of having money to buy one.

The house's security system had already been taken care of by Qiao Shuangmu's people, and the homeowner's name had been changed to Chen Gu. He could move in right away.

During this process, Dr. Meng Ji called dozens of times, all of which Chen Gu declined. Eventually, he outright blocked the doctor.

#### Chapter 332: Throwing a Spanner in the Works

Dr. Meng Ji was truly infuriated. He stormed directly into Aviloya's office to file a complaint. Aviloya, at least better versed in the ways of the world than Dr. Meng Ji, tried to appease him with kind words. She assured him that she would definitely find a way to have Chen Gu come over soon to collaborate on his research, but after the doctor left, she didn't actually rush Chen Gu at all.

Qing Ruyan treated Chen Gu to a meal. After Chen Gu went home and took a bath, he leisurely made his way to the Bureau of Mystic Security's headquarters.

Only after settling Chen Gu did Qing Ruyan drag her exhausted body back to her own apartment. If Chen Gu could enter Qing Ruyan's "boudoir," he would certainly curse that the more beautiful a woman was, the more deceitful she could be. Qing Ruyan's apartment was so spacious it rivaled his three-story villa in size. Moreover, located on the top floors of the building, it offered an excellent view. Its location was prime—situated in the golden district of Capital Star, the price would likely be no cheaper than his house...

On Chen Gu's part, after Dr. Meng Ji had resentfully pestered him for several days, he finally had some time to himself. He gathered his courage a few times only to back down again. In the end, he gritted his teeth, squeezed his eyes shut, and went to find Aviloya. He had to find out what exactly had become of Chen Jixian.

Although his son was "unfilial," he was still his own flesh and blood.

He seemed to have a natural "fear" of Aviloya, like a mouse before a cat. But in reality, he knew it was just his guilty conscience.

When he reached Aviloya's massive office and announced his name, requesting to see the Director-General, he was stopped by the secretary. The secretary earnestly checked the Director-General's schedule for the day and then gave Chen Gu a professionally courteous smile. "Sorry, you don't have an appointment. How about I set one up for you? Let me see... In six days, at four-fifty in the afternoon, the Director-General has about five minutes of free time."

Chen Gu's expression darkened. He turned and left, well aware the secretary only dared to do this because they had surmised Aviloya's intentions—she obviously didn't want to see him.

What a coincidence, he thought. Truth be told, I didn't want to see you either.

But who else could he ask for news about his adult son? Chen Gu walked out of the Bureau of Mystic Security building, hesitated for a moment, and then called Gong Shuxu.

Gong Shuxu agreed readily. "I'll ask for you."

He immediately called the Director-General...

Aviloya had, of course, instructed her secretary to block "that little thief" if he came by. So, when Gong Shuxu's call came through, she wasn't surprised in the slightest. After composedly waiting for Gong Shuxu to ask his question, she replied, "As you know, Chen Jixian's 'Abyssal Blacksmith' profession is rather unique. Compounded by his personal issues, the entire promotion process is very complex. The Bureau's experts have devised a seven-stage promotion plan. We've just entered the third stage, and it will likely take at least another two months."

Gong Shuxu calmly thanked her, hung up, and relayed the information to Chen Gu.

Aviloya didn't find it troublesome at all. As long as she didn't have to see that annoying brat, everything was perfect.

Chen Gu breathed a sigh of relief, then began to complain to Gong Shuxu, "I submitted my promotion report for the Third Energy Level a long time ago, and there's been no response from the Bureau whatsoever. Tell me the truth, Elder, does the Bureau plan to keep me stuck at the Second Energy Level for the rest of my life?"

Gong Shuxu hesitated for a moment before revealing, "Not exactly. The current consensus is that they want you to collaborate with Dr. Meng Ji first. Once you clarify the secret behind holding multiple professions, the Bureau will consider your other demands."

Chen Gu sighed. I'll have to think of other methods, he realized. The reason I can hold multiple professions is entirely due to "The Past of Four Hundred People"—a secret Dr. Meng Ji could spend his entire life researching without ever uncovering, unless I tell him. And even if he did figure it out, it would be meaningless, as it couldn't be replicated.

The Bureau of Mystic Security naturally didn't want to promote Chen Gu. He was already so formidable at the Second Energy Level; if he reached the Third, they feared only someone at the Sixth Energy Level could control him. If he ever became unwilling to cooperate or suddenly decided to join another power, like the military, the Bureau of Mystic Security's efforts would have been truly in vain.

After returning to his residence, Chen Gu rested his chin in his hands and pondered. What other channels are there for promotion? The first choice is definitely the Atomic Holy Church. I already have the promotion resources. As long as I can borrow a generator from the Atomic Holy Church, I can begin my advancement to the Third Energy Level. But the Atomic Holy Church certainly won't want to offend the Bureau of Mystic Security by lending me a generator. What price would I have to pay for them to agree? Moreover, I can't openly seek a promotion pathway right now. If the Bureau of Mystic Security found out, they'd certainly find a way to pressure me, and my poor adult son is still in their hands.

Chen Gu seethed internally. I'll endure for two more months! Once Chen Jixian successfully promotes, we'll break away from the Bureau of Mystic Security together and join the military with Bai Yunpeng! I refuse to believe that, with the military's resources, they can't find a suitable generator for me!

But that was just angry talk; I definitely wouldn't do that unless it was absolutely necessary.

Not to mention, Aviloya's threat alone is chilling. Toying with a Ninth Power Level like that... do they really think the Valkyrie can't draw her sword?

Chen Gu called the priest of the church in Wuzhaoyin City, subtly expressing his intentions. The priest kindly offered to make some inquiries for him.

After a day, the priest's joyful feedback arrived: "Why not convert to our faith? Our church is extremely generous to its followers."

Chen Gu was speechless.

It's almost certain that the Atomic Holy Church path is a dead end. If this master actor were to change allegiances, the military would be my first choice anyway.

In short, Chen Gu's time on Capital Star had been anything but "pleasant."

This was evident in his daily routine. Dr. Meng Ji experimented on him all day. In response, Chen Gu maintained a stoic expression, remained silent, moved sluggishly, often "arrived late for work," and steadfastly refused overtime. This made Dr. Meng Ji extremely irritable, but he was helpless against Chen Gu. Deliberately making things difficult for Chen Gu during experiments only resulted in Chen Gu being even less cooperative in subsequent ones. Beyond his research capabilities and talent for cursing, Meng Ji was incompetent in other areas. Unsure how to handle the situation, he resorted to his usual grand move: "tattling to the higher-ups."

Aviloya, however, didn't seek out Chen Gu. She knew he was smart and would figure things out on his own.

Chen Gu still felt constrained, hesitant to act rashly because he cared about too many people—for instance, Chen Jixian, despite their mutually aloof demeanor. Chen Jixian was still under the Bureau's control. So, Chen Gu's recent "uncooperative actions" were merely him venting some dissatisfaction before burying everything deep down and appearing to return to normal on the surface.

But Chen Gu had already begun mentally sifting through suitable intelligence sources, actively looking for a generator outside the Bureau of Mystic Security and the military. The first person he thought of was "the Ape."

It's not safe to discuss over the phone; I'll wait for his next visit to Capital Star, he decided.

He had the resources for promotion, but to sway the generator's owner, he still needed to accumulate more capital.

#### Chapter 333: Dean's Identity Exposed

Zhao Zhenhuai finally returned. When he left, he was full of pomp and pride, eager for everyone to know he was escorting his son for the college entrance exams.

However, he returned as quiet as a mouse, terrified someone would spot him and ask, "Vice Director, how did your son do on his exams?"

There was no help for it; his son was a disappointment.

Ironically, he'd heard about the remarkable achievements of his old rival Chen Jixian's children. Chen Zili had actually been accepted into the Tiangong Military Division! His daughter, Chen Qingyu, had also been admitted to the Capital Music Hall after releasing an album of exceptional quality.

Zhao Zhenhuai had exerted tremendous effort, pulling strings to get Zhao Jun into an ordinary military school on Capital Star. This way, he could look after his son more conveniently. Next, he would have to find a way to get his wife transferred over as well.

But as soon as he got back, he received a new assignment: "A new research topic."

His assistant emphasized, "Vice Director, this is a topic personally set by Marshal Bai and relayed by Bai Xianya."

Then he opened his memo, which recorded Bai Yunpeng's original words, as relayed by Bai Xianya: "Have your Director do it personally; he owes me, HA HA HA!"

The assistant repeated this mechanically. Zhao Zhenhuai was puzzled. The Director? The 'Idol Actor'? he wondered. He then muttered to himself, "That guy is always so secretive. How did he get involved with Marshal Bai?"

Zhao Zhenhuai was all business. "Alright, I'll report to the Director right away."

Up to this point, the entire 745 Research Institute was still unaware of the 'Idol Actor's' true identity. And as Zhao Zhenhuai looked at the new topic, he found it odd: "Mecha solo combat?"

He remembered that the 'Idol Director' was proficient in tactics involving multi-branch coordination. This, however, was about solo tactics. Could the 'Idol Actor' handle it?

He flipped through some more pages and was even more shocked to find that this research project was extremely broad in scope, ranging from the lightest class of light land combat Mechas to the most massive first-class Warmasters... each category actually had a sub-project!

After reviewing all the sub-projects in shock, he speculated that completing this research would require not only profound tactical expertise but also powerful Mecha piloting and combat abilities.

In other words, for the 'Idol Actor' to complete this research task, he'd need to be a Mecha ace!

Why does Marshal Bai seem so confident he'll complete this project?

Could it be that the 'Idol Actor' isn't some crafty old schemer?

That... seems unlikely...

He contacted the 'Idol Actor' in 'Infinite.' Unexpectedly, he received a quick response—Chen Gu had been playing the game frequently lately, as he had more free time.

Zhao Zhenhuai diligently sent over the extensive data for the new project and informed him, "This task was personally assigned by Marshal Bai. Furthermore... Marshal Bai said that you owe him."

Chen Gu couldn't help but laugh. He knew that Bai Yunpeng's enthusiastic help earlier meant he would eventually come back to "blackmail" him. However, Chen Gu didn't mind this kind of "blackmail."

Moreover, after briefly reviewing the entire project plan, Bai Yunpeng had explicitly stated that the research results this time were merely to serve as reference material for Mecha pilots.

After all, Mecha combat requires pilots to adapt on the fly. However, such reference material could broaden their tactical thinking and expand their horizons.

Chen Gu agreed, "Okay, I'll take charge of this project personally." Then he suddenly remembered and gave Zhao Zhenhuai his private contact number. "This is my phone number. For the near future, I should be staying on Capital Star. If there are any matters, you can call me directly."

On the other end of the game, Zhao Zhenhuai was stupefied.

The Director is on Capital Star?!

No...

Weren't you supposed to maintain the image of a mysterious master? This doesn't fit your persona!

You've come to Capital Star now, so how can I still call the shots?

He wrestled with the decision for a long time. Just as his assistant came in to ask for instructions and saw him in this state, the assistant asked, "Director, what's wrong?"

Zhao Zhenhuai sighed and explained. The assistant instantly understood Zhao Zhenhuai's thoughts.

The main research institute oversaw two subordinate institutes. Zhao Zhenhuai had always been the sole point of contact with the mysterious Director. In reality, Zhao Zhenhuai was the Deputy Director of the main institute.

As long as the Director didn't show his face, he, Zhao Zhenhuai, was the master of the research institute!

"Regarding this matter..." the assistant suggested, "we should still invite the Honorable Director back to guide our work."

This reminded Zhao Zhenhuai, and he suddenly had a chilling realization: when he first joined the research institute, he had been harshly dealt with by that 'Idol Actor'... This time, who's to say it wasn't that insidious, seasoned Director deliberately testing him?

His guard was up immediately. He went to find Zhan Cunshan, the deputy director of the other research institute. After Zhao Zhenhuai explained the situation, Zhan Cunshan immediately said, "Contact the Director right away. We'll go over now."

Chen Gu was enjoying his game when the phone rang. Reluctantly, he answered. On the other end, Zhao Zhenhuai cautiously said, "Honorable Director, this is Zhao."

"Zhao?"

"Zhao Zhenhuai," Zhan Cunshan quickly added from the side, "Honorable Director, and I'm Zhan, Zhan Cunshan. It's an honor to work under you."

Chen Gu asked, "Is there something you need?"

"Yes, since you're on Capital Star, we all feel we should welcome you back to the institute to oversee things and guide our work. If you could help us identify any shortcomings, we can then improve."

Chen Gu frowned. He wasn't keen on going, but now that his identity had been exposed, dragging things out wasn't an option. Reluctantly, he said, "Alright, come and pick me up."

"Yes, yes."

Chen Gu gave his address, hung up the phone, and waited.

Capital Star was vast. However, maglev cars could reach extremely high speeds, far surpassing the aircraft of the old Earth era. Consequently, half an hour later, a car slowly stopped outside the villa. Zhao Zhenhuai and Zhan Cunshan quickly alighted and waited respectfully by the door.

Chen Gu finished getting ready and stepped outside. "Let's go."

Zhao Zhenhuai was stunned. He looked at the person before him, a sense of familiarity nagging at him as he tried to recall where he'd seen him. Zhan Cunshan, on the other hand, was merely shocked by the Director's youth. He quickly recovered and opened the car door, "Please, get in."

It was not until this moment that Zhao Zhenhuai suddenly remembered, blurting out, "Chen Gu!"

Chen Gu, sitting in the car, said indifferently, "It's me."

Zhao Zhenhuai was utterly dumbfounded. In an instant, all the pieces fell into place—it all made sense! A wave of intense humiliation and resentment washed over him, so potent that he nearly resigned on the spot and walked away.

Chen Gu still spoke calmly, "Let bygones be bygones. Just focus on your work from now on."

Chapter 334: Another Way Out (1)

Zhao Zhenhuai contemplated his current situation: Deputy Director of Division 745—a respectable position with a good income and considerable status. His child had just come to Capital Star for school and needed his nearby care. His wife was about to be transferred here as well. If he resigned impulsively, everything would be ruined. He gave Chen Gu a deep look and silently got into the car.

Chen Gu even felt some sympathy for Zhao Zhenhuai. He recalled a popular saying from his previous life: in the workplace, you can't bully newcomers because they might resign on a whim. They have little to

lose and can just walk away. But you can exploit middle-aged workers at will; they carry too many burdens to dare risk resigning.

He said to Zhao Zhenhuai earnestly, "You know very well what happened between us and who started it. But now that things have reached this point, you've paid a price. Focus on your work from now on. Don't resort to those underhanded tactics anymore. You still have a bright future ahead of you."

However pitiable Zhao Zhenhuai was now, he had been just as detestable back then. Even if his competition with Chen Jixian had been fair and square, Chen Gu wouldn't have deliberately targeted him. He had truly brought this upon himself. It was just as the famous line goes: You have to pay back what you owe sooner or later.

Zhan Cunshan sat to the side, looking straight ahead as if he hadn't heard anything. But the flames of gossip burned brightly within him. Zhao Zhenhuai, you old fox! To think you'd use despicable methods against such a young tactical genius, someone anyone could see had a brilliant future? Are you out of your mind? At the same time, Zhan Cunshan's mind grew active. Does this mean that if I work hard, I have a good chance of replacing Zhao Zhenhuai and becoming second-in-command at the Director's research institute?

Chen Gu's youth certainly shocked the entire research institute. However, the researchers were all tech nerds; it was just a moment of surprise, perhaps mixed with a little dissatisfaction.

The situation thereafter grew quite chaotic. The researchers had finally met the Director in person, and they bombarded him with tactical questions. They had to seize this opportunity. Given the Director's usual behavior, who knew when the next chance would come?

Chen Gu, channeling Griffin Wester's memories, handled these questions effortlessly. However, Wester's eccentricities seemed to have rubbed off on him. He found fault with everything and cursed

freely, reprimanding the researchers as if they were errant children. Yet, precisely because his tactical insights were often spot-on, the researchers, despite being thoroughly berated, found themselves unusually convinced.

Before they knew it, this "exchange" continued until the end of the workday. The researchers were still reluctant to stop when Zhan Cunshan stepped in. "Alright, that's it for today. Let the Director rest. There will be other opportunities." Only then did the researchers sullenly disperse.

However, from that day's exchanges, Chen Gu identified a few promising individuals. He gathered these individuals, formed a research group, and tossed them the Mecha tactics research project, saying, "Work on this for now. Contact me if you encounter any issues."

Then, the young Director left his domain amidst the researchers' eager farewells.

Dr. Meng Ji had completed all the new test items he could think of, but they seemed to offer no help to his research. This made him scratch his head in frustration. For the time being, he had no better solution, so he had to let Chen Gu off the hook temporarily.

Today, Chen Gu finally received his car—it had just been shipped from Empire River Star. In this regard, the Bureau of Mystic Security's efficiency was hardly praiseworthy.

He went to the Dimensional Cage to visit the Combat Rooster. The Combat Rooster had always been kept at the Bureau's headquarters. During Chen Gu's time back on Empire River Star, it had nearly staged a rebellion. Since his return, Chen Gu had frequently visited to appease it, feeding it and taking it out for walks, much like one would a dog.

This creature had been growing wildly recently, reaching a length of thirty meters and increasingly showing signs of evolving into a Super Life Form. Inside the Bureau's headquarters, an entire floor had been cleared out specifically for researching these colossal beasts and had been converted into a natural habitat. This was also one of the Bureau's projects: an attempt to tame these colossal beasts to enhance the Bureau's combat capabilities. This floor at the Bureau headquarters served merely as a preliminary research site; the actual research base was on a desolate planet far, far away.

The expert in charge of this project was Dr. Obayan. He maintained a low profile and wasn't as famous as Dr. Meng Ji, but his status within the Bureau was by no means inferior. He was stationed at the research base year-round, leaving a group of his graduate students to manage things at the headquarters.

These graduate students had seen all sorts of enormous creatures—behemoths hundreds of meters long, even complete remains of Super Life Forms. Yet, whenever Chen Gu took the Combat Rooster out for a stroll, all the researchers kept their distance. They had never seen a living creature with such incredible offensive power, capable of easily wrecking various containment devices. If they got too close while the creature was in a bad mood, they could lose their lives. They weren't Professionals and lacked such formidable vitality.

Chen Gu was also vexed about how to handle the Combat Rooster. It had grown increasingly irritable and was only somewhat docile when by his side. However, its immense size made it impossible to keep with him at all times. Today, after "walking the dog," he returned the Combat Rooster to the Dimensional Cage. The Combat Rooster was reluctant, nuzzling against Chen Gu, clearly unwilling to part.

Chen Gu made all sorts of promises – "I'll bring you something tasty tomorrow," "We'll play five more minutes next time," "I'll find you a mate soon" – and finally coaxed the Combat Rooster inside.

A middle-aged researcher, seeing the Combat Rooster was safely inside, cautiously approached. "There's some news—it might be good news for you. The team responsible for the Dimensional Cage has made

some breakthroughs recently. They're hopeful about miniaturizing it, which means you could carry the Combat Rooster with you."

Chen Gu smiled, relieved. "Thank you for telling me."

Then, Chen Gu left the Bureau headquarters and drove to the spaceport to pick up Griffin. Griffin's company headquarters was actually on Capital Star. That was the true center of his career. But Chen Gu still took the initiative to pick him up.

Man Suling had indeed come along. Both were wearing sunglasses and were disguised to avoid causing a stir. Once they were in Chen Gu's car, Man Suling cheered, discarded all her disguise, and sprawled on a seat, sniffing eagerly in Chen Gu's direction. She looked utterly blissed out.

Griffin coughed repeatedly. "Mind your image! You're supposed to be a future diva!"

Man Suling paid him no mind. Chen Gu smells amazing!

Griffin turned to Chen Gu with a serious expression. "Alright, out with it. Why did you ask for me? You wouldn't come all this way to pick me up for no reason. Gratuitous offers ring with hints of deceit."

Chapter 335: Another Way Out (2)

Chen Gu didn't stand on ceremony and cut straight to the chase. "Help me find a generator. I want to advance to the Third Energy Level."

The gorilla didn't ask any questions and readily agreed. "Alright, I'll go ask around."

It wasn't long before Chen Gu received an answer from the gorilla. "Wuning Temple has a secret generator. Its facilities are a bit outdated, but it's definitely usable. They're willing to provide it to you on one condition: you accept their price."

Wuning Temple was one of the three largest freelancer organizations. When first established, the organization was incredibly radical, proclaiming "death before lack of freedom."

Then, it was severely pummeled by the official forces of the four major Star Nations, and all the founding members with radical views were wiped out.

Thus, the organization instantly adopted a more detached, philosophical approach.

They quickly reconciled with the major Star Nations. Ever since, they have been the most cooperative freelance organization, their enthusiasm in this regard far surpassing that of the other two.

If Wuning Temple knew how the Bureau of Mystic Security views me, they probably wouldn't dare lend me the generator, Chen Gu estimated. They must be lagging in their intelligence; I need to capitalize on this time difference.

"What's their price?"

The gorilla said, "Of course, it's an exorbitant price. Twenty grams of supermatter, or two hundred kilograms of a super lifeform's remains; or items of equivalent value—they don't want cash."

Chen Gu pondered for a moment, then said, "First, help me pressure them to lower the price, and I'll figure something out."

"Okay."

After the gorilla left, Chen Gu entered the game pod and, using the method Qing Ruyan had taught him previously, entered the decadent, dilapidated Divine Realm.

With practiced ease, Chen Gu located the Taoist temple, its walls almost completely collapsed, leaving only a lonely gate standing.

But this time, the old Taoist was fast asleep, reeking heavily of alcohol.

"Senior?" Chen Gu called out, but the old Taoist didn't respond. Chen Gu called out twice more, but the old Taoist still snored thunderously. Frowning, Chen Gu shook him a few times. "Senior?"

The old Taoist refused to wake up, and Chen Gu grew irritated. He made a fortune off me last time, and now he thinks he can just ignore me? No way!

He wandered around the temple and suddenly noticed a silver bell on a table in the half-collapsed main hall. "Senior, I really like this. It seems you don't use it, so why not gift it to me? I'll even buy you a few more later."

As he spoke, he reached for it. The old Taoist continued to snore loudly, seemingly unconcerned. Go ahead, take it if you can!

Chen Gu's hand was already extended, mainly to force the old Taoist to wake up, but he found himself hesitating.

Chen Gu gritted his teeth and decisively snatched the bell.

DING-A-LING-A-LING...

To his surprise, he actually managed to grab the bell. He stuffed it into his pocket and ran off without looking back.

Sure enough, just as he ran behind the temple gate, his vision blurred, and the old Taoist was already standing before him. Chen Gu, with a cheeky grin, said, "Yo, Senior, you're awake."

The old Taoist stared at him coldly, silently extending his hand.

Chen Gu, holding the bell, was somewhat reluctant to return it. The old Taoist values it so much; it might be a treasure.

However, the old Taoist's gaze was icy. Chen Gu judged that if he didn't hand it over, he might get beaten... Mostly, I'm afraid this old codger will feign injury and try to extort me if he makes a move. With feigned magnanimity, Chen Gu handed the bell back. "Why so stingy today, Senior? It's just a small bell."

The old Taoist carefully placed the bell back, ensuring it was in the exact same position as before, down to the millimeter. Then he walked back to his spot, ready to lie down and continue sleeping. I clearly don't want to deal with you. Can you still shamelessly linger here?

But before lying down, the old Taoist glanced at the bell, a thought stirring. Finally, he asked coldly, "You need something?"

"Yes!" Chen Gu quickly nodded. "I need a substantial amount of supermatter."

"How many kilograms?" asked the old Taoist.

Chen Gu was speechless.

Indeed, my definition of 'a substantial amount' differs greatly from that of a powerhouse like him. It was the first time Chen Gu learned that supermatter could even be measured in kilograms.

After thinking for a moment, he said, "0.02 kilograms."

The old Taoist couldn't help but glare at him. "Cheeky!"

Chen Gu gave a sheepish smile. "Old Master, could you perhaps think of a way to help?"

"What do you have to trade?"

Chen Gu replied, "I have money."

"Starshield isn't useful here," the old Taoist stated, his tone still cold.

This was precisely Chen Gu's predicament. Acquiring a full twenty grams of supermatter on the outside wasn't something Starshield alone could achieve, and right now, he truly had nothing else of value to trade.

The old Taoist glanced at the small bell again and finally said, somewhat reluctantly, "Wait a moment." He closed his eyes, his actions unclear. After a short while, he said, "Someone will contact you tomorrow. Have that pet of yours cooperate with them for some experiments. Then, transfer two hundred million Starshield to them, and they'll give you twenty grams of supermatter."

Chen Gu frowned deeply. "You mean Combat Rooster? But he's locked up at headquarters; I can't get him out..."

The old Taoist coldly interrupted, "They will take care of everything."

He then lay down to sleep, his snores booming, no longer paying any attention to Chen Gu.

Chen Gu cautiously backed out, feeling somewhat bewildered. The supermatter issue seemed resolved, but who exactly would contact me tomorrow? Would they expose my secret plan to seek advancement? If my secret got out and Aviloya intervened, what would I do then?

Chen Gu mentally reviewed various contingency plans as time slowly passed. Soon, it was the next day.

He reported to the Bureau of Mystic Security as usual. At 8:30 in the morning, a high-ranking internal affairs officer arrived with several people to see him. None of them wore Bureau of Mystic Security uniforms.

The high-ranking internal affairs officer introduced them. "This is Lord Shangguan Yuxie, and these are researchers from Tsunami Lab. They require your cooperation."

The officer specifically added, "This collaborative project has been approved by the Director-General herself."

Chen Gu inwardly marveled. Shangguan Yuxie truly is well-connected to get Aviloya's approval for this. But at the same time, my anxiety about the secret leaking has intensified.

With the high-ranking internal affairs officer present, Chen Gu didn't want to mention their clandestine deal. He smiled and asked, "How can I assist?"

Shangguan Yuxie acted as if he knew nothing of other matters. "We need your pet to assist us with some tests. For this, Tsunami Lab is willing to pay you three million Starshield. It's just some basic data collection, and we assure you, it won't cause any harm to your pet."

Chapter 336: Another Way Out (3)

Chen Gu feigned meticulous interest, inquiring about the specific details of the test. After some consideration, he reluctantly agreed, "Alright, since the Director-General approved it, I'll cooperate."

They proceeded to an independent floor of the building. Pang Yifan, Dr. Oubayang's 'senior disciple' and the middle-aged researcher who often communicated with Chen Gu, had already been informed and came over to assist.

As he operated various instruments, he asked, "What exactly are we testing?"

The experts accompanying Shangguan Yuxie quickly reeled off a string of professional jargon. Pang Yifan nodded in approval. Chen Gu didn't understand any of it and looked at Shangguan Yuxie. The latter shrugged and said to Chen Gu, "It seems there's nothing for you or me to do here—let the professionals handle professional matters. They've worked hard in their studies precisely so they can play such an irreplaceable role, right?"

Chen Gu smiled and nodded. Shangguan Yuxie scanned the area, complaining discontentedly, "Doesn't Dr. Oubayang have any pretty female graduate students? No one's even offering a cup of coffee..."

Chen Gu laughed heartily and, with familiar ease, got himself some coffee. Then the two of them drank their coffee while observing the tests. However, right from the start, Chen Gu realized there was an issue: all the tests being conducted by Shangguan Yuxie's people were aimed at the red glow within Combat Rooster's body.

Chen Gu couldn't help but glance at Shangguan Yuxie, who seemed oblivious to everything.

As the final few tests commenced, the other party's intentions became increasingly apparent, prompting Chen Gu to whisper to Shangguan Yuxie, "Is your target also super life forms?"

Shangguan Yuxie, smiling, replied, "We know you have an agreement with Qiao Shuangmu, so we won't ask you any questions."

Of course, it wasn't Chen Gu they were wary of, but Qiao Shuangmu.

"But as you see," Shangguan Yuxie lightly lifted his coffee cup and gestured to Chen Gu. "As long as we circumvent things a little, we can easily obtain what we want."

Then he took a sip of his coffee. "Rest assured, we will give you your compensation very soon."

Chen Gu frowned internally, feeling that something was amiss.

After pondering, he still sent a message to Qiao Shuangmu to inform him of the situation.

However, the message seemed to vanish like a stone dropped into the sea—there was no response from Qiao Shuangmu.

Chen Gu found it oddly astonishing.

The group bustled about for the entire day, finally completing all the tests. Combat Rooster, having been prodded and poked all day, was extremely disgruntled; if Chen Gu hadn't constantly placated it, it would have already gone berserk.

After the tests concluded, Chen Gu didn't see Shangguan Yuxie and his team off but stayed to accompany the agitated Combat Rooster. Shangguan Yuxie took no offense. He even left his phone number and said, "Your pet is quite impressive. If you ever consider selling it, please contact me first. I'll be more generous than Qiao Shuangmu."

Chen Gu took down the number but replied as before, "I'm not selling it."

After finally calming Combat Rooster, Chen Gu returned to his residence alone, only to find Qiao Shuangmu waiting at the door!

He had sent a message to Qiao Shuangmu, who hadn't replied all this time, so he'd thought Qiao Shuangmu truly didn't care about the matter.

Qiao Shuangmu began with a wry smile, then nodded at Chen Gu. "Notifying me was thoughtful of you. I've taken note."

Chen Gu asked, "Why didn't you stop them?"

Qiao Shuangmu shook his head. "Because of the rules. Our ancestors said that without rules, there can be no order."

Chen Gu still didn't understand.

Qiao Shuangmu elaborated, "Our Qiao Family, the Bai Family you're familiar with, and Shangguan Yuxie's Shangguan Family have all attained the status of first-class families within the Confederation through the struggles and accumulations of countless generations.

"However, since everyone's strength is roughly equal, if we all covet the same thing, we might fight and both sides could suffer heavy losses, potentially ruining generations of hard work in an instant.

"Therefore, everyone gradually formed a tacit understanding, which is this rule."

"First come, first served, unless you can find a loophole."

"For instance, with this matter of the super life forms, I came to you first, and normally others shouldn't trouble you anymore. But that damn Shangguan Yuxie found a loophole in how I handled this: he could still get a lot of information about super life forms through your pet, without directly asking you like I did."

Chen Gu understood. "He played by the rules, and you have to as well, without interfering with him."

Qiao Shuangmu nodded. "Although I can't interfere, being informed in advance allows me to take precautions sooner." He paused, then added, "I heard your friend has sought out Uncle Delos. If needed, I can make an introduction for you."

This was to repay a favor, Chen Gu was well aware. But since Tao Tao had already begun cooperating with Marshal Bai, she probably wouldn't seek out General Delos anymore.

He nodded. "Alright, I will tell my friend."

After Qiao Shuangmu finished speaking, he took his leave. Just before departing, he made a telephone gesture with his hand. "Stay in touch."

Chen Gu smiled and agreed.

To Chen Gu's surprise, no sooner had Qiao Shuangmu left than a delivery robot arrived at his door with the super-substance promised by Shangguan Yuxie.

The timing was impeccable; Qiao Shuangmu had been gone for less than three minutes!

These scions of the great families... they're all the most outstanding people of this era. Anyone who truly believes they are all profligates is making a grave mistake.

Shangguan Yuxie was clearly using this small gesture to inform Chen Gu that he was aware of Qiao Shuangmu's visit.

Chen Gu quickly transferred two billion Starshields to Shangguan Yuxie. When dealing with people like them, he had to be extra careful. It was best to maintain a purely transactional relationship, with no outstanding debts on either side.

Having received the super-substance, Chen Gu quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

Reflecting on his previous two promotions, each time it had taken an enormous effort to gather the necessary materials.

This time, though the Bureau of Mystic Security's stance had caused some complications, it was much easier than on previous occasions.

The key reason was that his network of relationships was now drastically different.

However, this convenience was likely limited to the lower Energy Levels. As one advanced, the required resources would become more precious and rarer; it wouldn't be as easy as this time.

Chen Gu immediately contacted the Gorilla, who was quite surprised. "You've obtained twenty grams of super-substance so quickly?"

Chen Gu said, "Please arrange the contact as soon as possible."

"Alright."

Chen Gu still felt somewhat uneasy. If Aviloya knew about this, she would certainly try to stop it. If Wuning Monastery received a warning from Aviloya, they would likely call off the deal immediately.

Can I somehow get Aviloya to tacitly consent to this? Chen Gu pondered.

But after much thought, Chen Gu decided to stand pat. If Aviloya was completely unaware, my own proactive approach might instead reveal the matter.

If, in the end, Aviloya remained unpersuaded and insisted on stopping me—wouldn't I be caught in a bind right there and then?

The next day, the Gorilla had arranged everything and informed him, "You'll need to take a trip to Maoshi Star."

Chapter 337: Huai Shan Branch School (1)

Maoshi Star was not far from Capital Star. It was the kind of colony star that, under the brilliance of Capital Star, could easily go unnoticed.

The Wuning Cult didn't dare place their generators on Capital Star. If anything went wrong and endangered Capital Star, they would face dire consequences they couldn't afford.

Yet, they didn't dare hide too far away either. This location was convenient for the Bureau of Mystic Security to monitor—a testament to their cowardly yet meticulous planning.

Chen Gu was also in a quandary. His current status made it difficult for him to leave Capital Star freely.

Just as he was pondering how to depart Capital Star unnoticed, his personal account suddenly went DING-DONG!

Chen Gu opened it. To his surprise, it was a message from the Tiangong Military Division—or, to be exact, from the Huai Shan Branch School.

Upon opening it, Chen Gu was quite astonished. Report early? Military training?

The tradition of military training for college freshmen had originally been abolished. Colleges could decide whether or not to conduct military training for new students based on their own circumstances.

However, after the great war with the Alien Insect Race began, military training was quickly reinstated by administrative decree.

But military training usually took place after the school term started. The Huai Shan Branch School had only a few freshmen, so why were they being summoned for an early assembly to begin military training?

Nevertheless, the email's wording was very stringent. It demanded all students report to the school within three days. If anyone faced difficulties, the school could offer assistance; students were told they could communicate with the school via email.

Chen Gu, of course, had no difficulties. He was incredibly curious about this Huai Shan Branch School and couldn't wait to see what it was like.

So, after receiving the email, he temporarily set aside his current tasks and drove straight to the address provided.

The Tiangong Military Division was located in Capital Star's most prime area, yet the address in the email led to a very remote place.

Capital Star's development had reached a very advanced stage, extending several layers underground where countless 'capital drifters' struggled to survive in subterranean spaces.

However, the Confederation had laws stipulating that at least thirty percent of a colony star's natural environment must be preserved.

Capital Star had adhered to this precisely, preserving exactly that thirty percent—not even a tenth of a percent more.

And as it happened, the address for the Huai Shan Branch School was located within this preserved thirty percent: an undeveloped, purely natural area.

Capital Star was an ideal planet for colonization, its natural environment even surpassing that of the mother planet. Chen Gu drove his maglev car for two hours, leaving the bustling urban sprawl and entering a lush, primeval forest.

Wild beasts frequented this area, but those posing a real threat had long been cleared out. Chen Gu enjoyed the scenery along the way, though he was also preoccupied with his advancement to the Third Energy Level. After another hour, he entered a valley.

There, at the address provided in the email, stood a complex of ancient-looking buildings. Red bricks, green tiles, and 'palaces' and 'pavilions' with high, upturned eaves were constructed on rammed earth platforms.

This place? Chen Gu was somewhat astonished. He parked his car. After he got out, a robot came to escort him, leading him into a building. Inside, a robust, middle-aged man sat behind a wooden desk, looking at something on the Star Web. Chen Gu's appearance evidently surprised him.

"A new student?"

Chen Gu nodded. "Chen Gu."

The robust middle-aged man's eyes lit up. "The kid who got full marks in the physical ability test? Come on, follow me to the tempering field first. Let me see what level this top scorer is at!"

Chen Gu was exasperated. From a nearby doorway, a slender, coldly beautiful woman emerged. She said indifferently, "Teacher Li, you already have four violations. One more, and you'll be punished with a stint in the Samsara Prison."

Teacher Li clearly struggled, weighing the pleasure of 'testing the top scorer' against the agony of the Samsara Prison as he contemplated his choice.

Ignoring Teacher Li, the cold beauty stepped towards Chen Gu, sizing him up from head to toe.

Chen Gu felt a profound discomfort, as if a venomous snake were slowly gliding over his entire body, its forked tongue licking every part of him.

Chen Gu was absolutely certain this woman was a Professional, scrutinizing him with her unique Professional abilities.

What kind of bizarre place is this Huai Shan Branch School? None of the teachers seem normal, Chen Gu silently grumbled. Outwardly, however, he maintained his composure, facing the cold female teacher's scrutiny with equanimity.

"Not bad," the cold female teacher commented coolly. With a swipe of her hand, a holographic page appeared. She glanced at it. "The first to report gets a school reward."

Chen Gu was taken aback. There are rewards for this too? The rewards at this branch school seem rather arbitrary.

The cold female teacher swiped her hand again. Chen Gu saw his student file being created. Then, with a sound like Gold Coins clattering, his student account was credited with three academic points.

Chen Gu immediately understood this was the reward. It seemed the academic points here were quite similar to the merit values at the Bureau of Mystic Security.

Then, the cold female teacher glanced at him again. "So, are you interested in going to the tempering field with Teacher Li? If you can beat him, there's a reward of a full twenty academic points."

No matter how he heard it, this sounded like she was fanning the flames, Chen Gu thought. He weighed his options. The reward was generous, but greater rewards often meant greater risks.

He looked at Teacher Li, the robust middle-aged man, whose face was alight with eagerness. If a new student accepted the challenge, it wouldn't be coercion, meaning no trip to the Samsara Prison for him.

Chen Gu quietly activated Mind Belief. A strong premonition made his heart pound wildly! With a polite smile, he refused, "One should respect one's teachers and honor their teachings. So, no thank you."

Teacher Li looked hugely disappointed. The cold female teacher simply waved her hand at Chen Gu.  
"Alright, go to your dormitory."

"And then?" Chen Gu asked.

"Wait."

The guide robot approached again to lead Chen Gu away. He wanted to ask more about the school, but both teachers had expressions that clearly said, 'Just leave.' Chen Gu had no choice but to go.

The facilities at the Huai Shan Branch School seemed excellent. Just as Chen Gu stepped out, he saw a maglev car racing over at top speed. When it landed, a chubby boy leaped out, exclaiming, "Haha, I must be the first! Those three academic points are mine!"

Then he saw Chen Gu and froze. "You... you stole my three academic points!"

Chen Gu pursed his lips, ignored him, and continued following the guide robot. The chubby boy chased after him. Four more maglev cars descended swiftly. Several men in black hurried over, led by an older man who pleaded earnestly, "Young Master, this isn't home. We mustn't cause any trouble here!"

But as these people neared the school buildings, they suddenly crashed into an invisible barrier and were flung back. THUD.

The cold female teacher's voice sounded faintly, "Non-students of this school are not permitted entry."

Chapter 338: Huai Shan Branch School (2)

The fatty also paused in shock. He clearly knew the strength of his followers, but they couldn't even make it through the door. This filled him with a newfound awe for his alma mater.

But he didn't intend to let Chen Gu off the hook just yet. He chased after him, calling out, "Hey, hey, hey! I'm Qiao Shuangyi! What's your name?"

"Chen Gu."

The fatty smacked his forehead. "You're Chen Gu? My cousin mentioned you! It seems we should be friends. My cousin is Qiao Shuangmu. As a friend, how could you snatch those three credits I've been scheming to get? I had everything calculated; without those three credits, graduating is going to be tough..."

He rambled on about his sorrows, and Chen Gu was also surprised. "You're Qiao Shuangmu's younger brother?"

"Yup." The fatty finally caught up, sizing Chen Gu up and down. "My cousin said you're good, very promising. How about it? Join the Qiao Family. We guarantee you'll save at least sixty years of your time."

Chen Gu couldn't help but laugh, having realized this fatty wasn't really cunning. He waved his hand. "You better hurry to register. Maybe there's a reward of two credits for second place."

Qiao Shuangyi, the fatty, was instantly re-energized with hope. He turned and ran. "Alright, we'll chat more later!"

So easy to fool! Chen Gu was astonished. This guy is leagues below his cousin Qiao Shuangmu. Chen Gu quietly shook his head and went to his dormitory.

It was another ancient, palace-style building, but the spacious interior was designed to accommodate "roommates."

Chen Gu took a look. This building appeared to be a single dormitory unit with a total of four rooms; Chen Gu knew he would have three roommates.

Since he was the first to arrive, he naturally chose the best-positioned room. Chen Gu boldly occupied a sunlit, second-floor room with a window he could use to climb onto the roof at any time.

「...」

The fatty, Qiao Shuangyi, limped away from the admissions teacher, a helpless expression on his face. Just moments before, he had passionately argued his case, believing that if the first person to register received a reward of three credits, then he, being second, should get at least two, and the third person one.

He was then thoroughly scolded. Teacher Wang, whose primary target for action had been Chen Gu—the student with a perfect physical test score—showed little interest in Qiao Shuangyi and merely gave him a casual kick. It was only then that poor Qiao Shuangyi remembered: at Huai Shan Branch School, physical punishment of students by professors was extremely common!

He didn't get any credits and even got beaten up. He pitifully called his cousin, "That crappy friend of yours set me up!"

Qiao Shuangmu was taken aback. "Friend? Which friend of mine?"

"Chen Gu!" Qiao Shuangyi roared and then recounted the incident. On the other end, Qiao Shuangmu also secretly shook his head. How could Chen Gu be blamed for this? It's your own stupidity, isn't it?

However, Qiao Shuangyi came from a better background and was someone he had watched grow up; the two brothers were very close.

Qiao Shuangmu said, "I have an idea for you. Use this incident as a pretext to cling to Chen Gu.

Don't put on the airs of a young master from a noble family with him, at least not before this round of freshman military training is over."

Qiao Shuangyi hummed, asking, "Is this freshman military training any different?"

"No different. Exactly the same as before."

Qiao Shuangyi actually shuddered at that.

Qiao Shuangmu continued, "You also know the disposition of the old man at Huai Shan Branch School. He personally picks out the training projects for the new students. If he encounters something he deems suitable, regardless of the timing—even if it's during final exams—he'll immediately gather the new students and send them off.

Conversely, if no suitable projects arise for the freshmen during their entire first year, the freshman military training will simply be canceled."

Qiao Shuangyi said helplessly, "So we're just unlucky, huh? We haven't even started our studies, and now we have to begin military training?"

Qiao Shuangmu sincerely replied to his younger brother, "Yes, you guys are pretty unlucky."

Qiao Shuangyi: "..."

"However, that old man, despite his severity, wouldn't send his students to their deaths for no reason. So, although his freshman military training is very dangerous, it's not entirely without a chance of survival."

These words nearly drove Qiao Shuangyi to despair. "Not entirely without a chance of survival... Freshman military training doesn't allow bodyguards! Big Bro, what do I do?!"

Qiao Shuangmu said, "That's why I told you that you absolutely must cling to Chen Gu. He's someone who has fought his way out of large-scale ground battles; his strength is undeniable. Moreover, just the fact that he witnessed a Super Life Form with his own eyes and returned alive means he can definitely protect you through the freshman military training!"

Qiao Shuangyi's eyes lit up. "Got it, Big Bro. I understand now."

"Hello? Hello?" Qiao Shuangmu called out twice, but his impetuous younger brother had already hung up the phone. He had originally wanted to advise his brother on how to interact with someone like Chen Gu, afraid he might mess things up.

But Qiao Shuangmu, who was about to redial, hesitated for a moment and then stopped.

He knew his cousin well. To describe his personality... putting it kindly, he had "a child's innocence." Less kindly, he was "shamelessly persistent."

Perhaps it could achieve unexpected results.

「...」

The dormitory had very comprehensive facilities, including... a small-scale training field for Professionals!

Chen Gu had initially guessed that Huai Shan Branch School might exclusively recruit Professionals, and now he was certain.

He changed into a tracksuit and entered the training field to exercise.

But just as he was warming up, he heard a loud THUMP, THUMP, THUMP at the door. "Chen Gu! It's me, Qiao Shuangyi! We're roommates now. You took my three credits, and you took the best room in the dorm! Unless you give them all back to me, I'm sticking to you throughout university. Wherever you go, I go!"

Chen Gu: "..."

How strange. Why is this fatty pestering me?

Chen Gu opened the training field door, and Qiao Shuangyi entered with a beaming smile. "So diligent, huh? Started exercising as soon as you registered. Tsk tsk, great physique."

As he spoke, he regretfully patted his own round belly.

"Hey, we're classmates now. Tell me, what's your profession? I'm a 'Paradox Architect'."

He had, in essence, just revealed Huai Shan Branch School's secret: it was indeed a school that recruited Professionals.

Chen Gu asked, "I'm a 'Radiation Missionary.' What exactly is the situation with this Huai Shan Branch School? Tell me what you know."

Qiao Shuangyi grinned. "First, you have to promise me that you'll let me follow you throughout university and won't deliberately try to shake me off."

Qiao Shuangyi was very timid; he was the Qiao Family's "hothouse flower," otherwise, he wouldn't have grown so plump. His cousin had only mentioned the freshman military training, but was that the only thing to worry about during university? That old eccentric from Huai Shan Branch School was notorious for tormenting his students. Countless dangers awaited Qiao Shuangyi throughout his university years, and he had already made up his mind to cling to Chen Gu for the entire duration.

Chapter 339: Huai Shan Branch School (2)

Chen Gu's heart stirred; he sensed there might be a reason behind it. He decided to give it a try. "Of course, that's possible. But what is the Qiao Family willing to offer in exchange?"

Qiao Shuangyi curled his lip. "Just like my big bro, always talking business."

Chen Gu smiled silently. Qiao Shuangyi had no choice. "What do you want?"

"Actually, it's quite simple for you. Arrange for me to visit Maoshi Star soon."

Qiao Shuangyi didn't understand why Chen Gu would make such a request, but it was indeed no problem for the Qiao Family. He was about to casually agree when he suddenly received a message. After reading it, he grinned. "All right, no need for the Qiao Family to arrange anything. You'll be able to visit Maoshi Star very soon."

Amidst Chen Gu's confusion, Qiao Shuangyi continued, "The location for this new student military training is Maoshi Star."

The Qiao Family had received the news in advance and immediately informed Qiao Shuangyi.

Chen Gu was somewhat surprised. This little fatty really had no schemes compared to Qiao Shuangmu. If it had been Qiao Shuangmu, he probably wouldn't have told Chen Gu. Instead, he would have pretended to agree. Then, when the location of the new student military training was announced, he would have claimed the Qiao Family had used considerable influence to change the training location just to satisfy Chen Gu's request.

Honestly, although Qiao Shuangyi always made people feel pleasantly warm when interacting with him, Chen Gu preferred dealing with this Qiao Shuangyi, who, though blunt in speech and sometimes impulsive in action, was more straightforward.

Chen Gu patted Qiao Shuangyi's shoulder. "For this new student military training, you stick with me."

As for after the military training, well, that can be discussed later.

Qiao Shuangyi was elated. "Alright!"

Chen Gu ignored him and resumed his workout. He still had one set of warm-up squats left, so he added more weight and completed it.

Qiao Shuangyi watched with twitching eyelids. The gravity field was set to six times normal gravity, and Chen Gu's squat weight was eight hundred kilograms!

That was equivalent to Chen Gu shouldering nearly five tons.

The little fatty glanced over and saw Chen Gu performing the exercise with ease, his breathing stable, his ascent and descent perfectly even.

He swallowed and couldn't help but ask, "What Energy Level are you?"

"Second Energy Level," Chen Gu answered while warming up.

The little fatty blurted out, "Impossible! The Third Energy Level professionals in my family don't have your kind of strength. Don't try to fool me! I know Radiation Missionaries are all about explosive power, not raw strength."

Chen Gu was indifferent. "Believe it or not, I'm at the Second Energy Level. And this is just my warm-up weight."

The little fatty was dumbstruck. He turned, went out, and immediately called his cousin. "That guy... he's not human!"

He quickly recounted his recent experience. Qiao Shuangmu also quietly heaved a sigh of relief upon learning that Chen Gu would be looking after his cousin during the new student military training. If his cousin really hadn't been able to get Chen Gu to take him under his wing, he would have had to step in; he knew this military training might be more dangerous than previous ones.

Then, he told his cousin, "He's not lying to you; he really is only at the Second Energy Level. But... that guy is a bit special. We can't interfere with the Bureau of Mystic Security's affairs, but I did manage to gather some information. He has a new position there: Senior Advisor. Do you know what that position means? Gong Shuxu, who is at the Sixth Energy Level, also holds that position."

If it were someone more calculating, they would surely be silently alarmed and deeply contemplating this. But the little fatty, capable only of simple arithmetic, exclaimed excitedly, "Doesn't that mean Chen Gu is on par with a top expert of the Sixth Energy Level? Hahaha, I have a super bodyguard with Sixth Energy Level strength! This new student military training is going to be a breeze!"

Qiao Shuangmu shook his head and said helplessly, "Alright, just make sure you get along well with him."

...

In the Training Hall, Chen Gu practiced alone, a hint of doubt rising in his heart. Why Maoshi Star? Could there be some connection behind this that I don't know about?

...

By evening, most of the new students had arrived. Qiao Shuangyi pulled Chen Gu out of the Training Hall. "Come on, let's go eat! My treat."

"I've heard that Huai Shan Branch School has the best food of all the colleges. I've been wanting to try it for ages."

"Credits here are incredibly precious. Throughout your entire time at college, if you can't earn fifty credits, you can't graduate, no matter whose son you are. This is a rule personally set by that old monster... I mean, the old principal."

"You've seen it too; the students here are all professionals. The cafeteria food is said to be highly beneficial for professionals, and every dish is considered a rarity on the outside."

Qiao Shuangyi rambled on, telling Chen Gu all about Huai Shan Branch School. Even when Chen Gu was taking a shower, he leaned against the bathroom door, still talking, which left Chen Gu quite speechless.

I do want to know everything about Huai Shan Branch School, but it isn't *that* urgent.

After Chen Gu got ready, the two headed to the cafeteria. Chen Gu asked, "Why was Huai Shan Branch School established? And where do its professional graduates ultimately end up?"

Qiao Shuangyi shook his head. "I don't know why this school was established. Supposedly, it was the result of discussions between the... principal and the leaders of the Elders' Council."

"As for where the graduates here end up, I do know a bit about that."

"A portion go abroad. You understand... under various identities, certainly not as professionals."

Chen Gu silently nodded. High-level spies.

"Others... a small number of individuals with extremely strong personal combat abilities become guards for the leaders of the Elders' Council. Another portion joins the military."

"In short, graduates from here generally don't re-enter civilian society."

Chen Gu, keeping his composure, asked, "Then why did you come here? With your family background, there was absolutely no need for you to attend this place."

Qiao Shuangyi, completely unguarded, replied, "Because my old man cares about face! This was the only way I could get into the Tiangong Military Division based on my own abilities. This way, my old man can boast at his gatherings, 'My son got into the Tiangong Military Division!'"

Chen Gu was surprised. "The entry scores here are lower than for other specializations at the Tiangong Military Division?"

"Of course. As long as you have an average of over 810 in two subjects, you might be admitted. Naturally, they investigate applicants beforehand; only professionals are accepted."

Qiao Shuangyi continued, "Once you're in here, your future path is pretty much set, so the entry scores aren't very high."

A wave of displeasure washed over Chen Gu. Have I been tricked?

However, he was somewhat skeptical of Qiao Shuangyi's words. It wasn't that he suspected Qiao Shuangyi of deceiving him; rather, he guessed Qiao Shuangyi's own understanding of Huai Shan Branch School wasn't very deep. Given the Qiao Family's status, he couldn't believe that a prominent figure in the family would send his own son to such a place merely to have something to boast about. The real reasons were probably never shared with Qiao Shuangyi. Qiao Shuangmu might know, but there's no need for me to go out of my way to ask.

Chapter 340: Maoshi Star [Wuning Temple] (1)

The two arrived at the cafeteria, and Qiao Shuangyi, upon seeing the groups of new students here and there, immediately cheered up, "Hahaha, looks like it's not just me who's unlucky. Look at that chick over there, the skinny and tall one—she's Shangguan Yuqing from the Shangguan Family. And the one sitting alone in that corner, yes, yes, that's right, the one who looks like everyone owes her a night of virginity—she's Shang Qingye from the Shang Clan."

This convinced Chen Gu even more that the Huai Shan Branch School wasn't as simple as Qiao Shuangyi had described. Establishing such a school and placing it under the renowned Tiangong Military Division must have significant implications.

Qiao Shuangyi seemed to be quite afraid of these two girls, both from elite families, and dragged Chen Gu toward the food stalls. "Come on, let's eat—I'm treating. Don't you dare be polite with me."

As soon as Chen Gu heard "eat," the vestiges of Isabella Wu's influence within his Soul immediately took effect, his eyes lighting up as he looked toward the neat rows of food stalls.

Once he looked, he couldn't take his eyes away.

He had to admit, Qiao Shuangyi wasn't lying—the food here was genuinely outstanding.

All of it consisted of very rare ingredients. Each dish, staple food, dessert, and fruit was clearly labeled with its place of origin and the career it was most suited for. Moreover, they were prepared using the most advanced cooking methods, maximizing the benefits of these foods.

But when Chen Gu saw the prices, he almost choked. The cheapest fruit cost five thousand Starshields apiece! This was nearly the monthly salary of an average wage earner in this era.

The expensive foods cost hundreds of thousands of Starshields per serving! There was even one stall that was cold and deserted, with no food inside, just a projection of a list naming various delicacies followed by prices and the "preparation time" they required. This was a custom-order stall, the highest-grade in the whole cafeteria. The cheapest dish started at one million six hundred thousand Starshields, and the most expensive soared to twelve million!

Chen Gu inwardly sighed, The rich feast while the poor starve...

Chen Gu now had a fortune of several hundred million Starshields, but even for him, a meal in this cafeteria would be painful to pay for.

His attitude toward Qiao Shuangyi immediately improved considerably, and he smiled as warmly as a spring breeze. "Are you really treating?"

Qiao Shuangyi swept his arm grandly. "Don't worry, these prices are nothing to our Qiao Family. No need for politeness with me. Not just one meal—even if I have to treat you every day, it's no problem!"

Chen Gu demurred, "How could I accept that? My family is indeed quite poor, owning only Chen's Biotech, and it isn't even in my name, sigh..."

Qiao Shuangyi recalled for a moment. Chen's Biotech? Seems like a small company that produces pharmaceuticals. No wonder he looked a bit dejected by the cafeteria prices. Their entire family fortune is only a few tens of billions; they really are poor.

"Rest assured!" Qiao Shuangyi declared boldly. "When I say I'm treating, I'm treating! If you don't eat, it means you look down on me! From now on, I'll cover all your meals at school."

"Well..." Chen Gu made a show of reluctance but then readily agreed. "Since Young Master Qiao has said so, if I don't accept, it would be disrespectful. Alright, from now on, I'll depend on you."

"Hahaha!" Qiao Shuangyi laughed heartily, pulling Chen Gu to pick out food.

Half an hour later, Qiao Shuangyi's eyes were somewhat glassy. What happened? Why is my account over seven million Starshields short? The thing is, I only had a risotto that cost 160,000 Starshields!

Chen Gu, who was sitting across from him, stood up and headed toward the food stalls again. Qiao Shuangyi snapped back to reality in alarm. "Huh? Wh-where are you going?"

Chen Gu didn't look back. "I'm still not full. I'm going to get some more."

Similar exchanges had already occurred between them seven or eight times in the past half hour. Chen Gu ate with astonishing speed. More importantly, he was like a bottomless pit. Qiao Shuangyi even suspected that Chen Gu might not be full even if he devoured the entire cafeteria!

As it happened, Chen Gu hadn't picked any particularly expensive dishes; all were below the average price. If he had actually chosen the expensive items, my monthly allowance wouldn't have been enough... Qiao Shuangyi thought.

But Qiao Shuangyi had already made his boast. If he went back on his word now... What am I going to do during the upcoming freshman military training?

Qiao Shuangyi gritted his teeth. My life is more important! He braced himself and went to pay the bill again.

Chen Gu asked considerately, "Oh dear, did I eat too much?"

Qiao Shuangyi's heart was bleeding, but he forced a smile. "Not at all, not at all. The experts in my family can really eat. I've seen my share of big eaters, so you don't need to worry..."

Chen Gu gave a thumbs up. "Young Master Qiao is indeed generous!"

An hour later, as the cafeteria was about to close, Chen Gu still wasn't full. Qiao Shuangyi's monthly allowance was nearly depleted. He was on the verge of tears, remembering his apparent promise to cover Chen Gu's future meals, which filled him with an even deeper fear. What on earth have I done!

Just then, his phone suddenly rang. It was his cousin.

"Hello?" Qiao Shuangyi answered weakly.

Qiao Shuangmu said, "I remembered something. Although it's just a rumor, I thought I should still remind you: they say Chen Gu can eat an incredible amount. Whatever you do, don't treat him to a meal. I know the prices at the Huai Shan Branch School cafeteria."

There was no response from the other end for a long moment, so Qiao Shuangmu asked, "Hello?"

Qiao Shuangyi replied weakly, "Got it."

Qiao Shuangmu hummed in acknowledgment. "Alright, just wanted to give you a heads-up. I'll hang up if there's nothing else."

"Brother—" Qiao Shuangyi's voice was tinged with a sob. "I need to borrow money—"

Qiao Shuangmu: "..."

「...」

Chen Gu left the cafeteria completely satisfied, while a devastated Qiao Shuangyi trailed behind him. The financial pain was so acute that he even overlooked the fact that Chen Gu hadn't followed any of the cafeteria's dietary recommendations; he ate a wide variety of dishes, getting a portion of whatever he fancied, with no restraint whatsoever.

Young Master Qiao is truly generous, Chen Gu sincerely praised Qiao Shuangyi in his heart. How long has it been since I've eaten my fill, especially with food of this quality?

He had a feeling. After this meal, my physical fitness should see a significant improvement, and it will greatly benefit my various professional abilities too.

Back at the dormitory, Chen Gu said sincerely, "Thank you for your generosity today, Young Master Qiao. I wish you a good night!"

Qiao Shuangyi, his face a mask of despair, returned to his room, which he promptly began to trash. Good night? Fat chance! There's no way I'm having a good night tonight!

「The next day.」

All of this year's freshmen at the Huai Shan Branch School had arrived. There were a total of twelve new students: ten admitted through the college entrance examination, and two who looked like they came from ordinary families but had been specially admitted.

The standards for special admission... Chen Gu didn't know either. However, there was a fellow nearby who considered himself a "know-it-all." While this person only had a superficial understanding of Huai Shan Branch School matters, one could always try to get some information from him.