

Full Time 491

Chapter 491: The City-State Royalty

Sadek was filled with remorse.

Chen Gu nodded slightly after listening to the man's account, finally gaining a thorough understanding of the situation at the Potsdam City Shrine.

What he needed was precisely a breakthrough like the one Tanbudo provided. As for the subsequent investigation, the Bureau of Mystic Security had plenty of professionals. They didn't need evidence; the Bureau's own conviction was sufficient.

Representing the "Great True God," Chen Gu commended Sadek, "the most faithful believer of Our God," with a few words of praise and blessed him by laying a hand on his head.

No substantial reward was necessary. For a true believer like Sadek, those few words of praise brought him the greatest satisfaction.

Then, Sadek, who had clearly been a great help, departed, thanking profusely. He was reluctant to leave, repeatedly looking back as he went.

However, Chen Gu couldn't entirely agree with Sadek's assessment of the situation. It wasn't that he suspected Sadek of deceiving him, but rather that Sadek's own perspective and insight were limited.

For example, Sadek had concluded that the imperial family joined the shrine simply to gain leverage in their power struggles against other royals.

But Chen Gu wouldn't view the issue so simplistically. While he subscribed to the notion that "those in power are often shortsighted," it didn't necessarily mean there were no far-sighted individuals among the royalty.

What followed was simple. Chen Gu gathered everyone and briefly explained the situation. Chen Jixian then made a prompt decision: "Chen Gu, you go."

"You're a Brain Domain Hacker. Extract what we need to know from the minds of these suspect royals."

"Charles and Boluo will go with you, under your command."

"Also, take Chu Zheng. This mission isn't particularly dangerous; take her for some experience."

Chen Gu rolled his eyes. Is he really addressing his own father by his full name?

And stop trying to jinx it, will you? Don't you know that saying 'this mission poses no real danger' is just asking for trouble?

But his adult son was the commander; he could choose not to show deference to his old father. Parents, however, always had to "accommodate" their children. So, Chen Gu didn't rebut Chen Jixian but waved to the three of them. "Let's go."

Joseph volunteered, "Brother Chen, I'll go too."

The skills of this group of professionals were considered "unmatched" on this planet; on the battlefield, they were "mighty warriors." They could hide their movements with ease. Barring those long-headed people with powerful spiritual power, no one would notice them.

Even so, Joseph conjured a mist to envelop them. In the dead of night, even if they strolled past openly, no one would see them.

At most, any onlookers might merely remark, "The night air is unusually heavy during this rainy season."

Chen Gu first sought out a leader within the shrine whom he had observed during the day. This leader was a confidant of the high priest and was sure to know many secrets.

Chen Gu invaded the man's mind as he slept, effortlessly gathering the information he sought: the whereabouts of Tanbudo and the others.

Cities in this era all had inner fortresses where the royalty dwelled. These were heavily guarded—obviously to prevent revolts from the impoverished masses.

Within the inner fortress, "powerhouses" among the long-headed people were stationed. To Cyclops, the inner fortress was no less than a dragon's den, yet the group of four easily bypassed all sentries and infiltrated it undetected.

As they passed through a large courtyard, they all sensed something and simultaneously looked towards the master bedroom, where a long-headed individual with abilities resided.

Curious, Charles whispered to Chen Gu, "How capable is he?"

Chen Gu briefly assessed the presence. "If we're talking about Energy Levels, he's probably equivalent to our Second Energy Level standard. However, his actual combat power is likely only at the First Energy Level, at best."

The spiritual power users of this world were far inferior to professionals in terms of ability application; the backwardness of their civilization was all-encompassing.

Charles nodded. They passed by quietly and soon arrived at Tanbudo's residence.

In the vast courtyard, besides Tanbudo and his family, there were dozens of servants and nearly a hundred guards.

The four of them entered the courtyard. Although Tanbudo was a spiritual power user, he stood no chance against Chen Gu. While Tanbudo slept, his mind was effortlessly "crashed" by Chen Gu using his Brain Domain Hacker ability.

Then Chen Gu began his "inhumane" rummaging through Tanbudo's mind, as if strolling through his own backyard.

This search, however, made Chen Gu grimace continuously. What kind of person is this, with such a degenerate collection of memories... He's a true libertine! As vile and chaotic as they come!

This man was royalty, a member of the city-state's ruling class. Yet, his most profound and extensive memories weren't related to governance. As a spiritual power user, his deepest recollections also weren't about training or enhancing his abilities. Instead, they were entirely consumed by his dalliances with various men and women—liaisons so varied and complex that even Chen Gu, with his past life in the entertainment industry, was left dumbfounded.

No wonder you're marginalized by the other royals and can't make your way, forcing you to try and carve out a new path in the shrine, Chen Gu grumbled internally as he continued his search. He finally managed to sort through the fool's chaotic memories, but the meager findings nearly made him curse aloud.

This idiot was the mastermind who bribed Cyclops to ambush and assassinate me!

His motive was simple: even though the high priest had made thorough arrangements, what if this "Prophet" was genuine? That would significantly undermine Tanbudo's own interests within the shrine.

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So, it would have been simpler to just kill him on the road.

What, you speak of the sanctity of life? Cough, we are all subjects of the royal family, and should the royals dictate your death, what grounds do you have for resentment or defiance?

As for Tanbudo's purpose in infiltrating the shrine, it was truly as simple and shallow as Sadek had described, so much so that Chen Gu doubted his intelligence. Moreover, he couldn't understand how a guy like that could have awakened spiritual power.

Chen Gu shook his hand. "Let's go, let's find the other two."

If Chen Gu had gleaned any useful insight from the contents of Tanbudo's filthy, long-skulled head, it was that the other two royals in the shrine, Rayleigh Augustine and Michel Augustine, were likely problematic.

Tanbudo thought so solely because these two individuals showed restraint everywhere within the shrine. In his memory, he believed it was his 'formidable might' that prevented them from daring to provoke him.

But from Tanbudo's memories, Chen Gu saw that these two royals seemed to intentionally or unintentionally push General Manager Joe Igor and Tanbudo to the forefront, while they themselves remained hidden behind the scenes.

Before leaving, Chen Gu had destroyed Tanbudo's spiritual power. When Tanbudo woke tomorrow, he wouldn't feel anything amiss but would gradually discover his spiritual power weakening, eventually becoming a normal long-header.

Once Chen Gu sorted out the affairs at the shrine, Tanbudo would lose all his holy positions there.

Without spiritual abilities, without a high-ranking priestly status, the fool would certainly be ostracized by the other royals to the fringes of the city-state, ultimately dying a desolate death in his later years.

The fancy pleasures of men and women would bid him farewell forever.

Chen Gu also knew the residences of Rayleigh Augustine and Michel Augustine, which were very far from Tanbudo's. Tanbudo's residence appeared central within the inner castle, a location signifying status! However, in the eyes of the special action team veterans, Tanbudo's residence was conspicuously located and poorly defensible.

It was like a target deliberately presented by the inner castle to attract invaders' attention.

Conversely, the residences of the two royals, Lyle and Michel (one male, one female), appeared to be on the outskirts of the inner castle. However, they were actually situated behind the highest and sturdiest sections of the ramparts.

Lofty watchtowers on the ramparts offered high vantage points for vigilance and cover. Nearby archways provided escape routes, making these truly safer abodes.

Chen Gu, leading the others, still easily dodged the teams of patrolling soldiers at night and entered Lyle's courtyard.

To everyone's surprise, Lyle was still awake at such a late hour, and there were guests in the inner quarters.

The vast estate was shrouded by three layers of faint spiritual power—what the long-header spiritualists called their 'domain'.

They believed that once this 'domain' was established, nothing could escape their spiritual perception, and all battles would proceed under their control.

One of them is Lyle, who are the other two? Chen Gu speculated inwardly as he led his subordinates unimpeded into the so-called 'domain'.

Such use of spiritual power at this level appeared to him as merely 'rudimentary'.

"Hasn't Tanbudo prearranged some extreme measures?"

"Has that fool gotten smarter?"

"No. As far as I know, he spent a fortune, yet inflicted no harm on the Prophet. The Prophet already performed miracles today; the measures Tanbudo arranged couldn't possibly hurt him."

Chen Gu recognized two of the voices: one was Lyle's, and the other Michel's, but the third was unfamiliar.

"Tanbudo, that worthless pawn, was placed by us in the open; he doesn't even realize he's being manipulated, so we shouldn't expect any clever schemes from him," said the third voice. "Now that we can confirm the Prophet is genuine, we should initiate Plan No. 2, as instructed."

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Lyle seemed somewhat reluctant. "Should we simply hand over the fruits of our long and hard efforts to others?"

"On the contrary," the third voice said, "we shall work with this Prophet to nurture our achievements and make them even greater."

"But what if he eventually kicks us out and takes over our nest?" Michel asked.

"Don't worry, the Saints' Guild won't let that happen. He's indeed very powerful, but we have the mighty Twelve Saints! We'll use him to preach, and if he becomes uncontrollable, the Saints will make him sleep forever!"

Chen Gu sneered. Feeling there was no need to listen further, he made a light movement with his psychic tendrils, and the three long-headed people engaged in the secret conversation all fell into a deep slumber.

Chu Zheng was the first to rush in. She disdainfully kicked the three lying on the ground and said, "They sure are ugly."

Chen Gu gently pressed down with both hands, and his psychic tendrils penetrated the minds of the three, beginning the search for information related to the "Saints' Guild."

"Huh—"

This time, he discovered something unexpected: there was an "encrypted" thought structure in the minds of these three people!

And this encrypted thought structure cleverly set a "trap." If one carelessly stepped into it, one would receive completely false information about the "Saints' Guild."

However, all their other memories were unprotected. Only the section concerning the Saints' Guild was shielded by this encryption.

"This is getting interesting," Chen Gu said, stroking his chin. The use of spiritual power demonstrated here clearly surpasses the level of this world's psychics.

Who taught them this? Professionals?

Moreover, Chen Gu pretended to step into the trap. From the minds of these three, he obtained identical false information about the Saints' Guild, which was clearly orchestrated in advance.

No, it seems that every psychic who knows the secrets of the Saints' Guild would provide this same "version" of false information.

Then, with the capabilities of a Fifth Energy Level Brain Domain Hacker, Chen Gu easily decrypted the thought encryption.

He then learned the true information about the Saints' Guild: it was a highly secretive organization. The three people at his feet—Lyle and Michel—were equivalent to the Second Energy Level. The mysterious third person, whom Chen Gu didn't recognize, was even stronger, having nearly reached the Third Energy Level.

Yet all they knew was that the Saints' Guild consisted of twelve incredibly powerful Saints, who were the true puppet masters behind the "Grand True God" Church.

This organization had immense influence, with numerous royal family members as peripheral associates, such as these three. Yet, they had no idea who the Saints actually were. The Saints had revealed their identities to each other, but aside from that, they were unaware of any other peripheral members.

The Saints simply issued them tasks, with no need for feedback or reporting.

The Saints issued orders to them in a mysterious manner as well. Each time, a "Saint"—a tall, majestic figure wearing a golden mask and holding a staff of light—would appear in their dreams and tell them what needed to be done.

While ordinary dreams might be forgotten upon waking, every detail about the Saints remained clear in their minds.

Yet, regarding the thought encryption for the "Saints' Guild" in their minds, the three of them had no memory whatsoever.

By this point, Chen Gu was certain that the encryption was not constructed by the three of them. Rather, it had been planted by the "Saint" who delivered commands during their very first assignment in their "sleep."

What made Chen Gu somewhat uneasy was his inability to infer the Saints' strength from the encryption. Although the structure and the subsequent trap were rudimentary, their design was commendable.

The absence of a more sophisticated encryption might have been due to the "Saints'" insufficient power. However, it was more likely because the three individuals' "weak" spiritual power was incapable of sustaining a more intricate structure.

Are those Saints also Brain Domain Hackers? Chen Gu speculated. But their methods seem somewhat different from those used by Brain Domain Hackers.

However, he would find it impossible to believe that these native, long-headed beings of this planet were capable of such, given the disparity in civilization levels.

The trail seemed to be cut off here; Lyle and the others could not make contact with the Saints' Guild. Chen Gu stroked his chin, gestured to Chu Zheng and the others, and they quietly left for the shrine without alerting anyone.

Chen Jixian and the others had been waiting for news. After Chen Gu returned and shared his findings, his adult son and the elderly predecessor, Gong Shuxu, frowned simultaneously. "Does this mean we can only sit and wait for things to happen? That's too passive."

The team members also felt helpless, realizing they might have to wait for the next command from the Saints' Guild.

Joseph consoled everyone. "The last command they received was to utilize us. Now that we have arrived in Potsdam City, perhaps the next command will come soon."

At that moment, the voice of their former leader, Marcus, rang out through the public communication channel. "Would you like to hear my opinion?"

Chen Gu quickly said, "Of course."

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Marcus didn't beat around the bush. "Based on my many years of experience, an organization as mysterious as the Order of Saints would never truly leave important pawns like Lyle unattended. They would only issue orders when needed."

The old comrade's words served as a wake-up call to everyone.

While the Order of Saints needed to maintain its air of mystery, it didn't mean they had no control over their members. Otherwise, the Saint tasked with giving orders wouldn't have gone to the trouble of implanting that encrypted thought structure in the minds of Lyle and his companions.

Melincha, the puppet, asked, "Are you saying that...?"

Marcus continued, "The more secretive the organization, the more it needs to appear omnipotent and omniscient—especially when it comes to controlling its own members.

"Even if we assume that each Saint is important to the organization and they come in person to give orders, what if these three have already been secretly controlled by the enemy, and they come crashing into a trap without any idea?

"That's why, next to every important peripheral member, there must be an eye of the Order of Saints watching them!"

Marcus speculated with the expertise of a seasoned special agent, "This eye might seem inconspicuous to Lyle and his two companions, but it must stay close enough to observe them unnoticed, providing ample intelligence support for the Saint behind the scenes."

Even Gong Shuxu couldn't help but nod. "That makes sense. Indeed, an elder in the family is a treasure!"

Chen Gu glanced sideways. Aren't you flattering yourself with that comment?

Chen Gu didn't dawdle and stood up right away. "I'll make another round to thoroughly check the servants around these three."

The servants were the perfect candidates for the "eyes" identified in Marcus's analysis. All three were royals, and each family employed hundreds of servants. However, not many had frequent enough contact with them to facilitate surveillance, only about a dozen or so per household.

In this round of inspection, Chen Gu was extra careful, wary of those "mental traps."

But after a busy night, as dawn approached, he found nothing. These servants were all ordinary people. Although their hearts were full of envy or resentment towards their masters, none exhibited any suspicious behavior or seemed to be secretly passing on messages.

As Chen Gu contemplated with furrowed brows, Marcus suddenly interjected, "Check their concubines as well."

Chen Gu laughed and immediately set to work.

The matrimonial system in this world was extremely chaotic. Simply put, those with power could do as they pleased.

For instance, Lyle had sixteen concubines, and Michel had nine male courtesans.

As for the third person, Clerinsa, another member of the royal family with even more wealth and power, was truly impressive—she had four wives and three husbands!

From Clerinsa's memories, Chen Gu had even unintentionally seen the extraordinarily large bed in her home.

Time was running out for Chen Gu, but he quickly made a discovery. One of Lyle's concubines would shop at a clothing store in the city every three days.

During these visits, she reported Lyle's movements over the last three days to a tailor in the shop while trying on clothes.

The concubine had always believed that the owner behind the clothing store was the City Lord, the highest ruler of the entire city-state.

She thought she was helping the City Lord by monitoring all actions of the royal members under him.

She didn't even know about the existence of the Order of Saints.

Chen Gu quickly took control of this concubine. By now, daylight had broken. Chen Gu brazenly woke up Lyle and the two others, keeping them under control with his 'Brain Domain Hacker' abilities.

The three—two men and one woman—emerged from a room early in the morning, accompanied by a concubine. Lyle's servants and guards quickly lowered their heads, pretending to see nothing, though their hearts filled with deep admiration. Royals sure know how to live it up! How enviable! If only I could join them!

Chen Gu kept these four close because he couldn't yet control them remotely. Thus, he hid in the shadows, controlling the four as they headed straight for Michel's house. Sure enough, he successfully identified another 'eye' among Michel's male courtesans.

This informant's reporting location was an arena in the city. After every gladiatorial game he watched, he would meet with a popular and powerful gladiator, his lover, and casually report the information during their intimate moments.

What a mess.

Clerinsa's case was a bit odd. Chen Gu caught two 'eyes' in one fell swoop—a man and a woman. The man reported his information at a bank, receiving a sum of money after each report.

The woman, on the other hand, went home, where the old butler was her contact.

Gong Shuxu said calmly, "Alright, you need to appear before your followers today. Leave the rest to me."

So, Chen Gu, with all the high-ranking clergy of the shrine, including Lyle, by his side, spent the whole day racing through various mines to bring blessings to the faithful. Of course, he did not miss showing off some miracles and concocted several large barrels of "Holy Water" mixed with antibiotics.

By the time he returned in the evening, Gong Shuxu had already discreetly taken care of everything.

Gong Shuxu informed him, "Although they reported to different places, all the intelligence ultimately converged, ending up in the hands of an unremarkable small merchant in the city.

"This merchant has three trade caravans frequently traveling between cities, evidently to facilitate message transmission."

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"The two from the Clerinsa family: the man is the Saint Council's eyes, while the woman is genuinely an informant placed by the City Lord to monitor Clerinsa. It seems the City Lord doesn't trust him much."

Clerinsa was powerful enough to pose a threat to the City Lord.

The division of labor was still clear. Chen Gu devoted himself to continue acting the charlatan, while Gong Shuxu led a few team members to start investigating secretly.

A few days later, the old man suddenly returned, looking perplexed. "After a round of investigation, I was led in a big circle, only to end up back in Potsdam City!"

Chen Gu was also surprised. "Who on earth is it?"

"In the end, all this intelligence was delivered to the City Lord's mansion!"

"Hmm?"

Gong Shuxu said, "I left a spiritual imprint on the secret report. Tonight, I will go to the City Lord's mansion to see whose hands it eventually fell into!"

Everyone nodded in agreement, ready for a significant action that night, and then all began to conserve their energy.

However, after dinner, a priest from the shrine came in holding a wooden box. "Prophet, someone outside requests an audience. He brought this and said that after you see it, you will definitely agree to meet him."

Chen Gu took the wooden box and sensed it with ****Mind Belief****, surprised to find that the ordinary-looking box could block his abilities.

He cautiously opened the box. Gong Shuxu, standing beside him, his expression suddenly changing, whispered in Chen Gu's ear, "This is the secret report that I left a spiritual imprint on!"

Without any change in his demeanor, Chen Gu closed the box. "Let him come in."

The priest wasn't gone long before a young man entered.

He gave a slight nod to the group and, rather impolitely, began to look them over freely without saying a word.

Chen Gu and his companions were meanwhile scrutinizing him.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Colin Augustine. I am the son of Dakote Augustine," the young man finally spoke.

"The young City Lord?"

Dakote Augustine was the City Lord of Potsdam.

Colin nodded, then made a startling remark, "So the 'devils from the stars' don't look much different from us, or are you good at disguising yourselves?"

Chen Gu frowned slightly. "Are you a member of the Saint Council?"

Colin smiled faintly. "To be precise, I am one of the twelve Saints of the Saint Council."

"You?" The group clearly didn't believe him. Colin, however, still smiled confidently. Lightly shaking his long head, a strong spiritual power rippled out from him like water waves.

Chu Zheng and several of the weaker professionals felt a wave of dizziness, their bodies swaying unsteadily.

Chen Gu silently nodded to himself. Colin was much stronger than Lyle and the others. Furthermore, when it came to the use of spiritual power, he was clearly several levels higher.

He asked, "What is your purpose in finding us?"

Colin said indifferently, "You were the ones who found me first." He pointed to the box. "If I didn't show up, you might have ended up finding my father."

"Although my father is short-sighted and indulges only in pleasure, he is still my father and has always been good to me."

By this time, Chen Jixian stepped forward. "The cooperation between the Long-headed Royal Family and us has always been harmonious. As a royal, you are a beneficiary. Why are you secretly engaging in these conspiracies?"

"Harmonious?" Colin scoffed. "You have always been plundering us!"

Chen Jixian, a man of rigid military bearing, couldn't be bothered to argue. He interrupted Colin coldly, "Who is backing you? Your skill in using spiritual power far exceeds this planet's level."

"HAHAHA!" Colin laughed. "Are you scared now? We have found a partner far more powerful than you. They will help us break free from your rule..."

Chen Jixian interrupted him coldly again. "Confess honestly, and you might still have a chance to live—or rather, your family might!"

Colin gritted his teeth. "Let's leave the city. If we act here, many innocents could be hurt." Then, with a mocking smile, he added, "I know you invaders don't care about the lives or deaths of us Long-heads, but if too many of us die, there will be no one left to mine for you."

Having said that, he didn't wait to see whether Chen Gu and the others would agree and turned to leave. Chen Jixian's expression at that moment was the spitting image of his usual demeanor, with half-lidded eyes and a face filled with cold indifference. Colin's brazen accusations didn't stir any emotion in him. With a wave of his hand, he led everyone to follow.

Outside the shrine, carriages had already been prepared. After Colin boarded one, he sped towards the city limits, Chen Gu and the others following swiftly in pursuit.

Potsdam City was large, and it took them over an hour to leave the city. After another half an hour, Colin's carriage stopped outside a forest.

As Chen Gu and his party disembarked from their carriage, eleven Long-heads emerged from the trees. Each one radiated strong spiritual fluctuations.

Colin also stepped out of the carriage. "You always wanted to find the Saint Council, and now, as you wished, all twelve Saints stand before you!

"However, today's outcome might not be what you expected!

"We will kill you to raise our banner, then initiate the dawn of our planet's independence and liberation!"

Chen Gu looked at him with inexplicable amazement. Young man, your confidence is quite baffling.

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Twelve Saints stood together, holding hands. Their spiritual fluctuations merged, mutually amplifying and growing stronger.

A visible, deep blue energy wave spread out from them as the center, continuously expanding and washing over their surroundings.

The forest behind them seemed to be swept by relentless gusts of wind, its branches and leaves rustling loudly.

The horses pulling the carts neighed miserably and fled in panic. One of them crashed into a large tree and fell to the ground, convulsing.

Meanwhile, from both sides of the path behind Chen Gu and his group, a large crowd of long-headed people burst out. They were not only numerous but also all psychics. They held spiritual power muskets, even more refined than the Cyclops's dual pistols, their dark muzzles pointed at the group, cutting off their retreat.

To Colin and the others, such overwhelming force was enough to overthrow any city-state in this world; using it against these 'demons' seemed like overkill. However, to ensure a victorious start, the Saints' Council still spared no effort in gathering almost all of its power.

Chen Gu found the situation quite amusing. He simply crossed his arms and stood aside to watch the show unfold, pulling Chu Zheng, who was itching to get involved, behind him. "With so many powerhouses here," he said, "there's no need for us to get involved."

Chen Jixian was quite satisfied with the situation before him. He twisted his neck and, with a thought, issued a command. The "Biochemical Muscle Suit" encasing his body hissed as it automatically detached.

Colin sneered, "So this is the true face of devils, eh? Much weaker than us!"

Chen Jixian had been impatient for days. The Bureau of Mystic Security really wasn't the right fit for him, especially not special operative tasks.

He was always one to act rather than talk. After waiting for so long and finally finding his mission target, he reached out. A ball of light gathered in his palm, quickly spinning and transforming into a war hammer.

Chen Gu watched with envy. This unfilial son! You make excuses when I ask you to forge a weapon for me, even trying to pocket the precious materials I risked my life for. Yet, you prepared one for yourself the moment you were promoted!

This war hammer was far more powerful than his previous one.

Chen Jixian displayed no fancy skills. He strode forward, raised the war hammer high, and aimed at the twelve Saints' interconnected spiritual power wave. Then, with a thunderous slam, he brought it down.

BOOM—

The nearby mountains seemed to tremble. The ground undulated like ripples on water. The amplified spiritual power connection between the Saints shattered instantly under the attack of the Sixth Energy

Level Abyssal Blacksmith, and large swathes of deep blue spiritual power roared out into the surroundings.

The unlucky ones weren't the special operations team members but the long-headed people behind them. They were swept up by the residual waves of spiritual power. One by one, they crumpled in agony, clutching their heads, some even screaming as they rolled on the ground.

As the hammer fell, the twelve Saints simultaneously sprayed blood from their nostrils, their eyes turning bloodshot. They slumped to the ground, disfigured and limp. A few already had twisted mouths and slanted eyes—it was doubtful if they retained any consciousness.

Colin was the toughest of them all. He managed to remain standing, glaring at Chen Jixian with gritted teeth for a long, long time before reluctantly sputtering, "How... how can it be... like this..."

Chen Gu sneered. Young man, you really know nothing about power.

Gong Shuxu emerged from behind them, sighed softly, and asked, "Was all this necessary?"

It was such a simple sentence, yet it instantly triggered an intense resonance among all the long-headed people present. Those suffering on the ground behind them immediately felt: Yes, why did it have to come to this? They were demanding ores from us, but they hadn't mistreated us. Why did we have to resort to armed confrontation? Freedom? Dignity? Those are all illusions. Are they really worth such a high price?

Gong Shuxu had already opened a communication channel and said to Marcus, "Send over a batch of restraining devices."

The restraining devices could incapacitate practitioners, so naturally, they would have no issue subduing these psychics.

The unmanned aircraft arrived in just a few minutes. Under the shocked gazes of the long-headed people, Joseph and a few others retrieved restraining devices from the aircraft and shackled all of them.

Chapter 497 Holy Mountain

The remaining twelve Saints watched Chen Jixian approach, hammer in hand. Several of them panicked and began to retreat, but Gong Shuxu assured them, "Don't worry, we won't really kill you." Whether it was true or not, the Saints believed him.

Only Colin still gritted his teeth, glaring furiously at Chen Jixian. Chen Jixian didn't bother with words and casually grabbed him, dragging him back.

The Tall-heads were huge in stature, but in Chen Jixian's hands, Colin was like a small chicken seized by an eagle.

Chen Jixian threw Colin in front of Chen Gu. Meanwhile, Gong Shuxu was chatting amicably with the other Saints, like a friendly neighbor. "Who taught you these spiritual power techniques? They're pretty good, much cleverer than your original ones."

Having their spiritual power broken, the Saints had no ability to resist the skills of the Psychological Spy. They felt a great sense of kinship with Gong Shuxu, as if he was one of their own—someone they could talk to about anything.

"Sacred Mountain," the Saints stated in unison. "It was Sacred Mountain that taught us."

Colin, gritting his teeth, shouted loudly, "Fools, shut up!"

He was the most gifted among all the Tall-heads present. Despite taking a blow from Chen Jixian's hammer, his spiritual power had not completely collapsed. In just a short time, he had managed to gather some of it back. His deep-seated hatred for the "Devils from the Star Sea," combined with his unwavering belief, allowed him to withstand Gong Shuxu's abilities and avoid total bewilderment.

His shout did indeed shake a few Saints out of their trance, and they now looked at Gong Shuxu with wary eyes.

Chen Gu patted Colin's shoulder and said with a smile, "Well then, if you won't let them speak, you can be the one to tell us."

When Chen Gu's hand touched Colin's shoulder, his mental tendrils had already spread and invaded. An unharmed Colin could have actually contended with Chen Gu's "Brain Domain Hacker" for a while. But at this moment, Colin's spiritual defenses offered almost no resistance, and Chen Gu's tendrils easily took control of him.

After Chen Gu finished speaking, Colin became dull and wooden. Then, he "honestly" heeded Chen Gu's "advice" and began to speak, "Sacred Mountain is grand and mysterious. It hailed from the infinite void, crossing the Star Sea to bring us salvation!

"It is the manifestation of Our God's power in this world.

"It is omnipresent and can appear anywhere.

"Though it has no life, it can connect with us Tall-heads through thought. Everything we have is a gift from Sacred Mountain.

"We also follow Sacred Mountain's teachings, proclaiming the glory of the one true God in our world..."

Chen Gu no longer needed to listen. He spoke to Marcus on the communication channel, "Boss, did you hear that? This thing must be a vessel with mimetic stealth capabilities. Scan the globe and find it."

Marcus's voice came through. "As the Group Leader, do I need *you* to tell me what to do? I've already started the scans. The thirty-six military satellites outside the planet are all running at full power. Don't worry, we'll have results soon."

Meanwhile, Chen Gu asked Colin with a smile, "You say Sacred Mountain is omnipresent. Yet all you Saints are about to be wiped out, and it doesn't come to rescue you? Why is that?"

Colin was left speechless.

Chen Gu didn't bother with him anymore. He turned to discuss matters with Gong Shuxu and the undutiful son. "This thing is highly technologically advanced and can link minds. Clearly, it's from the Star Sea—could it be the work of another Star Nation?"

Gong Shuxu shook his head lightly. "We don't know yet. We'll find out when we locate it."

He glanced at the Tall-heads secured in safety shackles. "What should we do with them?"

Chen Jixian said bluntly, "They are all war criminals!" The implication, of course, was summary execution.

Chen Gu thought for a moment. "I think we should wait until we find what they call the Sacred Mountain before discussing this. Moreover, how to deal with them should be decided by the Director-General."

Chen Jixian couldn't help but glance at him, and Chen Gu almost cursed aloud. Why are you looking at me, kid? It's not like I'm afraid of her! This is work! Fierce on the outside, cowardly within... that's me, alright. Just like those men from my past life who would always explain, 'I'm not scared of her; I do it because I love her.'

Chen Jixian, of course, was completely unaware of Chen Gu's internal drama. His gaze remained coldly fixed on Colin and the others. His viewpoint was simple: cult organizations like this were most dangerous if not completely eradicated. Give them the slightest chance to survive, and they would spread rapidly once again.

Soon, however, Marcus's voice, tinged with excitement, rang out on their channel: "Found it. Want to see the hunt?"

Chen Jixian said, "Switch it over."

Suddenly, a holographic projection appeared out of thin air among them. The image showed several high-speed fighter jets flying low to the ground. Then, they swiftly climbed, converging from all directions on a mountain that appeared unremarkable amidst the verdant range.

The mountain, nestled among the lush peaks, showed no sign of abnormality. But as the jets abruptly approached, it suddenly "came to life." Orange-red flames erupted from below as it quickly fled towards outer space.

Colin and the other "Saints" also witnessed this scene, and their "faith" crumbled in an instant. One of the Tall-heads, whose mind had clearly snapped, suddenly giggled foolishly. "Why is the Sacred Mountain spewing fire from below?"

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Every "Saint" was exceptionally familiar with the appearance of that mountain, as it was the sacred place in their hearts. It was the encounter with this mountain that had sparked their "sudden enlightenment," leading them away from a muddled and intoxicating dreamlike existence. They embraced a grand pursuit and embarked on a noble enterprise! All that they possessed now could be said to have been bestowed upon them by this mountain.

Chen Gu and the others didn't bother to explain to them. When this mimic spacecraft, disguised as the sacred mountain, performed its deceptive acts in front of the long-headed people, it must have been using anti-gravity flight, or simply the same kind of levitation technology as maglev vehicles. But now, in their moment of escape, the engines were naturally running at full power.

Even so, it was no match for the pursuing fighters. After several aerial entanglements, two fighter jets simultaneously hit the mountain with their magnetic storm cannons. With a ZZZT-HUMM, the "mountain" went offline on the spot. Its exterior was undamaged, but it plummeted straight down. Another two fighter jets flew past above it, shooting out two energy capture nets that swiftly ensnared the mountain and flew away.

From the holographic projection, Marcus's voice came through, "Do you want to come back and witness the deconstruction process?"

"Of course, I can't miss that," Gong Shuxu said with a smile.

Meanwhile, Colin and the others had completely collapsed, sitting on the ground with vacant stares and blank minds. Only Colin was muttering to himself, Really... is there no way out? Are we doomed to be enslaved forever?

Chen Gu thought for a moment, then reached out to open the Dimensional Prison Ring, "collecting" all the long-headed people present inside it—after all, Chen Gu figured Aviloya wouldn't bother releasing these long-headed people again.

As soon as Combat Rooster saw the Dimensional Cage open, it thought it could go out and play. SQUAWK! It bounced up, only to have a bunch of odd-looking creatures thrown in instead. Its master didn't even greet it before promptly closing the Dimensional Cage again. This made it quite unhappy. Hence, it looked down at these "little things" with no good temper, snarling and baring its teeth, appearing incredibly malevolent and terrifying.

The Saints had already completely collapsed. Even if Combat Rooster were to swallow them whole at that moment, they would have no reaction. However, the long-headed people armed with spiritual power rifles had never seen the "sacred mountain" before. Suddenly entering this "world," they were so terrified they nearly wet themselves! Could this place be the "hell" ruled by the "Devil from the Starry Skies"? Was this terrifying beast the demon guarding the gates of hell?

Adding to their fear, Combat Rooster deliberately intimidated them, causing nearly half of them to collapse on the spot, their crotches damp. If Chen Gu had known it would turn out like this, he would never have thrown them in...

The group didn't return to Potsdam but headed straight for the military base instead. The fighter jets had already dragged the "sacred mountain" back, awaiting their return to start disassembling it. Marcus was skilled at administrative tasks. He had already reported the mission's overview to Aviloya in advance. Aviloya had only one directive: "Find out the origins of that sacred mountain." This was the real puppet master behind the scenes.

By the time Chen Gu and his team arrived at the base, the sacred mountain had been secured on a huge platform, surrounded by twenty-four function-specific mechanical arms. Chen Jixian gave the order, "Begin."

The mechanical arms operated swiftly according to a predetermined program. Lasers peeled away the giant mimic spacecraft's shell, then delved layer by layer deeper inside. As expected, there was no pilot inside this mimic spacecraft. However, it did contain a highly advanced AI program, and Marcus also discovered a remote control interface. Besides these, the entire mimic spacecraft was remarkably 'clean,' leaving no clues that could be traced back to its source. Even the serial numbers on every component of the mimic spacecraft were erased.

"Damn it!" cursed Silver Eagle Charles. He felt like they had wasted so much effort for nothing. It seemed they had made a significant discovery, but the final answer remained elusive.

Marcus checked it over again, feeling equally helpless. "This mimic spacecraft sent out a warning signal the moment we found it," he explained. "Since we didn't block it, the remote operators must have received the message by now. They won't contact this mimic spacecraft again."

Chen Gu, however, approached the disassembled mimic spacecraft, carefully examining each part. He continuously ran his hands over them, browsing through the various data recorded within the spacecraft. This included the spacecraft's flight logs, records of contact between the spacecraft and the long-headed people, and more.

Chu Zheng, curious, was about to ask the instructor what he was doing when Gong Shuxu gently stopped her. "He is using the abilities of the Brain Domain Hacker. If there's still a chance to glean any clues from this mimic spacecraft, it will be up to him. Don't disturb him."

The Brain Domain Hacker was activating a level of cognitive power far beyond that of ordinary professionals, analyzing the data. The mimic spacecraft's database was immensely vast. Chen Gu's eyes were bloodshot, and he felt his brain starting to overheat! Streams of data flowed through his mind as Chen Gu continuously conducted associative analysis. His primary focus was the mimic spacecraft's 'consciousness link' data.

Indeed, inside the mimic spacecraft was a device similar to the Giant Beast League's 'consciousness linker,' but it was more advanced, capable of maintaining a brief 'void link.'

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That is to say, Colin and his team didn't need to board the spacecraft to maintain this connection.

The time was short, and the energy consumed was immense.

The spacecraft was precisely using this device to teach Colin and his team spiritual power techniques that far exceeded the standards of this world.

Then Chen Gu began to analyze these "techniques." To his surprise, these techniques were not based on the Brain Domain Hacker or Psychological Spy vocational skills he had previously guessed. They weren't tailored for the development of the Long-headed People's spiritual power.

Instead, these techniques seemed to be specifically designed for spiritual power.

Could it be that in the Star Sea, there is another profession that specializes in spiritual power, which is naturally compatible with the talents of the Long-headed People?

Despite the fact that professions had developed for many years and were quite refined, new ones would occasionally emerge.

Suddenly, Chen Gu remembered something: he had consumed quite a bit of Grade 4 Ore Crystal. It was one of the three most valuable minerals on the planet.

Aside from that, there was another type called Raw Silicate.

Raw Silicate is an important raw material used to manufacture quantum super brains. The spacecraft's flight logs recorded some mining areas it specifically visited, all of which were important sources of Raw Silicate.

The mastermind's meticulous promotion of the heretical cult, intending to control the planet through the 'True God,' must also have his own interests at stake.

Is there anything else of value on this planet besides these minerals?

At the very least, we can preliminarily conclude that the mastermind is most interested in Raw Silicate.

He controls a profession that excels in spiritual power.

As Chen Gu continued to review some information on the spacecraft, he discovered that it had arrived on the planet more than twenty years ago.

It had a "plan," and had been strictly following it since the day it landed, developing the Holy Church according to this plan. Only occasionally would directives arrive to make some minor adjustments to the overall plan.

According to this plan, the "Holy Mountain" had basically completed its mission; the work it needed to do was finished.

Within the next two to three years, a "Prophet" would arrive. The Holy Mountain's next task was to cooperate with this Prophet to elevate the Holy Church to a position from which it could completely overthrow the royal family's rule and establish a theocratic state on the planet.

During this process, the Holy Church would provide a large amount of advanced weaponry to the Holy Church's rebel forces to help them secure autonomy.

This meant negotiating with the Confederation for a deal: a portion of the mined ore would be handed over to the Confederation, while the Holy Church would manage the rest. The Confederation would have to pay for any ore they wanted from the Holy Church's share.

Chen Gu certainly wasn't foolish enough to believe this plan was prescient, somehow foreseeing the arrival of his group, or himself as this "Prophet."

Clearly, the mastermind had originally intended to send someone to reap the rewards within these two years. The plan was to coerce all the Long-headed People into negotiating with the Confederation—betting that the Confederation wouldn't slaughter all of them, thereby gaining a substantial share of the ore profits.

However, Chen Gu felt the mastermind's gamble was unlikely to pay off.

It's not a matter of right or wrong, good or evil; it's really because the stakes are too large. The capital magnates within the Confederation would never share such considerable profits.

To be precise, no Star Nation would do so.

During this time, Chen Gu had also come to understand why the Confederation had preserved the Long-headed People instead of slaughtering them, taking over the entire planet, and then using mining robots for extraction.

A reluctance to commit genocide was one reason, but it might not have been the main one. Massacres also required the deployment of troops, which cost money.

Subsequent processes, like cremating and burying corpses, and managing the potential public uproar from leaks, would also require a great deal of effort and money.

So, with the Long-headed People's royal family willing to cooperate and still able to provide ore, it was more cost-effective to supply them with some food and rudimentary weapons than to use expensive mining robots.

Yet even after analyzing so much, Chen Gu still hadn't found any clues that would allow him to continue tracking the mastermind.

But Chen Gu had some speculations. He said to Marcus, "Lend me the base's interstellar quantum network connection port; I need access to the Bureau's secret database."

"Okay."

After the connection was established, Chen Gu brought up a list of all the heretical organizations in the Confederation's history. The Bureau had a department dedicated to studying such groups and had thoroughly researched every one of them.

Their research covered everything: origins, political purposes, and modus operandi.

Chen Gu kept comparing and analyzing until he reached a conclusion. There's a 70% chance it's our old nemesis: True Knowledge Sin!

By this time, Chen Gu was exceptionally fatigued. He exited Isabella Wu's memory, feeling as limp as a dehydrated vegetable.

No one immediately voiced an opinion on his judgment, neither agreement nor opposition.

The veteran Bureau of Mystic Security employees began their own internal evaluations, reassessing True Knowledge Sin based on their knowledge and understanding.

Chu Zheng, Dora, and Boluo, however, were far less informed. They lacked a clear and complete understanding of True Knowledge Sin and merely looked at each other. Chu Zheng, though, was convinced. If the instructor says so, then it must be true, no doubt about it.

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Gong Shuxu was the first to nod in realization. "Although it's somewhat disguised, when you think about it, it really is the True Knowledge Sin approach: masquerading as a normal belief and then spreading rapidly like a virus..."

Marcus also expressed his agreement. "Chen Gu makes a good point."

Chen Gu leaned on a nearby table, too hungry to straighten his back. "Please, get me something to eat from the base."

Marcus hurriedly went to get food but was stopped by Chen Gu. "Don't get ordinary food. I need No. 4 Ore Crystals, raw silicates, and other minerals."

"Huh?" Marcus and everyone else looked baffled. Chen Gu could only force a wry smile. "When I use the Brain Domain Hacker profession, I need some special materials to replenish... Just don't ask too many questions and hurry up. I'm starving."

"Okay." Marcus, true to his habit of being considerate to newcomers—a trait he maintained to this day—immediately took action. After communicating with the base, a large shipment of ore was quickly delivered. Chen Gu grabbed it and, CRUNCH, CRUNCH, began to devour it.

Everyone watched, dumbfounded. Could those hard minerals really be eaten as easily as crisp, refreshing melons?

Chu Zheng's eyes shone with admiration. "Truly worthy of being an instructor; he really is different from the rest!"

This base served many purposes. One crucial role was conducting "exchanges" with the royalty of the various city-states. Consequently, ore mined from across the planet was first transported here.

The base would initially break down and refine the ore, then package it into standard cubes. Marcus went to negotiate, and the base was very accommodating, immediately dispatching a heavy mining vehicle to transport twelve standard cubes of ore.

Chen Gu ate with incredible speed, and in just over half an hour, he had consumed all twelve cubes of ore! It was as if his body were a bottomless pit.

After finishing, Chen Gu finally let out a long sigh; the satisfaction of a full stomach was simply incomparable.

Marcus asked in shock, "Do you know how much that meal just cost? I've been chatting with the base's warriors these past few days. They told me that each cube, when transported back to Gonghe, is valued at over a million Starshields..."

Chen Gu was about to speak, but suddenly, his stomach rumbled with a strange noise, and a wave of terrible pain washed over him!

Chen Gu's face immediately contorted, and he bent over. "I need... a restroom..."

Marcus's complexion changed. He pointed in a direction, and Chen Gu darted over like a rabbit.

It had only taken him half an hour to eat, but Chen Gu spent a full two hours in the restroom. When he came out, he looked wan and weak, merely saying, "I need to rest."

Marcus supported him to a dormitory. Chen Gu lay down on the bed and soon fell into a deep sleep.

That night, the base's waste disposal system became severely clogged. The distressed warriors eventually had to draw straws to pick an unlucky individual to go and clear it with a robot.

When the unfortunate soul returned, he cursed profusely, "Which unscrupulous bastard threw all those metal chunks and rocks into the toilet?!"

Marcus, realizing something, shrank his neck and didn't dare say a word.

But the story quickly spread throughout the base. Everyone in the special operations team soon knew and snickered in secret. Chen Gu, still deep in sleep, was unaware that he was on the brink of social death within headquarters...

He slept until the following morning before waking up.

Truth be told, while this peculiar appetite was a significant burden, the torment that followed each indulgence always brought immense benefits.

For instance, as Chen Gu looked in the mirror, he felt he had become more handsome.

No, that's not the point. The point was that Chen Gu could clearly feel his spiritual power had significantly increased—a definitely good thing for a professional.

An increase in spiritual power for any profession meant smoother operation and enhancement of skills.