

Martial Arts 291

Chapter 291: Demanding an Explanation

Headquarters.

In a peaceful room.

On the northern wall, there was a painting with the word "Zen" written in vigorous strokes.

Below the painting, there was a table with an incense burner on it. Sandalwood was burning inside the burner, releasing wisps of white smoke that carried a faint fragrance.

This was no ordinary sandalwood but calming incense. The scent it emitted after being lit could calm one's mind and prevent them from going astray during meditation.

Additionally, it could speed up the flow of True Qi within martial artists, making it highly effective during their breath regulation.

Shi Tao was sitting cross-legged on a cushion, facing the incense burner, with his eyes closed and white mist rising from his head.

Ling Yu was seated behind him, also cross-legged, circulating his True Essence and absorbing the medicinal power of the True Qi Pill.

Suddenly, his eyelid twitched a few times.

Ling Yu slowly opened his eyes.

At that moment, his right eyelid twitched again.

"What's going on?"

He frowned slightly. This was the first time he had encountered such a situation.

As the saying goes, "Left-eye twitching brings wealth; right-eye twitching brings disaster." His right eyelid kept twitching incessantly, indicating that something bad might happen to him soon?

This was quite puzzling.

It should be noted that the place he was currently at was one of the safest in Jiangnan City. So even if Jiangnan City fell, he would remain safe here. What disaster could be looming over him?

Thinking this, Ling Yu's lips curled into a smile. All those old sayings about left-eye twitching wealth and right-eye twitching disaster were just outdated myths that only a fool would be unsettled by.

He raised his head to look at the painting in front of him and thought to himself, had Xiao Hong arrived in Anshan City?

From Jiangnan City to Anshan City was thousands of miles away, but with Xiao Hong's abilities, he shouldn't encounter any issues.

If he arrived, chances were he'd find the alchemist Chen Fan. A mere early-stage Meridian Refining Realm martial artist—wouldn't it be easy to capture him?

Just make sure to find a private place upon returning. If word of this gets out, it would be problematic.

As long as confidentiality is maintained, he would have countless top-grade True Qi Pills to consume. His realm surpassing his master one day wouldn't be impossible.

"What's the matter? Distracted?"

At that moment, Shi Tao's voice sounded.

Ling Yu was startled, hurriedly lowered his head, and honestly replied, "Master, I suddenly felt a bit irritable just now, so I opened my eyes to rest for a while."

"Is that so?"

Shi Tao opened his eyes at his words.

He then said slowly, "Circulating True Essence can be quite tedious. If you still can't calm your mind, you might want to go for a walk to relax."

"Master, I have calmed myself now."

Ling Yu smiled.

"Alright."

Shi Tao nodded, not giving it much thought.

Even he would feel distracted during his seclusion occasionally, but over the years, as his spiritual power grew stronger, such occurrences had become rare.

"Master's senses are indeed sharp."

Ling Yu closed his eyes, feeling a sense of relief while secretly being wary.

Having countless top-grade True Qi Pills after capturing Chen Fan would be a good thing, but it would also likely be noticed by the master, requiring caution.

As he was about to resume circulating his energy, a faint phone ringtone suddenly sounded in the peaceful room.

Both men opened their eyes simultaneously.

Shi Tao exhaled and stood up, walked to the table, and picked up the phone.

"Chang Fei?"

His pupils slightly dilated, pondering, could it be that Elder Tang and the others had quickly mastered the improved True Qi Pill refining technique?

Otherwise, why would Chang Fei contact him during his seclusion?

He answered the call and smiled, "Chang Fei, have Elder Tang and the others made progress in alchemy?"

"No,"

Chang Fei glanced at Chen Fan on the screen, took a deep breath, and said, "Chairman, I have some bad news to tell you next, and I hope you'll be prepared."

Shi Tao's expression changed slightly and said, "Alright, go ahead."

"Chairman, Ling Yu is currently by your side, right?"

"Yes, why?"

Shi Tao glanced at Ling Yu, who also looked puzzled.

Was Uncle Chang calling the master?

Did he mention me in the call? Otherwise, the master wouldn't suddenly turn to look at me.

He was inexplicably uneasy, thinking of his right eyelid twitching earlier, wondering if it was a real sign of trouble approaching?

But he hadn't done anything to offend anyone lately, mostly staying beside his master without leaving, so why trouble would find him?

Wait, could it be?

Ling Yu's eyes widened. Was it Xiao Hong who ran into trouble?

No, it couldn't be.

"Alright, Chairman, since Ling Yu is right next to you, you might want to put the phone on speaker so he can hear what I have to say."

Chang Fei said.

This matter needed to be clarified.

Otherwise, Chen Fan's trust in the headquarters would drop to zero, and nothing could recover it.

"Gulp."

In the meeting room of Anshan City, Xiao Hong swallowed.

Ling Yu is there?

Then I might have to confront him soon?

If possible, he didn't want things to come to this, but now he had no choice.

Sun Wei felt extremely nervous, with sweat covering his palms.

Chen Fan remained silent, quietly waiting.

After a moment, Shi Tao said, "Go ahead, what's the matter?"

With those words, Xiao Hong breathed a sigh of relief.

Clearly, Shi Tao hadn't agreed to Chang Fei's request to put the phone on speaker for Ling Yu to hear.

Although inevitable, this situation could be delayed for a while.

Feeling bitter, Chang Fei glanced at Chen Fan and said, "Chairman, do you remember yesterday's phone call about Brother Chen?"

"Yes, what's the matter?"

"I mentioned that Brother Chen didn't want to come to the headquarters, which we understood and didn't force. But today, someone, using the headquarters' name, broke into the Anshan City Branch and tried to forcibly abduct Brother Chen to privately make top-grade True Qi Pills for them."

"What!"

Shi Tao exclaimed.

The sound was so loud that the three people opposite the screen heard it clearly.

"Is it true?"

Shi Tao suddenly realized something and looked at Ling Yu behind him.

Combining Chang Fei asking him to put the phone on speaker for Ling Yu, it wasn't hard to guess that what Chang Fei was saying had a lot to do with Ling Yu.

"Chairman, if possible, I wish this were false too."

Chang Fei sighed heavily, "But it isn't. The person who broke into the Anshan City Branch was caught by Brother Chen on the spot."

"Who was it?"

Shi Tao's tone turned cold, seemingly lowering the room's temperature by ten degrees.

"Xiao, Hong."

Chang Fei said the two words.

Xiao Hong turned pale. Despite being immobilized, his hands and feet trembled uncontrollably.

It's over.

Sweat continuously dripped from his face. This matter finally reached the President.

From now on, he'll have no good outcomes.

"Xiao Hong?"

Shi Tao muttered the name, recalling his appearance.

When Ling Yu heard that name, his heart nearly jumped out of his mouth.

So, Xiao Hong failed?

Otherwise, why would Uncle Chang mention him now?

But how? Ling Yu was sweating profusely.

Even if Xiao Hong failed, he wouldn't reveal his identity?

He was repeatedly reminded to keep his identity secret because once it was revealed, both he and Xiao Hong wouldn't escape unscathed.

So even if he failed to abduct Chen Fan, he shouldn't reveal his identity?

Most importantly, how did he fail? A mere early-stage Meridian Refining Realm martial artist who spent much time on alchemy, Xiao Hong couldn't capture him?

"Yes, Chairman, Xiao Hong was caught by Brother Chen on the spot, immobilized, now in the meeting room of the Anshan City Branch. We're having a video call. I asked him to describe the incident again."

Chang Fei sighed.

Shi Tao was silent for a moment and said, "No need; I roughly understand the situation. Xiao Hong is reckless and bold, acting outrageously,"

Treat this matter as you see fit. As for Xiao Hong, bring him to me; I'll handle it."

Because Chang Fei had the phone on speaker, Shi Tao's words were clearly heard by everyone present.

Xiao Hong breathed a sigh of relief.

Returning to headquarters was a great relief for him because the President seemed to suggest ending the matter here without confronting Ling Yu.

Sun Wei frowned.

The President means to end it here?

He nearly died, and Ling Yu's involvement as the mastermind wasn't mentioned.

But maybe this is the best outcome. To calm Brother Chen, the headquarters will surely offer many valuable items.

However, knowing Brother Chen, he wouldn't let it go easily.

"President Shi, I think it's better to hear Xiao Hong's explanation."

Chen Fan's voice suddenly rose.

Instantly, everyone on and off-screen fell silent.

Even Chang Fei broke out in a cold sweat.

Because he realized, Chen Fan insisted on an explanation, even if the President was on the other side.

Chapter 292: Don't Worry About This Matter

"This kid, how dare he, how dare he?"

Xiao Hong's eyes were about to pop out of their sockets.

On the other end of the phone was the President! The top figure of the Jiangnan Sub-district Martial Arts Association! Even among all the associations, he was one of the strongest!

But Chen Fan's words just now showed no respect whatsoever and even had a hint of threat.

Did he think that the President couldn't do anything to him just because they were separated by a network line?

Sun Wei watched Chen Fan, thinking to himself that he knew this wouldn't end so easily.

However, if Chen goes on like this, it would strain his future relationship with the headquarters. After all, that was the President!

"Brother Chen, were you talking to me?"

To everyone's surprise, Shi Tao's tone was calm, not angry at all.

"Yes, Brother Chen. I think you should listen to Xiao Hong's explanation," Chang Fei quickly said.

He knew the President was protective of his people, especially since he regarded Ling Yu as his successor. The two were not father and son but had a father-son bond.

He had a hunch that the President might already know the inside story, which was why he didn't want to pursue it further.

However, Brother Chen seemed determined to get to the bottom of this. Avoiding it won't solve the problem.

And excessively indulging and favoring Ling Yu, would that really cultivate a martial arts strongman capable of saving the Human Race from peril?

If possible, he hoped this incident would teach Ling Yu a harsh lesson, making him realize the world doesn't revolve around him.

Xiao Hong was on edge again.

After a full three seconds, Shi Tao slowly uttered one word, "Okay."

Chang Fei looked at Xiao Hong, his tone strict: "Repeat to the President what you told me before. Leave nothing out, understood?"

"U-understood."

Xiao Hong was like a wilting eggplant, deflated.

So he started again, recounting everything without any omission.

"President, it's true I made a mistake, a big mistake, and I admit it. But if it wasn't for Ling Yu approaching me and seducing me with words, I wouldn't have made such a big mistake, President."

After speaking, Xiao Hong was a crying and snot-filled mess.

The room was deathly silent.

Everyone awaited the response from the other end of the phone.

"Okay, I'll go talk to him. I'll call you back later."

Shi Tao said and then hung up the phone.

"Beep, beep, beep..."

Chang Fei felt a headache coming on but still managed a smile, looking at Chen Fan: "Brother Chen, you heard what the President said. Please wait a moment, and rest assured, the headquarters will definitely give you a satisfactory answer."

"Really?"

Chen Fan's expression was indifferent.

"Yes, it's true, Brother Chen."

Chang Fei said hurriedly.

But in fact, he had no idea what would happen.

If the President wanted to give Chen Fan a satisfactory explanation, he could just turn on the speakerphone. After all, Ling Yu was right beside him; having him face Xiao Hong directly would suffice.

But the President didn't do that; instead, he hung up the phone.

What happens next is uncertain.

Xiao Hong licked his lips, filled with regret.

This feeling of being at the mercy of others was truly awful.

In a quiet room.

Shi Tao hung up the phone, turning to survey Ling Yu in front of him.

The latter sat on a cushion, forcing a calm smile: "Master, why are you looking at me like that? Did Uncle Chang call you? What did he say on the phone?"

"Do you really want to know?"

Shi Tao asked.

Ling Yu's heart trembled.

In his memory, such expressions from his master usually came when he was being scolded.

In other words, something must have gone wrong on Xiao Hong's side, not only failing but also letting Uncle Chang know.

Uncle Chang had called the master to accuse him?

Damn Xiao Hong, betraying him immediately after being caught? He really didn't put him in his eyes.

Anger surged in his heart, but on the surface, he forced a smile: "Yes, I kind of want to know. But if it's classified, then I'd rather not know."

Shi Tao looked at him, bluntly asking: "Was Xiao Hong sent by you?"

"M-master, what are you talking about? I don't understand."

Ling Yu tried to put on a perplexed expression, but his body trembled, and cold sweat dripped from his forehead.

"Do you think you can fool me with your acting?"

Shi Tao squinted.

Ling Yu felt struck by lightning. The next moment, he fell to his knees, choking with sobs: "Master, I was wrong. I shouldn't have targeted that Alchemist or sent Xiao Hong. But my intentions were good!"

"Good intentions?"

Shi Tao sneered.

"Yes, Master."

Ling Yu looked up with tearful eyes.

"I did it entirely for your sake. You've reached the Third Realm of True Essence. If you had enough top-grade True Qi Pills, you could ascend to the Fourth Realm and solidify a First-grade Martial Arts True Pill! At that level, even a Beast King-level Fierce Beast wouldn't stand a chance against you. Yes, Elder Tang and the others can refine plenty of top-grade True Qi Pills, but what about time?"

Ling Yu's eyes were blurry with tears: "Who knows how long they'll need? Maybe tomorrow, maybe a week, maybe even a month. So I thought if I could bring Chen Fan over to make top-grade True Qi Pills for you, you'd reach the Fourth Realm of True Essence in no time!"

"Nonsense!"

Shi Tao was furious, "What did you tell Xiao Hong? Need me to remind you again?"

"Master, I said it deliberately that way."

Ling Yu shouted hoarsely: "One can never know someone's true intentions. If Xiao Hong knew you were involved, who knows what he'd do next?"

But if it's done in my name, it's different, isn't it?"

Shi Tao was bewildered.

"Master, I'm really thinking about you!" Ling Yu seized the moment, "You are the hope of our Jiangnan Sub-district Martial Arts Association. Only when you grow stronger will our association thrive, right?"

调Chen Fan can make so many top-grade True Qi Pills; can he use them all? Even if he can, wouldn't it be better for you to use them?"

"Enough!"

Shi Tao shouted, but anyone could tell that his anger had significantly lessened.

He stared into Ling Yu's eyes, asking: "Is that really what you think in your heart?"

"Master!"

Ling Yu raised his right hand and his chest: "I swear, if there's any falsehood in what I said, let me..."

"Enough!"

Shi Tao cut him off: "Even if that's the case, do you think what you did was right?"

"I..."

Ling Yu lowered his hand and his head.

"A gentleman knows what to do and what not to do. Have you forgotten my teachings?"

"Master, I know I was wrong."

Ling Yu looked at the ground: "I promise I'll never do it again."

"Oh, you."

Shi Tao sighed, looking helpless.

"Fortunately, this didn't turn into a disaster. But you won't escape punishment. You will stay here in closed-door training for a month without going out. Understood?"

"Understood, Master."

Ling Yu hurriedly nodded, feeling proud inside.

As expected, the best way to deal with Master was to act pitiful.

Denying and arguing never worked in front of him.

"Master, what will you do next?" Ling Yu asked cautiously.

"You stay here and train. I'll handle this."

Shi Tao glanced at him, picked up his phone, and walked out.

"Whew..."

Seeing Shi Tao's back disappear from view, Ling Yu let out a long sigh of relief.

With Master's words, this matter was settled.

But.

A vicious glint flashed in his eyes. Damn you, Xiao Hong, good for nothing.

Daring to betray me?

Fine, once Master is in a good mood and I can leave, I'll find you and settle the score!

Meanwhile, in another meeting room,

Sun Wei grew increasingly anxious as time ticked by.

What was the President doing? If he wanted to get to the bottom of this, he could just have Ling Yu and Xiao Hong confront each other?

Chen Fan glanced at Xiao Hong, then at the time on the screen's bottom right corner.

Nearly five minutes had passed since the phone hanging up.

He wanted to see how long they would keep him waiting.

"President, what are you doing?"

Chang Fei was burning with anxiety.

He frequently checked his watch and the phone, but there was still no call.

"President, you wouldn't still be favoring Ling Yu, would you?"

He had a bad feeling.

Knowing Shi Tao, this was highly possible.

If the President did favor Ling Yu, Brother Chen would be extremely displeased.

It's hard to predict the outcome then.

Just then, a video call request popped up on the computer.

Chang Fei shivered upon seeing it was from Shi Tao!

"Brother Chen, the President will join us via video. Be prepared."

"Okay." Chen Fan nodded.

The screen split into two, with Chang Fei on the left and a stern, imposing middle-aged man exuding authority on the right.

His appearance alone froze Sun Wei and Xiao Hong in place.

Chapter 293: You Dare to Kill Me???

Chen Fan and the middle-aged man on the screen stared at each other.

It had to be said that this man, even without speaking, exuded an oppressive presence like the looming Mount Tai. The aura he emitted was the most formidable Chen Fan had ever encountered.

This, however, ignited his fighting spirit.

Another thing, where was Ling Yu?

Why didn't he appear on camera with the President?

"This youth is not to be underestimated."

Shi Tao appeared calm, but internally, waves were surging.

Even the presidents from other sub-districts, intimidated by his aura, did not dare to look him in the eye for long. No one under thirty could do it.

Yet, this young man before him, probably twenty years old, or perhaps even younger, dared to return his gaze. His spirit was far superior to Xiaoyu's.

This also indicated that today's matter might not be as easy to resolve as imagined.

However, since he had promised Ling Yu, he would naturally honor it.

"Cough."

Chang Fei quickly coughed, proactively introducing, "Brother Chen, this is the President of the Jiangnan Sub-district Martial Arts Association. President, this is Chen Fan, Brother Chen."

"Indeed, heroes are born from youth."

Shi Tao nodded approvingly and said, "Brother Chen, I have already understood the situation. Rest assured, I will give you a satisfactory explanation."

"Fine."

Chen Fan said, "I'll be watching."

Shi Tao nodded and looked at Sun Wei, saying, "Chairman Sun, you were caught in an unfortunate situation this time. Rest assured, headquarters will also give you a satisfactory explanation."

"N-no, I wouldn't dare, P-President." Sun Wei stammered nervously.

He never dreamed he would have the chance to speak with the President alone.

Shi Tao's gaze finally landed on Xiao Hong, "Xiao Hong, you just said that Ling Yu ordered you to do this, correct?"

"Yes, yes,"

Xiao Hong nodded like a chicken pecking at grain, crying, "President, I admit my mistake. I am willing to accept any punishment from headquarters. But Ling Yu was also involved, or rather, he was the mastermind behind it all."

As the saying goes, those with nothing to lose do not fear those with something to lose.

Now, Ling Yu must know that Xiao Hong betrayed him, and given his character, he would not let it go.

Since he had already made an enemy, he might as well do it thoroughly.

"Is that so?"

Shi Tao said, "Is that really the case? Think carefully."

These words left everyone, including Chen Fan, stunned.

For these two sentences were full of meaning.

Xiao Hong was also stunned, staring directly into Shi Tao's eyes.

"I have just asked Ling Yu. He said that last night he did indeed meet you and mention Brother Chen Fan, but he did not ask you to go to Anshan City to take Brother Chen. Not even a hint. Is that right?"

Shi Tao's expression was like an ancient well, placid and unfathomable.

Chang Fei turned his head in shock, staring at Shi Tao.

What did the President mean by this? Hinting? Or threatening Xiao Hong?

Xiao Hong's body trembled.

The next moment, he repeatedly replied, "Yes, yes, President, I am sorry, I was wrong. Last night, Ling Yu did find me and mention Brother Chen Fan. He was very envious when he spoke. After he left, I got the idea. I thought if I took Brother Chen to headquarters, I could please Ling Yu? The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. So, I set off this morning and rushed here.

But I did not expect Brother Chen to be so hidden and powerful. I wasn't his match. To save my life, I blamed everything on Ling Yu. President, I was wrong. I truly was."

As he spoke, he began to wail bitterly.

This sudden scene left everyone present astounded.

It was a complete reversal of the situation.

"So that's how it is. Xiao Hong, you really do have a lot of nerve,"

Shi Tao's eyes gleamed with cold light, "I trusted you so much, focusing on nurturing you as a key martial artist. And this is how you repay me? Not only did you harm the brothers of the Child Association, when things fell apart, you tried to drag others down with you. You truly disappoint me."

"I am sorry, President. I was wrong. I am willing to return to headquarters and accept my punishment." Xiao Hong said.

But internally, he was ecstatic.

Clearly, the President wanted to protect Ling Yu, downplaying the incident.

This was only beneficial for him.

Because it was apparent that besides the few present, no one else in the association would learn of this incident, sparing his reputation.

And with the President mediating, Ling Yu wouldn't dare act against him.

The only downside was offending Chen Fan and Sun Wei, and probably Chairman Chang. But in the current situation, siding with the President was the best choice.

Chairman Chang would definitely stand by the President, even if he disliked Xiao Hong. He wouldn't intentionally target him.

Sun Wei, a mere Meridian Refining Martial Artist, was no concern.

The most troublesome was Chen Fan.

This man's strength was unfathomable, best to stay far from him.

"Hmph, I will deal with you properly when you return to headquarters."

Shi Tao said coldly.

"Yes."

Xiao Hong lowered his head, laughing inwardly.

At least his life was saved, punishment was better than losing his life.

"President..."

Seeing this scene, Chang Fei hesitated.

Everyone could see what was going on.

Was this really a good idea?

Shi Tao glanced at him, and he immediately looked away.

"Brother Chen, headquarters was indeed at fault here. On behalf of the headquarters, I apologize. What do you want? As long as it's within my capability, I will do it. Moreover," Shi Tao's face showed a smile,

"Would you be willing to come to headquarters? I have some insights in Martial Arts that might help you."

Hearing this, Chang Fei and others widened their eyes. Even Xiao Hong, who wanted to keep a low profile, cast an extremely envious glance at Chen Fan.

My god, was the President planning to take Chen Fan as his closed-door disciple?

Everyone knew that among all the talented youths at headquarters, only Ling Yu had gained the President's favor and was taken as a disciple.

Chang Fei also breathed a sigh of relief.

Although he felt that Chen Fan being in the True Essence Realm was likely, the gap between each level was significant.

For instance, he was in the Second Realm of True Essence.

Even if Shi Tao used First Realm of True Essence skills, he couldn't match him, let alone that Shi Tao had reached the Third Realm.

If Brother Chen's talent combined with guidance from the President, his future would be limitless.

However, having Brother Chen and Ling Yu together without conflict seemed unrealistic.

"Chairman Shi, do you really believe this resolution will satisfy me?" Chen Fan questioned.

Shi Tao laughed and said, "Aren't I letting you propose conditions? The Demon-Breaking Arrow? Cloud Jade Fruit? Or other Heavenly Materials and Earthly Treasures? Whatever headquarters has, it can compensate you."

"I don't want those." Chen Fan replied coldly.

The smile on Shi Tao's face gradually faded, "Then what do you want?" he asked.

"I want an explanation."

Chen Fan pointed at Xiao Hong, "I want to know who ordered him to come."

"Brother Chen, didn't you hear? No one ordered him. He came of his own accord." Shi Tao said.

"Yes, yes,"

Xiao Hong quickly agreed, "Brother Chen, I lied to you before. No one ordered me. My own greed got the better of me.

Later I falsely accused Ling Yu just to drag someone down, hoping you'd spare me. Truly, I am telling the truth now, please believe me?"

Sun Wei wanted to convince Chen Fan to let it go but couldn't say it out loud.

Since even he could see something was off.

The President clearly wanted to protect Ling Yu, any further pursuit was pointless.

"Brother Chen, let this go?"

Chang Fei hesitated but spoke, "Didn't you mention wanting ten Demon-Breaking Arrows? Headquarters has already sent three, the remaining seven will be arranged. Plus, two more Cloud Jade Fruits, okay?"

Anything else, just ask."

He frantically signaled Chen Fan.

Don't miss such a golden opportunity!

Chen Fan glared at Xiao Hong, then looked at Shi Tao, "So, you believe this is resolved? Ling Yu doesn't need to explain, right?"

"Brother Chen, I understand your anger, but Ling Yu truly has nothing to do with this. I questioned him before, and he dare not lie to me." Shi Tao smiled.

"Very well."

Chen Fan took a deep breath.

He approached Xiao Hong.

"Brother Chen?"

Xiao Hong sensed a profound crisis, his face showing a fawning smile, "Let's talk nicely."

"Brother Chen, what are you doing? Don't be impulsive!" Chang Fei seemed to foresee what would happen, shouting urgently.

The smile vanished from Shi Tao's face, his eyes cold.

"Since you admitted it was your doing, you must be prepared to pay the price."

"You dare kill me?" Xiao Hong was shocked.

The President was watching from the screen!

Not just the President, Chairman Chang too!

Chen Fan did not answer and took a step closer.

Xiao Hong turned pale, screaming, "President, save me! Save me!"

"Brother Chen, don't be impulsive! Calm down!" Chang Fei was panicking.

"Brother Chen, don't!" Sun Wei tried to stop Chen Fan.

But it was too late.

"Bang!"

A dull sound. Chen Fan struck Xiao Hong's chest with his palm, True Essence surging forth, shattering his heart.

Blood gushed like a breached dam from Xiao Hong's mouth.

Chapter 294: If Gods Block, Kill the Gods; If Buddhas Block, Kill the Buddhas

Xiao Hong stared at Chen Fan, his eyes filled with disbelief.

He couldn't believe that, in the presence of the President, this guy dared to kill him.

It was clear to everyone that the President wanted to turn a big issue into a small one and then into a non-issue. Xiao Hong would return to the headquarters to be punished, while Chen Fan would receive compensation from the headquarters. Wasn't that the best solution?

But how could Chen Fan dare to defy the President's wishes? How dare he?

Xiao Hong was filled with grief and indignation.

He was unwilling; he truly was!

As the number one below the True Essence Realm in the association, how could he die so unjustly here?

Just one step away from becoming a True Essence Realm Martial Artist!

His consciousness began to fade, seemingly exhausting his last life force, until he collapsed to the ground with a thud.

His body remained in its previous posture, his eyes wide open like copper bells, dying with a grudge.

Sun Wei also widened his eyes; his gaze shifted from the corpse on the ground to Chen Fan, his brain buzzing incessantly.

Did he just see what he saw?

Brother Chen, in the presence of the President, killed Xiao Hong?

That was the President!

The number one in the Jiangnan Sub-district Martial Arts Association!

Brother Chen's actions were like a fierce slap across the President's face! What would happen next was easy to imagine.

Being expelled from the association would be the mildest consequence. The President might even come directly from the headquarters to confront Brother Chen!

Why take things to this point?

Sun Wei sighed deeply.

The headquarters had already agreed to compensation, hadn't they? And it sounded abundant. More importantly, this incident concluded without lasting damage, didn't it? There were no irreversible consequences.

It truly wasn't necessary.

Chang Fei was also stunned.

His body seemed to be immobilized by the Body-Stabilizing Technique, staring unblinkingly at the corpse on the ground.

Xiao Hong? Dead?

The one with the highest hope of breaking through from the Meridian Refining Realm to the True Essence Realm within the headquarters, dead like this?

Dead like a dog by the roadside... he was a Martial Artist the headquarters painstakingly nurtured!

Gradually, his gaze shifted to Chen Fan, whose face was devoid of emotion, revealing a bitter smile.

He always knew, he always knew, this young man wasn't easy to deal with.

From the first encounter, he judged Chen Fan to be seemingly easygoing, but internally principled. As long as his bottom line wasn't touched, everything was negotiable.

But once his bottom line was crossed, he would make you regret it immensely.

This event displayed that perfectly.

He had a premonition that Xiao Hong's death wasn't the end but the beginning.

Of course, he was also deeply worried, unsure of the President's thoughts and what he might do to Brother Chen.

"You killed him, you should feel somewhat relieved, right?"

At this moment, Shi Tao's voice broke in, his tone and expression unchanged, as if nothing had happened.

Chen Fan looked at Shi Tao on the screen.

Shi Tao calmly continued, "Regarding the compensation I mentioned earlier, if you have no objections, I'll have Chang Fei collect it and send it to you soon."

Sun Wei felt his heart loosen upon hearing this.

Simultaneously, he felt the President was unfathomable.

Chen Fan killed someone from the headquarters, someone he wanted to protect secretly, yet the President remained calm and continued to fulfill the previous agreement of compensating Brother Chen. Such magnanimity truly befits the President.

"That's right, Brother Chen." Chang Fei smiled, "Seven Demon-Breaking Arrows and two Cloud Jade Fruits. If you have other requests, feel free to ask."

Though Xiao Hong's death was regrettable.

If it could help remove Brother Chen's hostility towards the headquarters, it was worth it.

After all, it was Xiao Hong's own doing.

As for Ling Yu...

A flicker of seriousness appeared in Chang Fei's eyes. After the video call, he needed to remind the President to supervise Ling Yu more strictly. This time, the President could protect him, but what about next time?

"No need."

Chen Fan replied firmly, "I don't want any compensation. I want the truth of this matter!"

These words made Sun Wei and even Chang Fei's hearts jump.

Shi Tao narrowed his eyes slightly, his voice emotionless, "The truth of the matter was already stated by Xiao Hong. This whole thing was his doing, you've heard it."

"Is that really the truth?"

Chen Fan questioned.

"That is the truth."

Shi Tao responded without hesitation.

The atmosphere fell silent once more.

The two stared at each other, the air thick with tension.

Sun Wei was terrified, his face pale and changing colors.

Chang Fei's expression wasn't much better.

He coughed and said, "Brother Chen, regardless of the real truth, Xiao Hong is dead, isn't he? The President and I can promise you that what happened today will never happen again. If it does, I, Chang Fei, will die to atone for it."

He looked at Chen Fan with a pleading gaze, as if saying, Brother Chen, let this matter end here.

Further pursuit wouldn't benefit anyone, would it?

Chen Fan looked at Shi Tao, knowing that whether he liked it or not, today's matter could only end here. Continuing would only waste time.

But precisely because of this, his suspicion deepened.

Could it be that even Ling Yu wasn't the true mastermind? Is the President before him the real one?

If not, why would he protect Ling Yu?

Finding out was simple: using the Soul Shifting Technique on him would reveal everything.

He took a deep breath, looked at Chang Fei, "Chairman Chang, let's end it here."

Chang Fei felt relieved, smiling, "Brother Chen, regarding compensation, the headquarters..."

"No need."

Chen Fan interrupted, "I will investigate this matter further."

"!"

Chang Fei was speechless, his throat clogged, unable to speak.

"Ling Yu, right? Please tell Chairman Shi that soon, I'll come to the headquarters to find him to clarify today's matter.

If he's uninvolved, I'll apologize. If he's behind it, I won't let him off even if he escapes to the ends of the earth."

Hearing this, Chang Fei turned pale, instinctively looking at Shi Tao on the screen.

The latter remained calm, "Very well, I'll relay your message."

"Thank you, Chairman Shi."

Chen Fan said indifferently.

"You're welcome."

Shi Tao paused, then said, "The Fierce Beast's activities have stirred, and Anshan City isn't safe. If you wish, it would be best to move to the headquarters soon."

Chen Fan remained silent.

Shi Tao gave him a deep look and ended the communication.

"Whew..."

Chang Fei exhaled.

Finally, it was over.

The previous tense atmosphere scared him, fearing Chen Fan and Shi Tao would clash harshly.

Whatever the outcome, it wasn't what he wanted to see.

Nonetheless, he admired Chen Fan's courage.

Since the association's founding, besides Chen Fan, no one dared to confront Chairman Shi.

"Brother Chen, why bother with this?"

After reconsidering, Chang Fei sighed, "I understand your anger and suspicions toward the President, wondering if he's behind this. But I assure you, the President would never do such a thing."

"So, is Ling Yu responsible?" Chen Fan asked.

"Brother Chen, I didn't say that." Chang Fei shook his head with a bitter smile.

He was stuck between wanting a good relationship with Chen Fan and protecting the President and the headquarters' reputation.

"Sigh."

He sighed, "Brother Chen, think it over. If you change your mind, call me anytime, and we can add more to the compensation."

Seeing no response from Chen Fan, he sighed again and ended the call.

"Brother Chen?"

Sun Wei cautiously called out, seeing Chen Fan look his way, he smiled bitterly, "Brother Chen, I think it's best to let this matter go. Anshan City isn't a place to stay long.

If a beast tide erupts, this place will fall in a blink. If you strain relations with the headquarters, the outcome will be hard to manage."

"Chairman, how can you forget he just almost killed you?" Chen Fan glanced at Xiao Hong's corpse.

"I haven't forgotten, but since even the President has intervened, we should..." Sun Wei trailed off.

"I haven't forgotten either, so I need to find out the truth, regardless of others' opinions. People can call me obsessive, or ungrateful, I only know retaliation for offenses."

"But..."

Sun Wei hesitated, "Ling Yu is the President's closed-door disciple. If he's behind this, killing him will certainly anger the President."

He thought, reminding himself that even now, the President was protecting Ling Yu.

"If it comes to that, he better not stop me, or," Chen Fan's eyes flashed murderously, "I'll kill anyone in my way."

"Thud!"

Sun Wei dropped to the ground in terror.

Chapter 295: Undying Seal Technique

In the meeting room, Shi Tao closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and then slowly exhaled. After that, he slowly opened his eyes.

He wasn't completely without anger at Chen Fan's actions earlier; an inner voice just told him to keep calm.

Firstly, Ling Yu was indeed at fault first in this matter, so it's normal for others to be angry.

Secondly, as the president of the Jiangnan Sub-district Martial Arts Association, if he fussed over this matter with a junior, it would be undignified.

What he didn't expect was that even after making such concessions, Chen Fan couldn't be deterred from pursuing the matter further.

He even killed Xiao Hong right in front of him, making the headquarters lose a talented individual.

"Blame me, blame me."

Thinking of this, he sighed softly.

As for Xiaoyu, his intentions were good too, but he blamed himself for failing to notice in time, leading to this tragedy.

Obviously, today's incident has caused a serious rift in Chen Fan's heart against the headquarters. Resolving this rift wouldn't be possible overnight.

Moreover, Chen Fan made it very clear earlier.

It wouldn't be long before he comes to the headquarters personally to find out what truly happened.

"Perhaps, this could be a good thing for Xiaoyu."

Thinking of this, his eyes flashed, and he turned off the equipment, then exited the meeting room to head to the quiet room, pushing the door open.

Ling Yu was sitting cross-legged on a cushion. When he heard the sound, he immediately opened his eyes and turned around carefully to ask: "Master! That matter?"

Shi Tao nodded.

Seeing this, Ling Yu immediately breathed a sigh of relief.

It made sense; after all, his master is the soul of the headquarters. With him taking action personally, how could there be anything that couldn't be resolved?

However, he absolutely couldn't let Xiao Hong, that trash, off easily!

Not only did he fail to handle the matter well, he also got caught red-handed and then sold him out. Is that how you do things?

When he returns, he must make Xiao Hong pay a painful price to relieve his anger!

"Xiao Hong is dead."

Shi Tao suddenly said.

Ling Yu was stunned and asked with a bewildered expression: "Master, what did you just say? Who... who died?"

"Xiao Hong."

Shi Tao looked at him quietly and said.

"Xiao, Xiao Hong?"

Ling Yu felt as if he was struck by lightning, his mind buzzing, and he almost went numb.

Xiao Hong is dead?

How could it be?

Just now when his master was questioning him, wasn't Xiao Hong still fine? How did he die so suddenly?

"Master, Master, how did Xiao Hong die?"

Ling Yu reacted and quickly asked.

"Chen Fan."

Shi Tao uttered two words.

"Chen Fan? What? Chen Fan?!!"

When Ling Yu heard this name, he was initially stunned because it sounded familiar.

Then he reacted, his voice rising several decibels, almost jumping off the cushion.

Chen Fan?

Isn't that guy just an early-stage Meridian Refining Martial Artist? He killed Xiao Hong? Or rather, he could kill Xiao Hong?

Xiao Hong is a late-stage Meridian Refining Martial Artist! He has even opened the Eight Extraordinary Meridians, and even ordinary late-stage Meridian Refining Martial Artists aren't his opponents.

How could he be killed by Chen Fan?

Impossible!

"You underestimated Chen Fan's strength."

Shi Tao saw his internal confusion and said: "Do you know who captured Xiao Hong?"

"Who... who was it?"

Ling Yu asked with difficulty,

From the beginning, he was deeply puzzled. Could it be that there were experts in Anshan City secretly protecting Chen Fan?

Otherwise, how could this foolproof plan fail?

"Still Chen Fan." Shi Tao said: "His real strength isn't at the Meridian Refining Realm, but at the True Essence Realm."

"True... True Essence Realm!"

Ling Yu exclaimed, his mouth wide open, disbelief filled his eyes.

"Correct, True Essence Realm."

Shi Tao paced slowly, "As soon as Xiao Hong arrived in Anshan City, he was immediately immobilized by Chen Fan with a single touch of his acupoint."

"In an instant?"

"Correct, in an instant."

Shi Tao said, "A fellow Meridian Refining Martial Artist couldn't do that; in other words, only a True Essence Realm Martial Artist could."

Ling Yu tightly clenched his fists, his face flushed.

True Essence Realm, True Essence Realm!

That guy is also True Essence Realm!

Damn it, no wonder he dared to refuse the headquarters' proposal and stay in a small, remote city; his confidence came from this.

Now, thinking back, sending Xiao Hong to abduct him was incredibly naive and ridiculous.

"Just immobilizing Xiao Hong in an instant? I can do that too."

Shi Tao nodded slightly at his words.

Indeed, a Martial Artist must have an indomitable heart; otherwise, before even starting the fight, his momentum would be lower than others. How could he fight then?

He continued:

"What happened afterwards, you can probably guess. Chen Fan found your Uncle Chang and had immobilized Xiao Hong disclose everything. Once your Uncle Chang learned the news, he found me."

"Master, then Xiao Hong?"

Ling Yu couldn't help but ask.

"This brings me to what I need to tell you next."

Shi Tao sighed and recounted what happened later.

When he heard that Chen Fan refused the headquarters' compensation and disregarded others' objections to kill Xiao Hong on the spot, Ling Yu's eyes almost popped out.

That guy called Chen Fan, how dare he be so bold?

Master is the number one at headquarters!

How dare he?

"It's unbelievable, right?"

Shi Tao sighed: "Even I didn't expect him to do this; if I had known, I should have handled it differently."

Indeed, Xiao Hong's death was partly his responsibility.

"Master,"

Ling Yu gritted his teeth, "Even if we were at fault initially, don't you think Chen Fan went too far?"

Xiao Hong was a brother in the association, he killed many elite-level Fierce Beasts and made meritorious contributions for our Human Race. In the end, he didn't die at the hands of fierce beasts but was frustratedly killed by a fellow human!"

Ling Yu showed a pained expression, "Master, I sent Xiao Hong there, his death is partly my responsibility. Please let me go to Anshan City now, to seek justice for Xiao Hong!"

"Oh? You want to go to Anshan City?"

"Yes, master, I must seek justice for Xiao Hong!"

Determination revealed in Ling Yu's eyes, but he sneered inwardly.

Since there's already a grudge between him and Chen Fan, why not take this opportunity to cripple him?

So what if the latter is a True Essence Realm Martial Artist?

A True Essence Realm Martial Artist who relies on a large number of elixirs to boost his rank can't compare to him, the president's direct disciple.

Shi Tao's eyes showed admiration.

Telling Ling Yu these things was partly to test his reaction.

It made him very satisfied that his disciple isn't selfish.

"No need, Xiaoyu, he will come looking for you."

"What?"

"He is coming to find me? To the headquarters?"

Ling Yu seemed to hear something unbelievable.

"Correct."

Shi Tao nodded, "He hasn't given up pursuing this matter. He still suspects you are behind it, and he even suspects me."

"Suspects master?"

Ling Yu was shocked.

"Yes, though he didn't say it explicitly, I can see it."

Shi Tao smiled bitterly, "He asked me to convey something to you. He said, in the near future, he will come here to ask you what really happened. If he finds out you were indeed behind this, he will..."

He paused and said seriously: "Kill you."

Ling Yu was stunned, then his eyes burned with fury. He sneered: "Him? Master, let me go to Anshan City now. I'll show him who kills whom!"

Seeing this, Shi Tao's eyes revealed an imperceptible smile.

But he said: "Don't be impulsive; he isn't as easy to deal with as you think. If you go now, you might fall into his trap."

"Master, do you think I'm not his match?"

Ling Yu questioned incredulously.

"Master doesn't mean that."

Shi Tao patted his shoulder, "Master just thinks that with your current strength, even if you can win against him, it won't be as easy as you think."

Since he said he would come to the headquarters soon, why not use this precious time to further enhance your strength?"

"No need."

Ling Yu sneered, "I don't need more time; I can easily defeat him now!"

"Don't underestimate your enemy."

Shi Tao said sternly, "I've told you many times, overconfidence leads to defeat."

"Yes, master."

Ling Yu reluctantly lowered his head, his face showing dissatisfaction.

How dare a guy from a mere small city challenge him, the headquarters' genius?

And even say he would kill him?

Does he even know that even other association geniuses don't dare to speak to him like this!

Who does he think he is?

Seeing this, Shi Tao was even more pleased.

His disciple's fighting spirit was thoroughly aroused; in the coming days, even without him supervising, Ling Yu would be determined.

Coupled with his guidance, when Chen Fan comes, it wouldn't be Xiaoyu who loses.

Moreover, this would be an excellent opportunity to curb Chen Fan's arrogance.

"Xiaoyu, in the coming days, I will teach you the first half of the Undying Seal Technique."

He said.

"What? Undying Seal Technique!"

Ling Yu's dissatisfaction instantly turned to joy, "Master, you are going to teach me the Undying Seal Technique?"

"Yes,"

Shi Tao smiled, "I'm still researching and perfecting the second half of the Undying Seal Technique. It will take quite some time, and it is uncertain if I can complete it. But I can teach you the first half.

If you master this first half, your chances of winning against Chen Fan will increase, and it will greatly benefit your future."

"Thank you, master! Thank you, master!"

Ling Yu was deeply grateful, bowing repeatedly.

The Undying Seal Technique is another supreme martial art!

If he masters this heart method, he can convert most attacks into his own blood and True Qi, almost becoming invincible.

The only downside is it is only half of the manual.

But a complete manual, even the headquarters or other associations, wouldn't have it; even the Awakened Association couldn't produce it.

Grasping half of it alone, he was already content.

Adding the Five-Thunder Transformation Hand he'd learned earlier, he would possess two supreme martial arts.

"Don't be so excited."

Shi Tao helped him up, "Your talents are among the best in the association. Master wishes to impart all his knowledge to you, but there's one condition you must promise."

"Please tell, master."

Ling Yu eagerly said,

He would agree to any condition just to master the Undying Seal Technique.

"The condition is, if Chen Fan does challenge you one day, and you win, Master wishes you to show mercy and not kill him."

"This..."

Ling Yu hesitated for a moment and then gritted his teeth: "Alright, since master said so, I agree."

"I appreciate it."

Shi Tao sighed in relief.

He said this to prevent any unforeseen incidents; after all, knives and swords are essentially uncontrollable, even with his strength, he couldn't stop what was bound to happen.

Unbeknownst to him, Ling Yu sneered inside.

Mercy?

That guy threatened to kill him, and he should show mercy? Dream on!

He would claim that he lost control at the time; his master wouldn't fault him for that.

Chen Fan, Chen Fan, when I master the Undying Seal Technique, what will you fight me with!!!

Chapter 296: What is He Here For?

"Creak," the conference room door was pushed open from the inside.

Chen Fan walked out.

"Brother Chen!"

"Brother Chen, are you alright?"

"What happened?"

Xu Jie and his group stood at the entrance of the conference room, looking tense as they asked.

Not just them, others in the association also gathered around.

The commotion on the second floor wasn't exactly loud, but it wasn't quiet either. Even Xu Jie's group had received the news and rushed over immediately.

At this moment, the bolder ones in the front took a few peeks inside the open conference room, vaguely seeing the president sitting on the ground. Not far away, there seemed to be another figure lying down.

"Just a little trouble, but it's been resolved," Chen Fan said with a smile.

Xu Jie and his group looked at each other.

A little trouble?

Was it really just a little trouble?

After all, they could smell the scent of blood in the conference room.

Chen Fan didn't say much and walked forward.

The crowd quickly made way, watching Chen Fan as he walked to the elevator and then disappeared from sight.

Xu Jie's group swallowed their saliva again. For some reason, today's Chen Fan gave them a very dangerous feeling.

Zhao Xuewen swallowed and asked, "How about we go in and take a look?"

"Yes, yes. Why is the president sitting on the ground?"

"President?"

They rushed in and were stunned by the scene inside.

They saw a man lying on the ground in a very strange posture, his eyes wide open, blood streaming from his lips, and the carpet nearby was stained red with blood.

"President!"

"President! What happened!"

Tu Yue and the others hurried forward, pulling the pale-faced Sun Wei from the ground and helping him sit on a chair.

Others who entered afterward also gaped at the scene.

A dead person?

No, if they remembered correctly, wasn't this person from the headquarters? Although he wasn't wearing a mask, his attire was the same as before, clearly the same person.

Then the question arose, why was he lying on the ground in such a position? Moreover, he looked mostly dead already...

"No, nothing,"

Sun Wei forced a bitter smile and waved.

He was indeed scared by Chen Fan's words.

If gods block, kill gods; if Buddhas block, kill Buddhas. In other words, if one day, Chen Fan found Ling Yu, uncovered the truth, and wanted to kill Ling Yu, would the president stop him?

Chen Fan would even kill the president?

After all, the president was the indisputable number one in the association! Could Brother Chen really be a match for him?

"Oh my god, that person on the ground is really dead."

"Of course, he's been lying there for so long without moving, it's not surprising he's dead."

"He's from headquarters, right? If he dies here, won't headquarters come after us?"

Discussions at the door rose and fell.

Sun Wei glanced at them, "This matter has nothing to do with you, and it won't affect you. Put your minds at ease and go back to what you were doing."

With the president speaking, the others, despite their questions, could only turn around and leave in twos and threes.

In a blink, only a few Entry Force Level martial artists remained in the conference room.

"President, what exactly is going on?"

Xu Jie couldn't help but ask. The others' discussions were correct; the man on the ground was from the headquarters, wasn't he? How did he end up dead here?

Could it be the work of Brother Chen?

If so, the headquarters learning about it would have unimaginable consequences!

The others also looked nervous.

Some even recognized the corpse, as if they had seen it somewhere before, but couldn't recall immediately.

"Knowing this won't benefit you in any way. Just treat it as if nothing happened," Sun Wei sighed.

"But..."

They exchanged glances.

It's human nature to be curious, not to mention such a bizarre event right before their eyes.

"Wait a moment!"

Gao Shan suddenly exclaimed. He quickly walked over to the corpse, his pupils contracting, "President, is this man, is he Xiao Hong?"

"What? Xiao Hong!"

"Xiao Hong!"

These words made the others' faces change dramatically, and they rushed forward.

Some even took out their phones, logging into the association and finding Xiao Hong's picture to compare with.

Instantly, the entire conference room fell silent.

Xu Jie's group stood in shock, their hair standing on end, eyes filled with disbelief as they looked at Sun Wei.

Xiao Hong, a name that resounded like thunder!

Yet he died here? Were they hallucinating?

"Sigh,"

Sun Wei sighed.

"As I said before, pretend nothing happened. It's for your own good, understand?"

If Xu Jie's group had been curious and unwilling to let go before,

now they were scared pale. Even if Sun Wei were willing to explain, they would be too scared to listen.

Because even fools knew this matter was extraordinarily significant!

"President, won't this matter cause us trouble in the future?" Xu Jie stammered.

"Don't worry. This issue has nothing to do with you or me. Just continue your usual activities—hunt Fierce Beasts, or train at the base."

"Alright, alright."

The group let out a sigh of relief.

"President, about what's inside?"

"I'll handle it," Sun Wei nodded.

"Alright, alright."

"President, if you need anything else, just let us know."

"Hmm, go on."

They quickly walked out, heaving a sigh of relief once they reached the elevator.

Although they didn't know what had happened or why the person from headquarters died here,

it was surely related to Brother Chen.

It was highly likely Xiao Hong was killed by Chen Fan, even though it sounded far-fetched. Xiao Hong was the number one expert below the True Essence Realm in the association, while Brother Chen seemed only at Transforming Force, not even a match at Meridian Refining Realm.

"The president is right; this matter is too deep for us. Let's pretend we didn't see anything," Gao Shan said, looking at the group, "Don't mention it to anyone."

They all nodded quickly.

They knew their limits.

It just felt like Anshan City was becoming less peaceful.

Chen Fan, who had left earlier, didn't go to the third-floor training room or return to the Alchemy Room but instead exited the branch office directly.

The day's events reminded him not to put all his eggs in one basket.

"Fortunately, I have another identity in the Awakened Association," Chen Fan thought.

Even if he clashed with headquarters today, he wasn't worried about lacking resources in the future.

Of course, the best solution would be having his own forces, so even if something happened with the Awakened Association, he wouldn't struggle for weapons, elixirs, and other resources.

But having his own forces was easier said than done. Not to mention, the upcoming Beast Tide would be a challenge.

"Sigh, I can only do my best and leave the rest to fate," Chen Fan sighed, found a deserted corner, and changed into Li Ping's appearance, then headed toward the Awakened Association.

He needed to trade the Fierce Beast materials he hunted last time for points. Though it wasn't much, leaving them piled in space items was pointless.

Trading them for points sooner would allow him to exchange for powerful martial arts earlier.

Also, he wanted to gather information.

As he walked into the Awakened Association hall, Chen Fan noticed the atmosphere was off.

It was too quiet.

Unlike before, where people gathered in groups, chatting and laughing.

Now, every Awakener was either staring blankly or frowning with a heavy heart.

When Chen Fan entered, many eyes turned to look at him.

"Li Ping?"

"It's him!"

"He dares to come back?"

Exclamations erupted.

They remembered the president had tried to recruit this man, and he had directly refused.

They thought he had left the place for good, only to see him now?

Chen Fan looked straight ahead, ignoring the stares, and walked to the counter.

"Hello, I'm here to submit a task," Chen Fan said.

"Ah, yes, Lord Li Ping, please wait a moment; let me check."

The woman quickly typed "Li Ping" into the computer. Shortly, three task entries appeared on the screen.

The woman's eyes widened in shock, her jaw nearly dropping.

The two women next to her, curious at their colleague's expression, also looked at the screen.

They were soon equally stunned.

"Is there a problem?"

Chen Fan frowned slightly, asking.

"No, no problem. Sorry, Lord Li Ping,"

the middle woman swallowed and asked cautiously, "Can I confirm the task details? You took on three tasks: hunting a Black Feathered Eagle, a Lion Ape, and a Fire Scaly Pig, and collecting their important materials, right?"

Her words left the entire hall in silence.

Everyone looked at Chen Fan in disbelief.

Black Feathered Eagle, Lion Ape, Fire Scaly Pig?

These were all elite-level Fierce Beasts. Any one of them was an opponent they would never want to face.

Especially the Fire Scaly Pig, the most formidable among elite-level Fierce Beasts. Even Yan Ming would struggle with it.

Yet this Li Ping took on all three tasks at once?

And he had said he was here to submit the tasks!

Chapter 297: Do You Want Me to Be Your President?

Hand over the task.

These three words, do I need to say more about what they mean?

The many Awakeners looked at each other in dismay.

Could this guy really kill three Elite-level Fierce Beasts on his own? One of them being a Fire Scaly Pig?

"Yes, that's right."

Chen Fan said calmly, "These are the three tasks I accepted. Where do I hand over the task items?"

"In the back, Mr. Li Ping, please wait a moment, I will notify the president."

The young woman stuttered as she spoke.

Three Elite-level Fierce Beasts!

Even she knew what kind of strength was needed to complete these three tasks.

"Alright."

Chen Fan responded, his gaze sweeping across the hall.

Many Awakeners lowered their heads, too scared to even breathe.

Soon, a middle-aged man, surrounded by several Awakeners, walked quickly over.

When they saw Chen Fan, there was a hint of unease in their eyes.

But the man at the head seemed to see a savior and enthusiastically reached out his hand to Chen Fan, saying, "Hello, Mr. Li Ping."

Chen Fan glanced coolly at his outstretched hand, did not shake it, but simply nodded, "You're here for the inspection?"

Hua Jun awkwardly withdrew his hand, saying, "Yes, Mr. Li Ping, I heard you accepted three C-level tasks at once?"

"Yes."

"And you completed these tasks on your own?"

"That's right. What's the problem? Are these tasks not meant to be accepted by one person?" Chen Fan said impatiently.

"No, Mr. Li Ping, that's not what I meant."

Hua Jun quickly smiled, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Mr. Li Ping, please follow me."

As he spoke, he made a gesture inviting Chen Fan forward.

Chen Fan strode ahead.

Through the corridor, they arrived at a spacious open area.

"Mr. Li Ping, please take out the Fierce Beast materials from your space items and place them here," Hua Jun said expectantly.

The others also looked tense.

Unconsciously, the open space around them had become crowded with people.

"Alright."

Chen Fan said, sliding his finger in his pocket.

Three piles of materials immediately appeared on the ground.

On the far left was the Black Feathered Eagle.

In the middle, the Lion Ape.

On the far right, the Fire Scaly Pig.

The three piles of materials were neatly separated and easily recognizable.

In an instant, everyone had their mouths wide open, their eyes frozen in place.

They had been wondering which one Li Ping would show first, and whether he would be unable to produce the Fire Scaly Pig materials at the end.

But this guy just laid out all the materials for the three Elite-level Fierce Beasts at once!

The shock was greatest for those standing closest.

Three Elite-level Fierce Beasts!

Even though they were dead, even if these were just materials, the aura they emitted was still very daunting.

As for Hua Jun, his inner excitement was plainly visible even as he was shocked.

"Please inspect them."

Chen Fan said, "If everything is in order, then the three tasks are completed."

The three tasks totaled about five thousand points.

While that was far less than the tens of thousands of points he had possessed before, it was still not easy for a C-level Awakened to earn five thousand points through tasks.

Chen Fan planned to go out hunting again once the headquarters' weapon supplies arrived.

After all, the Beast Tide was a certainty; killing a few more Elite-level Fierce Beasts or even one Commander-level Fierce Beast would significantly reduce the pressure on Anshan City when the beasts attacked.

"No problem, of course there's no problem!"

Without hesitation, Hua Jun said, "Mr. Li Ping, the materials you submitted are perfectly fine. I'll verify them now."

As he spoke, he took out his phone and tapped a few times on the screen.

Very soon, Chen Fan's phone vibrated a few times.

He took out his phone and checked. Indeed, the tasks were marked as completed, and five thousand points were credited to his account.

"Mr. Li Ping, the points have been credited, right?"

Hua Jun asked with a fawning smile.

"Yes, since it's confirmed, I'll be leaving now."

Finished, Chen Fan put away his phone and walked back the way he had come.

The surrounding Awakeners hurriedly made way for him.

Different from before, their eyes now looked at Chen Fan with reverence.

A man who killed three Elite-level Fierce Beasts, including a Fire Scaly Pig!

This kind of strength could definitely place him at the top among C-level Awakeners!

Some of them even suspected that Chen Fan was actually a B-level Awakened, only lacking the achievement of killing a Commander-level Fierce Beast alone.

But no matter what, they could not compare to him.

Even the vice president, a C-level Awakened, was far less powerful than him!

"Wait a moment!"

Hua Jun gritted his teeth and quickly ran in front of Chen Fan.

Chen Fan immediately frowned, "What is it now?"

"Mr. Li Ping, may I boldly ask if you are temporarily staying in Anshan City?"

Upon hearing this, Chen Fan's eyes flashed with a hint of killing intent.

"Mr. Li Ping, I have no other intentions,"

Hua Jun was terrified, shaking his head and waving his hand quickly. "I have no intention of probing into your background. It's just that something very important requires your help. If you are willing to lend a hand, it would be beneficial for you too."

"Is that so? What if I refuse?" Chen Fan said without thinking.

"Mr. Li Ping, this matter is really important. It concerns the survival of Anshan City and the lives of tens of thousands!"

Hua Jun gritted his teeth, "No matter what, please listen to me. After I finish, you can refuse. Mr. Li Ping, please."

"Brother Li Ping, please listen to him."

"Brother Li Ping, it won't take much of your time."

The few people around Hua Jun also pleaded.

The many Awakeners around them, some had guessed what it was about, some were still clueless.

"Go ahead."

Chen Fan said,

He was curious as to whether these people also knew about the imminent Beast Tide.

"Okay, Mr. Li Ping, what I'm about to say may seem extraordinary to you, but it did indeed happen. Everyone here can testify."

After glancing around, Hua Jun said, "Mr. Li Ping, do you know about the incident that happened at the villa yesterday in Anshan City?"

Upon hearing this, Chen Fan immediately guessed what the other party was going to say, but he still shook his head, "No, what's the matter?"

"Then please be patient and let me explain the entire situation."

With a sigh, Hua Jun recounted the deaths of Yan Ming and the others.

Chen Fan listened without showing any emotion.

This time, he had indeed come to gather information, so having someone recount the events was convenient for him.

"Mr. Li Ping, the City Lord and the president are both dead or missing. Frankly, the president is likely also in grave danger..."

"Is that so?"

Chen Fan asked, "But what does this have to do with me? Surely you're not asking me to find and kill that person to avenge your president and the City Lord?"

"No, no, not at all."

Hua Jun was startled and quickly said, "Mr. Li Ping, we mean no such thing. That person is incredibly powerful; how could we possibly ask you to take such a risk?"

"Yes, Brother Li Ping, we mean no such thing."

"Brother Li Ping, we reported this incident yesterday. The higher-ups will send hunters to capture the culprit."

"Oh?"

Upon hearing this, Chen Fan immediately focused on the speaker, asking, "Hunters? When will they arrive?"

"That..."

The person shook his head, "I don't know."

"Mr. Li Ping, the hunters' levels are extremely high; their movements are beyond our comprehension," Hua Jun gave a bitter smile. "Actually, what we want to ask for your help with is something else."

"What is it?"

"We would like to ask Mr. Li Ping to stay in Anshan City and become the president of the Anshan City Awakened Association." Hua Jun looked at Chen Fan with anticipation.

Indeed, the moment he heard of Chen Fan's arrival, he had this thought.

With Yan Ming and the others dead, Anshan City had virtually no C-level Awakeners left.

If the Beast Tide erupted again, how would Anshan City defend itself without C-level Awakeners?

With him?

He wasn't a combat-type Awakener!

But what about Li Ping?

His strength was evident to all. In Stone City, he had defeated many and, despite offending the entire Stone City, had still walked out of the association freely, proving his power.

And right now, the three piles of Elite-level Fierce Beast materials on the ground were direct evidence!

If they could get a C-level Awakened with combat expertise to stay?

"You want me to be your president?"

Chen Fan was stunned.

His first instinct was to refuse.

What a joke!

He was a Martial Artist, and all the supposed superpowers were just his fabrications. How could he, a Martial Artist, serve as the president of the Awakened Association?

Of course, it wasn't impossible. After all, he was publicly known as an Awakener.

The key issue was, he didn't want to lead a group of burdens.

But then he thought, isn't this the very problem he had been worrying about, not having his own force?

To establish his own power, first and foremost, he needed people!

Without people, no matter what he wanted to do, he would have to do it personally, even small trivial things.

But now, these people were in front of him!

For things like purchasing seeds, cultivating medicinal materials, and transportation, wouldn't he have someone handle those?

Plus, these weren't ordinary people; they were Awakeners!

With all sorts of unique superpowers, perhaps some of them could even be useful to him?

Seeing this, Hua Jun's eyes immediately lit up.

Because Chen Fan didn't refuse right away, it meant there was hope!

Chapter 298: You Are Quite Understanding

"Mr. Li Ping,"

Hua Jun took the opportunity to say, "Regarding the position of president of the association, you don't need to worry at all. Firstly, with your strength, holding this position is without question deserved,

and secondly, the process is simple. All you need to do is inform the higher-ups, and they will eagerly agree."

Yesterday, when he reported the situation here, he earnestly requested the association to send experts to oversee Anshan City.

After all, without several C-level Awakened in Anshan City, the situation was precarious.

However, the higher-ups were very indifferent, only stating that they would send Hunters to investigate and that cooperation would be required, without mentioning any plans to send someone to take over Anshan City.

Thinking about it, the reason is apparent.

C-level Awakened are considered high-end combat power among Awakened, and their numbers are always insufficient.

Even if they wanted to send someone to take over, the person being sent would have to be willing.

Honestly, if he were a C-level Awakened from another city, would he be willing to take over such a mess?

Isn't it better to stay in a medium or even a large city?

So, the headquarters would rather have the Awakened from each small city propose their own candidates to handle the city's defense issues.

"Mr. Li Ping, please take on the position of our president."

"Yes, Brother Li Ping, as long as you're willing to stay, we will follow your commands."

"Brother Li Ping, we will definitely obey you. Please, stay."

From all directions, the pleas of the Awakened resounded.

Most of those who stayed had no other options or were unwilling to leave their homes unless absolutely necessary.

The powerful Li Ping before them made them suspect that not even Yan Ming was his match.

If he could stay, the safety of Anshan City would undoubtedly be greatly enhanced.

They were willing, and happy, to follow a strong leader!

"Is that so?"

Chen Fan pondered.

He couldn't deny that he was tempted.

Having such a group to work for him would greatly improve the supply of medicinal herbs.

Even if a fierce beast siege prevented supplies from arriving, it wouldn't matter.

All he needed to do was defend Anshan City, which was exactly what he wanted to do.

It was a win-win situation; there was no reason to refuse.

"Alright, I can agree."

As soon as Chen Fan spoke, everyone present felt a weight lift from their chests.

"That's great, Mr. Li Ping, I..."

Chen Fan raised his hand to interrupt Hua Jun, his gaze sweeping across the room, and said, "I haven't finished speaking. Before I agree, I have one condition. If you can accept it, I will be your president and guard Anshan City. If you cannot accept it, then let's not talk about it."

"Mr. Li Ping, please speak."

Hua Jun quickly said.

The other Awakened also urged him on, though a bit nervously, unsure of what condition he might impose.

"My condition is that anyone who wants to stay must obey my orders. If anyone disobeys, they can leave. Those who stay will be assumed to agree to this condition. If anyone disobeys my orders in the future, don't blame me for being harsh."

As Chen Fan spoke, his eyes flashed coldly.

Those who met his gaze felt as if they had fallen into an ice cellar, not daring to breathe.

"If you agree to this condition, I will stay. If not, I will leave now. Rest assured, I am a reasonable person and will not force you to do anything morally wrong."

Chen Fan said.

The Awakened looked at each other, and soon someone raised their hand and said, "Brother Li Ping, since you said you won't make us do anything immoral, what is there to consider? You be our president, I, Ma Lining, am the first to support you!"

A long-faced man in the crowd raised both hands.

"Well said, I support it too!"

"If anyone doesn't support it, they can leave, I have no objections!"

"I have no objections either!"

Soon, everyone raised their hands in agreement.

Hua Jun saw this and smiled so broadly his mouth almost twisted. "Mr. Li Ping, you see, none of us have any objections to your condition. Now, you can be our Anshan City Awakened Association president, right?"

After saying this, he was still tense inside, afraid that the man before him might go back on his word.

However, he was overthinking it.

Chen Fan glanced around and nodded, "Alright, from now on, I am your president. Anshan City will be guarded by me and all of you together."

The Awakened were moved to tears upon hearing this.

Indeed, they too were part of Anshan City, and defending their home was also their unshirkable duty.

But at the moment, they still relied on this new president.

"Li, no, President,"

Hua Jun's eyes sparkled with excitement, "Having you oversee Anshan City is an honor for the tens of thousands of people here. Rest assured, everyone here will follow your orders and share the same fate with you!"

"Hmm."

Chen Fan nodded.

He felt a bit sentimental.

How unpredictable life is.

He had only intended to sell some materials and gather information but ended up becoming the president of Anshan City Association.

It was equivalent to being the City Lord of Anshan City.

He had to admit, with this new identity, his future actions would be much more convenient.

Oh, it was also time to have Gu Ze return, especially since the entire Anshan City was now under his domain.

"President, are you available now? If so, I can guide you through the process and brief you on our association's situation."

Hua Jun asked cautiously.

"Okay."

Chen Fan nodded, as he also needed to make some arrangements.

Under Hua Jun's lead, the two went up to the third floor and connected with the higher-ups.

As Hua Jun had said, the entire process was exceptionally quick. The person in charge merely confirmed Chen Fan's identity before agreeing to have him as the president of the Anshan City Awakened Association.

After the communication was cut, Hua Jun cheerfully said, "President, next I will introduce the personnel and operations of our branch to you."

Chen Fan said, "Prepare a list of everyone's superpowers for me."

"Yes."

Hua Jun quickly agreed, as he was planning to do that anyway.

"As for the association's operations, I'll leave those to you. Unless it's something major, you can make the decisions."

After all, he didn't even have time for cultivation, let alone handle trivial matters.

"!"

Hua Jun's eyes showed a hint of shock.

The president was delegating power?

It's said that new officials like to assert their authority, yet this one was...

"Do you have anything else to say?" Chen Fan asked.

"Not at the moment, no."

"Alright, then I'll tell you what I need you to do."

"Yes, please go ahead, President." Hua Jun bowed slightly, indicating he was all ears.

"Is the association growing medicinal herbs?"

Chen Fan asked, "For example, herbs for refining Qi Blood Pills or True Qi Pills?"

"We are growing herbs for Qi Blood Pills, but in limited quantities, mainly due to the demands of the previous City Lord," Hua Jun recalled, "As for True Qi Pill herbs, there haven't been any planted."

Chen Fan nodded and then asked, "If we start growing herbs for True Qi Pills now, how difficult would it be?"

"Not difficult at all."

Hua Jun replied without hesitation, "The seeds can be purchased from the association, and we have enough manpower. Also, we have two or three Awakened whose superpowers are related to plant growth."

"Oh?"

Chen Fan's eyes lit up, "How are they related?"

Hua Jun quickly said, "Two of them can accelerate plant growth; they're responsible for the Qi Blood Pill herbs. The other can increase yield, making a plant that normally bears one fruit produce two or even three."

"The three of them are in the association now. If you want to see them, I can call them over."

After a moment's thought, Chen Fan said, "No rush."

He mused, "So if I spend points to buy seeds from the association, we'll soon have a large supply of herbs?"

"Yes, President." Hua Jun smiled, "You don't even need to spend points; we can handle such a small matter."

Chen Fan glanced at him, his lips curving slightly, "You're quite considerate."

Hua Jun grinned ingratiatingly.

He was happy to help Chen Fan, as proving their worth would ensure the latter's willingness to stay and protect them.

"However, I don't like to take advantage of people, and besides, I'm not short on points." Chen Fan glanced at him, causing the latter to pale with fright, "Pre-President, that's not what I meant, I..."

"Alright, I'm not blaming you, no need to be so nervous." Chen Fan waved his hand dismissively.

"Later, I'll buy the seeds from headquarters. You will oversee the planting and tell them that the more herbs they grow, the happier I'll be. When I'm pleased, I will reward them generously, even with Celestial God Fruits, it's a small matter."

Chen Fan casually promised.

"Ce-Celestial God Fruits!"

Sure enough, hearing those words made Hua Jun's breath quicken.

Chapter 299: When Impoverished, Care for Oneself; When Successful, Aid the World

For Awakeners, the importance of Spiritual Power is self-evident.

After all, sometimes what they lack is not the imagination to control superpowers, but the ability itself.

Without sufficient Spiritual Power, no matter how good the idea is, it's useless. A clever housewife cannot cook without rice. With sufficient Spiritual Power, even if the method of application remains the same, the power cannot be comparable.

With greater power, naturally, one becomes a C-level, B-level Awakener.

But obviously, improving Spiritual Power is not an easy task. The "Moon Observation Technique" in the Cultivation Association is a good method, but the problem is that everyone's comprehension is different.

Some people may enter the beginner level within one or two months, achieve small success in less than half a year, or even reach entering the hall.

For others, half a year might pass, and they are only just beginning. Small success remains out of reach.

The latter situation is the most common. Even with guidance, how much can be understood depends on one's own aptitude. Not to mention, who has the time to guide you if they are not close to you? Wouldn't using that time on oneself be better?

In comparison, Heavenly Materials and Earthly Treasures like the Celestial God Fruit, which can directly enhance Spiritual Power, are what many Awakeners dream of obtaining.

Unfortunately, the price is too high.

One Celestial God Fruit costs fifty thousand points!

For the vast majority of Awakeners in the Association, let alone coming up with fifty thousand points, even five thousand points would be rare.

Yet the person in front of him was saying he would use a Celestial God Fruit as a reward?

"What, you don't believe it?"

Chen Fan glanced at him and asked.

"I believe, I believe."

Hua Jun quickly nodded, with a smile on his face, but it was obvious that he was being somewhat insincere.

Seeing this, Chen Fan was too lazy to explain. When the time came, he would directly take out a Celestial God Fruit and place it before these people. They would believe without a doubt and willingly serve him.

"Besides this matter, there's one more thing I need you to do."

"Please, President, speak."

"How many people are currently in Anshan City?"

"About one hundred thousand. If you include the people in the two villages outside the city, it might be one hundred and twenty thousand," said Hua Jun.

"One hundred and twenty thousand..."

Chen Fan's eyes narrowed slightly, and he asked, "How many people can Anshan City hold at most?"

"Huh?"

Hua Jun was taken aback, seemingly not understanding why Chen Fan suddenly asked this question.

But he quickly responded and thought seriously, "Accommodating two hundred thousand people should not be a problem."

"Two hundred thousand?"

Chen Fan was a little surprised.

He initially thought that the people outside the city were there because there wasn't enough space inside the city.

Now it seemed that it wasn't that simple?

"Vice President, since Anshan City can accommodate two hundred thousand people, why is it only half full?"

"This..."

Hua Jun hesitated and said, "President, this is the City Lord's Mansion's order. On one hand, fewer people make it easier to manage, and those inside live more comfortably.

On the other hand, it's to raise the threshold. Like the people of the two villages outside, they are actually of no value."

"Of no value?"

Chen Fan looked at him expressionlessly.

"Yes, President."

Hua Jun nodded and said, "Those people are mostly ordinary people. Only a few are martial artists, and most of them are still at the Body Tempering and Muscle Refining Realm. Whether we have them or not makes no difference.

So, Anshan City won't let them live inside. Occasionally giving them some benefits to make them contribute to Anshan City is enough.

If someone reaches the Entry Force Realm, only then do they qualify to reside in Anshan City. This is why, although Anshan City can accommodate two hundred thousand people, it's only half full now.

Of course, if they are Awakeners, it's different. President, you might not know, but if two Awakeners combine, their offspring are highly likely to also be Awakeners. This makes the value of ordinary people even lower."

As Hua Jun spoke, the smile on his face gradually solidified.

Because he noticed that the look in the President's eyes had become much colder.

"Pres-President, did I say something wrong?" he stammered, feeling a bit aggrieved.

Because these thoughts were not his alone, almost all Awakeners thought this way.

Chen Fan retracted his gaze and looked forward, "I'll overlook it this time. But next time, I don't want to hear such words coming from your mouth again."

"Yes, yes."

Hua Jun nodded quickly, changing the topic, "President, you mentioned earlier that you needed me to do something?"

"Survey the vacant land in the city and move the people from outside into the city."

"What?"

Hua Jun was dumbfounded, almost doubting his own ears.

"What, you don't understand what I'm saying?" Chen Fan looked at him coldly.

"I-I understand, but, but..." Hua Jun couldn't help but ask, "Why?"

To him, this seemed completely unnecessary.

They were just a bunch of ordinary people, right?

"No reason, just do as I say."

Chen Fan's tone was cold.

Soon, the Beast Tide would erupt. Even the seemingly impenetrable Anshan City had a risk of being destroyed, not to mention the two camps outside and other villages.

Therefore, he had to start making preparations in advance, moving the people outside into the city.

The reason was simple: as the saying goes, "if one can keep themselves safe in troubled times, they should help the world when prosperous." Now that he had the ability and knew that an unprecedented Beast Tide was about to break out, doing nothing would make him no better than a beast.

As for why he didn't explain to Hua Jun, it was also simple: first, Hua Jun's thoughts were deeply rooted, and no amount of explanation could change his mind. Second, as the stronger one, he needed to demonstrate his authority in such matters.

"Yes, yes."

Sure enough, Hua Jun nodded repeatedly, although he soon hesitated as if he had something to say.

"What, is there a problem?" Chen Fan frowned.

"Yes, there's some difficulty."

Hua Jun smiled wryly:

"First, the vast majority of the land is in the hands of the City Lord's Mansion and Awakeners. It's easier to deal with those within our association, but as for the City Lord's Mansion..."

He looked embarrassed.

When Yan Ming was around, the City Lord's Mansion and the Association were like one entity. As a result, the people there were very familiar with them.

Going to ask them for land would not only be very embarrassing but also challenging.

"What do they need so much land for?"

Chen Fan glanced at him, "Buy it from them at a normal price, and the expenses will be on me. If,"

He paused, a cold gleam in his eyes, "if they refuse the offer or extort excessively, expel them from the city."

"Also, if anyone inside the city is dissatisfied and instigates trouble, warn them the first time, and expel them the second time. If there are orchestrators behind the scenes, execute them without mercy."

"Yes!"

Hua Jun swallowed hard.

The President was indeed thorough, even considering the possibility of incitement.

The residents inside were mostly ordinary people. They wouldn't hesitate to take action.

But the City Lord's Mansion...

He sighed inwardly.

As the saying goes, "a new emperor brings new officials," with Yan Ming gone, Anshan City naturally depended on strength for rule.

Although the President was only the head of the Association, it was clear that the City Lord's Mansion needed a change. His words made sense, too.

Those people, not even a hundred in total, occupied more than half of Anshan City's land. They couldn't even use it and just let it waste away. The President was already reasonable for wanting to buy it.

He hoped this matter would go smoothly.

Although he didn't quite understand what the motive was for bringing the ordinary people inside.

"This matter must be completed quickly, understand?"

"Yes, President, I'll arrange it immediately," Hua Jun said quickly.

"Alright."

Chen Fan thought for a moment, "For now, that's all. If you encounter any trouble that you can't handle during the process, you can notify me."

"Understood."

Hua Jun bowed and walked out.

Upon closing the door, he let out a long sigh of relief.

He had to admit, the aura emanating from the President was too strong—stronger than the former President or even City Lord Yan Ming.

He dared not speak loudly in the President's presence.

On the positive side, this showed the President's strength. With him guarding Anshan City, they might withstand the Beast Tide.

But...

Hua Jun scratched his head.

The tasks he had been given were somewhat puzzling.

"Never mind, I'll just carry them out faithfully. Assigning land for the cultivation of herbs is straightforward, but the land issue..." he sighed, "I hope they understand the situation."

He shook his head and walked downstairs.

Sitting in his office, Chen Fan tapped his fingers on the table.

"The people in the villages also need to be brought over quickly, including those from other places. The capacity of twenty thousand might seem large, but it's not much. Also, huddling defensively in the city isn't a long-term strategy."

His brow furrowed at the thought.

With the population increasing by tens of thousands, aspects like food, water, sanitation, and security need to be managed. Fortunately, he had enough people under him to handle these tasks.

The main concern was whether they could withstand the upcoming Beast Tide.

According to Meng Xue, this Beast Tide would be fiercer than the one ten years ago. So even surviving the first wave wouldn't mean safety, as there would be subsequent waves...

Unless they could kill the Beast Emperors among the Fierce Beasts, it was unlikely that the Beast Tide would subside.

"I wonder how the S-Class Awakeners will perform this time. Relying on others is foolish. To survive, I must strive even harder," Chen Fan's eyes gleamed with determination.

Chapter 300: Perhaps, He Is Not from the Martial Arts Association

Chen Fan took out his phone and opened the association's mall.

He first looked at the medicinal herbs section.

A batch of herbs for True Qi Pills costs 20 points, similar to the Martial Arts Association's price.

In comparison, seeds are much cheaper. For 20 points, the cultivated herbs can make more than ten batches of True Qi Pills.

"It's truly better to do things yourself for a richer life."

Chen Fan sighed.

He immediately ordered 2,000 points worth of mature herbs, enough to refine over a thousand batches of True Qi Pills.

"I heard just now that there's an awakener in the association who can increase the yield. When the time comes, the number of batches refined might go up even more." Chen Fan's lips curled slightly.

He didn't intend to immediately meet those people and say anything about recruitment. From the agreed terms, taking on the role of chairman and providing them protection was already enough effort. Giving them more would make some arrogant and lose respect for him.

Of course, he wasn't a stingy person.

If those people performed well and cultivated satisfactory herbs, he wouldn't mind nurturing them.

The same goes for others.

Pushing these thoughts aside, he clicked on the Cultivation Technique section.

He had already exchanged for top-level and below martial arts and heart methods. The remaining ones were either Weapon Martial Arts or Supreme Martial Arts.

His gaze skipped over the Weapon Martial Arts and landed on the Supreme Martial Arts.

Prices generally start at 3,000 points, with many exceeding 10,000.

Chen Fan glanced at his remaining points and added "Marriage Robe Divine Skill" to his cart.

Though he hadn't unlocked the trait for converting others' True Qi for his use, he should be close.

He had mastered basic heart methods, leaving only the high-level and first-rate ones. With luck, he could unlock a trait for absorbing others' True Qi and converting it to his own vitality.

Combining these traits, completing the Undying Seal Technique would be within reach.

Even though his account currently had no points to buy this martial art.

"I still need to hunt more elite-level fierce beasts, and my Experience Points are running low."

Chen Fan glanced at his panel.

After fully leveling the Seventy-Two Acupoint Hand Techniques, he had over 20,000 experience points, likely only enough for one or two high-level heart methods.

If it's first-rate or top-level heart methods, mastering them to perfection would take tens of thousands of points.

Chen Fan winced.

The consumption of experience points was truly unbearable.

He needed to quickly acquire the Sun Observation Technique. Unlocking traits related to comprehension could save a significant amount of experience points.

As for the points needed to unlock the purchasing rights of the Sun Observation Technique.

Chen Fan reckoned it should be around 100,000.

That's quite a lot.

However, if he could get some Celestial God Fruits, selling a few would be enough to buy this spirit martial art.

Celestial God Fruits, like other Heavenly Materials and Earthly Treasures, work best the first time they're consumed. Effectiveness diminishes with subsequent uses, making selling them for resources a good choice.

Of course, half of them would be given to Meng Xue.

This was his investment.

After finalizing these plans, Chen Fan took out his phone to call Gu Ze.

Anshan City was now under his control, both for Gu Ze's safety and the upcoming relocation of his people; it was time for Gu Ze to come here.

However, he hesitated slightly at this moment.

He might as well go there directly given his current identity.

Thinking of this, Chen Fan nodded slightly, sent a message from his phone as a heads-up, then stood up and walked out of the chairman's office.

"Chairman!"

"Chairman!"

Seeing Chen Fan walk out, the awakeners on the road stopped and greeted him with respect.

Many women had stars in their eyes.

Though the chairman's looks were average and easily got lost in a crowd, his aura made them fall for him at a glance.

"Hmm."

Chen Fan nodded indifferently and walked out under everyone's gaze.

Secretly thinking, this feeling wasn't too bad?

...

Far away in Jiulong City, hundreds of miles away.

In the inner city, inside a magnificent building.

Ling Shiyao hunched over, trembling, facing the man who was sipping tea with crossed legs.

"Chairman Ling."

Du Hao blew on his tea cup, took a sip, and leisurely said, "I recall giving you just one day. What time is it now?"

"Lord Du,"

Ling Shiyao quickly admitted fault, "I'm sorry, I'm one hour late. Please punish me."

"No hurry."

Du Hao put down his cup and said, "Now, how's the investigation I asked for? Any results?"

Ling Shiyao's heart sank instantly, his face turning ashen.

"Lord Du, I still... I'm still investigating."

"Still investigating?"

Du Hao's eyes flashed coldly, "So I gave you a day and you've found nothing?"

"Thud!"

Ling Shiyao knelt, pleading, "Lord Du, I haven't slept or eaten since yesterday. I've been searching for the person in the painting everywhere but..."

"But what?"

"But I couldn't find his whereabouts?"

Ling Shiyao trembled and peeked up, quickly lowering his head again, "I've asked many True Essence martial artists, even the Jiangbei Sub-district Martial Arts Association assisted, yet no one knows about him?"

"You've asked all the True Essence martial artists in Yan Country? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Lord, I searched them all, but none knew about him..."

"Smack!"

Du Hao hurled the nearby cup at Ling Shiyao's face. The cup shattered, soaking him in tea and tea leaves, making him look utterly pitiful.

"No one knew him? Then tell me, where did he come from? A stone?"

Du Hao stood up, roaring.

Ling Shiyao dared not breathe, trembling on the ground.

He truly did his best.

He checked all Yan Country's True Essence martial artists but couldn't find the man in the painting. What could he do? He was despairing!

But despite his despair and fear, he knew he had to report here, even if beaten up and expelled from Jiulong City.

Failing to report would lead to a far worse fate.

"Useless! Useless!"

Du Hao roared, wanting to tear the incompetent man apart.

"Lord, Lord,"

Ling Shiyao quickly said, "Please give me a bit more time."

"More time?"

Du Hao's eyes bulged with rage.

"Lord," Ling Shiyao explained, "That man might have just recently reached True Essence Realm, hence I couldn't find him. A master of this level wouldn't emerge suddenly; he must have stood out during the Meridian Refining Realm."

"You mean?"

Du Hao's face showed a glimmer of thought,

"Yes, Lord, I plan to check the Meridian Refining martial artists next. It won't be long before I find him. Please trust me." Ling Shiyao pleaded.

"If you thought of this, why didn't you say earlier?" Du Hao gritted his teeth.

"Lord, I just realized and," Ling Shiyao stuttered, "The Meridian Refining Realm has far more people; checking each one takes more than a day?"

"Useless!"

Du Hao glared.

If not for receiving similar reports from others, he would have slashed the incompetent man.

Seeing him was a hopeful attempt for clues.

As expected, Ling Shiyao didn't disappoint in disappointing.

Taking a deep breath.

"Fine, I'll give you two more days. Search among Meridian Refining martial artists. If you find nothing in two days, I won't be merciful."

"Yes, yes."

Ling Shiyao felt reprieved, promising, "Lord, in two days, I'll drag him from the crowd!"

"Get out."

Du Hao impatiently replied.

"Yes, yes."

Ling Shiyao curled into a ball, rolling towards the door.

This scene amused Du Hao.

Cursing inwardly, truly useless.

Apart from some loyalty, worthless.

Turning around, he entered the inner chamber.

At the round table sat two dignified middle-aged men, who stood up as Du Hao entered, bowing, "Brother Du."

"No need to be formal, sit, sit."

Du Hao gestured graciously, smiling warmly, contrasting his earlier foul mood.

The two men exchanged smiles, sitting down.

"Brother Du, what about that man? Didn't he find anything?"

The crew-cut man on the left asked.

"That useless man found nothing."

Du Hao sat, sipping water, "He asked for two more days. I'll see what he brings then?"

"That's expected. Despite our efforts, we couldn't find him either. A True Essence martial artist's prowess leaves traces, so how could he vanish,"

The crew-cut man puzzled, "Could he have not joined the Martial Arts Association, possibly an awakener's association member?"