

Medical 681

Chapter 681 Additional Guest_2

"I really don't understand why they emphasize us so much," another voice chimed in. The voice was as gentle as a summer breeze, a sound that, like others, Yan Xiaobao could recognize anywhere. The sound of footsteps grew closer on the stairs, and Yan Xiaobao could guess that they were moving on the other side of the wall. Soon, they would reach the gate, and he could only imagine their stunned expressions when they did.

Standing still, his arms at his sides, Yan Xiaobao witnessed Rong Ming and Rong Xing for the first time in years as the group turned around. They had grown into remarkable adults, their faces devoid of any trace of youth. Rong Xing had transformed into a stunning beauty, the kind that men would fight for, while the formerly dull and awkward Rong Ming now carried a certain aura—an aura only found in high-level nobles who understood their importance. The Rong twins could no longer be mistaken for anything other than adults, yet when their eyes landed on the white-haired young man standing outside the gate, they froze in their tracks. Their wide eyes and gaping mouths betrayed their shock; neither of them could take another step. They simply stared at the pale-haired youth.

Seeing the reaction of the twins left the two guards visibly uncomfortable. Both were students of the academy, but graduates like the twins were admired greatly. Perhaps these strange-looking young men were people the Rong twins didn't wish to encounter, and so their reaction was one of sheer astonishment. Yet here they were, forced by the guards to face them. Thinking along these lines, the two young guards felt sweat bead upon their foreheads, their hearts racing in fear of the worst possibilities. Neither dared to meet anyone's gaze now; instead, they stared at the ground.

"Brother!" Rong Xing was the first to break free from her shock, rushing forward to throw herself into Yan Xiaobao's arms. Tears welled in her eyes, and a radiant smile lit up her face. Her tears flowed so freely that her entire face became stained with them. Shortly afterward, Rong Ming followed suit, charging toward Yan Xiaobao before embracing both the white-haired youth and his clingy sister who refused to let go.

The astonishing reactions displayed by usually stoic graduates utterly bewildered the guards. Feeling a sense of surreal incongruity, neither guard spoke. Glancing around, they noticed another person who looked just as out of place. The twins had leapt toward the pale-haired man, but standing quietly behind them was a blond man, his face barely concealing a sly smirk. Though he didn't step forward to participate in the reunion, it was clear that he was accompanying the white-haired youth.

"Come with us," Rong Ming finally said, wiping his red, swollen eyes with the back of his hand. Yan Xiaobao squeezed Rong Xing's hand and nodded, signaling Cai Jie to follow. The three of them followed

Rong Ming closely. Rong Ming walked ahead, his posture straightening once again, his aloofness restored. He walked with confidence imbued by a resolute energy. He had clearly undergone significant changes since Yan Xiaobao last saw him.

To Yan Xiaobao's surprise, the twins did not lead them deeper into the Royal Academy; instead, they headed toward another set of gates. Beyond it lay the upscale neighborhood they had walked through when arriving at the academy. After what seemed like a brief ten-minute stroll through streets, they reached a massive mansion. Guards stood at its gates, and the estate appeared capable of housing at least a hundred people. Expecting the twins to head for the student dormitories, Yan Xiaobao was stunned by the sheer size of their home. Noticing Yan Xiaobao's surprised expression, Rong Ming smiled with satisfaction. "You've sent so many people to us; we needed a place of our own," he explained, a bitter smile creeping across Yan Xiaobao's lips. Indeed, he had sent Xu Biao, Deng Wu, Sha Yun...

As they entered, Rong Ming cast a glance at Cai Jie. Seeing the golden-haired man pay him no mind but instead follow Yan Xiaobao with a sly grin plastered on his face, Rong Ming opted to remain silent. He knew Yan Xiaobao would introduce him eventually.

Yan Xiaobao reached the entrance, watching as the guards politely bowed to the Rong twins and opened the doors for the group of four. Upon stepping into the grand front hall, a voice rang out from one side. "Why are you back so early? I thought you were busy conducting experiments in the Martial Arts department." The voice emanated from one of the rooms nearby. Glancing inside, Yan Xiaobao spotted a large table strewn with papers. Behind the piles of documents, absorbed in a heap of Memory Stones, was the source of the voice. Yan Xiaobao examined the man closely, stepping forward with a faint smile. He could recognize this towering man anywhere, but the latter didn't look up until Yan Xiaobao's shadow fell across the papers he was reading. Frowning, the older man raised his gaze, prepared to scold one of the twins—until he saw a white-haired youth standing there. His jaw dropped as he grabbed a pair of glasses and perched them on his nose, staring at Yan Xiaobao in disbelief. Moments later, he removed the glasses once again. "Good heavens, you took your time coming back," he exclaimed in a stunned voice, suddenly lunging forward with such force that the chair toppled noisily to the floor.

Xu Biao rushed up and enveloped Yan Xiaobao in a mighty hug. Although he had seemed preoccupied with work, Yan Xiaobao could easily guess that Xu Biao had deliberately buried himself in it to avoid dwelling on what had been lost during their attempted escape in the dungeons.

Reuniting with Xu Biao stirred mixed emotions. They had been through so much together. Xu Biao had sold information about him to the Dragon Army but ultimately chose to follow him out of the underground city and into a new world. Alas, this decision had cost Xu Biao his closest friend and partner. Despite all that had transpired between them, Yan Xiaobao was astonished to find himself

genuinely happy to see Xu Biao again. There was no trace of resentment between them. Busy as he had been with the beast army, Yan Xiaobao hadn't had time to ponder his feelings toward Xu Biao. Now, reunited after more than two years apart, warmth blossomed in his heart—a warmth equal to that he felt when seeing the Rong twins. He realized he had long since forgiven the hardworking man.

"In terms of rankings, it seems you've already caught up with me. How did you become the King in such a short time?" Xu Biao asked with a smile. Though he smiled, the pain in his eyes was unmistakable. Yan Xiaobao realized that while Xu Biao was happy to see him again, the meeting had also triggered memories of his last moments with his dearly beloved. Worse still, Xu Biao hadn't understood his own feelings until it was too late, and those mixed emotions now churned turbulently within him. Yan Xiaobao placed a hand on his shoulder. "Believe me, I understand your feelings," he said with a sorrowful smile, recalling his own love for Li Fen. Though he could now only regard her as a friend, a pang of pain struck his heart as he acknowledged that the problems between them remained unresolved. He needed to tell her how he'd felt back then but also help her understand that those feelings belonged in the past. Sighing softly, Yan Xiaobao turned back to Xu Biao. "I have something you might want to know," he said, choosing each word with care.

"You understand that when someone dies, their soul typically enters Hell, ruled by the Void World, where they remain until all memories of their past life fade and they are prepared for reincarnation." He explained what Lan Feng had told him years ago when they shared the body of an infant. "When a soul enters the Void World, if someone can enter the Void World and locate the soul, there's a chance of recovering it." Every word Yan Xiaobao uttered made Xu Biao stare at him as though he had descended from the heavens.

Clearing his throat nervously, Xu Biao asked in a trembling voice, "You mean I could enter the Void World and find her? Could I bring her back?"

Yan Xiaobao nodded, and though Xu Biao's eyes shone with hope, his pulse racing, the young man was acutely aware of the arduous journey he had just placed upon him. "There's one problem," Yan Xiaobao stated candidly, his words instantly silencing Xu Biao. His expression turned bitter as if someone had poured a bucket of cold water over him.

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Chapter 682: Surveillance of the Death Monarch

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"Of course," he muttered, "there's no way to make someone accept the surveillance of the Death Monarch Yan Luo." A flicker of despair crossed his eyes, but he quickly regained his composure. His eyes, once filled with pain, now brimmed with determination. Turning to Yan Xiaobao, his expression became resolute. Grabbing the young man's shoulders firmly, he said, "Tell me! Please tell me what I need to do to save her and bring her back. I'm willing to do anything to bring her back!" His words rushed out, stammering slightly, as he focused entirely on the information Yan Xiaobao was about to share. Witnessing Xu Biao's desperation, which mirrored his state from earlier, a hint of mockery appeared on Yan Xiaobao's face—a faint, sardonic smile. The two locked eyes for a moment before Yan Xiaobao sighed. He knew the man, having been told how critical rankings were, would dedicate himself to training. Yet, he felt this was preferable to letting his friend live the rest of his life consumed by guilt. "To enter the other world, one must become a God Expert," Yan Xiaobao stated bluntly, his words causing a slight shake in Xu Biao's resolve, though it didn't take long for Xu Biao's determination to solidify again.

"Thank you for telling me," Xu Biao murmured softly. "I'll forgive myself for a while. If I want even a chance at reaching God's level before gaining a new life, I really need to start training."

Yan Xiaobao smiled faintly, leaning against the wall, his eyes following Xu Biao as he exited the room through the door on the opposite side. Having helped his friend made him feel good, but he stayed guarded. Deep inside, an eager anticipation sparked, something uncontrollable until he met Wang Julong again. Just thinking of her was enough to make his heart beat irregularly. When he turned, his eyes brimmed with longing. As he moved, he heard footsteps descending the stairs in the entry hall—located beside the office where he stood. Was it his Wang Julong? Leaving Xu Biao's office where he had been working, Yan Xiaobao, Cai Jie, and the twins returned to the foyer near the stairwell. Yan Xiaobao heard soft steps on the stairs, and when he looked up and smiled, the expression revealed anticipation. But it wasn't Wang Julong. In front of him stood a tall man. His hair was a deep azure; his eyes matched the blue of his hair. His skin was pale, tinged with a faint bluish hue. If anything, he seemed just as peculiar as Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie.

Upon seeing Yan Xiaobao, the blue-haired figure paused mid-step. He widened his eyes, staring at the young man with white hair. Seeing Deng Wu for the first time in over a year, Yan Xiaobao couldn't suppress a frown. Deng Wu was usually the clumsy, playful one among their group, but the man standing before him seemed far from amusing—he appeared utterly serious. Yet, looking deeply into his dark blue eyes, Yan Xiaobao finally caught a trace of the playful spirit he recognized as Deng Wu's.

This young man, much like the Rong twins, no longer had the youthful look of a child. Instead, maturity marked him—a demeanor of responsibility, drawing Yan Xiaobao's curiosity. It seemed that while they had been apart, he wasn't the only one who had changed. Recalling his rebukes toward himself, Yan Xiaobao remembered he shouldn't be surprised by such things—after all, it had been nearly two years since they fled the underground city. A year was consumed traversing tunnels, nearly another full year spent training alongside Wan Qiao, teaching the army to fight, and preparing for war. Though his friends

might not have endured experiences as extreme as his, life remained relentless. And with life came complications—complications that had to be resolved to keep living.

"It's been a while," Deng Wu said, speaking quicker than anyone present, his delicate smile giving away a hint of emotion. Descending the stairs faster than before, he approached Yan Xiaobao and pulled him into an embrace. "It's great to see you safe and sound. How did you end up as the Great Marshall of the Beast Army?"

Yan Xiaobao dismissed the question entirely, staring blankly at Deng Wu for a few seconds before shaking his head with a faint smile. "How exactly did you find that out?" he asked, watching Deng Wu shrug as he glanced around. "Gao Yan knows everything," Deng Wu replied. "Ever since we arrived in the Capital, that guy has spent all his time in the prime spots. He's done well with his worldwide information network. He's got sources in every major city and even some smaller ones. When people fled the Imperial Capital, they brought stories of the Beast Army—and of the white-haired Demon Lord, deadly as a white funeral lily yet as dazzling as the midnight moon." Hearing Deng Wu's words rendered Yan Xiaobao speechless. Although he had participated in the war, he hadn't expected everyone to know of him.

"I told you they've been watching you," Cai Jie said with a grin, clearly pleased to see proof of his earlier claims. Hearing the golden-haired man speak, Yan Xiaobao snorted but chose not to argue. Now wasn't the time for debates.

"This is troublesome," Yan Xiaobao muttered, scratching his chin thoughtfully. "Tonight, I've been invited to the City Lord's mansion, and I accepted the invitation. Maybe he's planning to kill us," he added calmly. Being the Great Marshall of the Beast Tribe was not something he wanted everyone to be aware of.

Chapter 683: The Surveillance of the Death Monarch_2

Hearing Yan Xiaobao's words, the Rong twins and Deng Wu laughed. "Don't worry. If he or the Royal Family wanted you dead, you'd already be dead. They'd send a Saint to deal with you." They conversed amongst themselves, and as Yan Xiaobao heard this, he grumbled somewhat; however, it did make sense.

"Alright, I'd like to see them try," Cai Jie and Yan Xiaobao said simultaneously, both of them flashing sinister smiles, their eyes filled with killing intent. Yan Xiaobao had acquired his killing intent from the red wolf. Initially, this killing intent was savage and wild, but after the war ended, Yan Xiaobao felt a change in it. Where it had once surged forth cold and unbridled, freezing and sweating his targets simultaneously, he had struggled to control it. However, after battling numerous experts during the war, he gained mastery over it. It now seemed as though the killing intent completely belonged to him.

Cai Jie also possessed a killing intent as strong as Yan Xiaobao's. As for where or how he managed to acquire it, Yan Xiaobao did not know, but he was aware that if he were to fight these experts standing behind him, he'd have to think twice. Cai Jie had many secrets.

Seeing the expressions of the two young men, even the composed Deng Wu felt a shiver run through him. It was evident they had experienced war. Death had followed close at their heels, and they had slain countless foes. Clearly, they were used to narrowly escaping death's clutches and carrying it with them to Hell World.

"If I'm not mistaken, aren't you two both kings?" Deng Wu frowned and asked, "How could you possibly defeat Saints?" Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie smirked, answering, "We have our ways." They didn't elaborate. Yan Xiaobao was confident that if a Saint came to kill him, even if he couldn't defeat them, he could absolutely rely on Velocity Flow to escape. Velocity Flow had evolved alongside him, growing stronger with his external training focus. If the Saint were mediocre, they simply wouldn't be able to keep up with him. As for Cai Jie's secrets, Yan Xiaobao didn't know, but recalling the dead Crusaders, he felt a bit unsettled, as he still didn't understand how they had been killed.

Deng Wu noticed the moment of discomfort in Yan Xiaobao's eyes and nodded in acceptance of their reasoning. Though they hadn't met for a long time, Deng Wu was still as adept at understanding Yan Xiaobao as ever, and he wasn't about to pile additional stress on the white-haired man who had finally returned.

Just as Yan Xiaobao was about to open his mouth to ask about Sha Yun and Wang Julong's whereabouts, he heard the door forced open, and a massive Snake Woman appeared before him. Her skin was still yellow as before, and her eyes shimmered silver from the beast contract they shared. Tears brimmed in her eyes, and as she caught sight of Yan Xiaobao, she burst into sobs and hugged him tightly. Seeing her, Yan Xiaobao's face softened into a gentle expression. He lightly patted her hair with his hand.

"I'm back," he said tenderly, though his voice seemed unheard, as Sha Yun clung onto him for dear life. It was as if she feared he might disappear again at any moment. Deng Wu wanted to help her off him, but Yan Xiaobao simply shook his head. He had forced her to stay in the sacred underground city. The least he could now do was let her cry on his shoulder. He could only imagine how much she had worried in the time he had been away.

Sha Yun spent half an hour sobbing before she finally managed to compose herself. Yan Xiaobao smiled at her, gently lifting her gaze with his hand and smiling again. "Don't worry," he chuckled softly, "I'm not going anywhere for now. I'll stay here with you and everyone else."

Upon hearing this, Sha Yun's face broke into a bittersweet smile. Yan Xiaobao took her hand and offered an apologetic smile to everyone else waiting for her crying to subside. Yet no one seemed angry, not even Cai Jie. Everyone clearly understood why Sha Yun was so elated to have Yan Xiaobao back by her side.

"We just need to find Gao Yan and Wang Julong," Yan Xiaobao said. Mentioning her name brought warmth to his heart, but at the same time, Sha Yun tightened her grip on his hand as if refusing to let go. It was as if she wouldn't allow him to go find her.

"Gao Yan went out for work. He won't be back until tonight," Rong Ming said from the side. "On the other hand, Wang Julong most likely is at the infirmary studying new healing techniques. Since her return, she's been training harder than anyone else. Right now, she's focused on poisons and healing and hasn't even touched upon her skills with her surprising staff. Even though she's only a Duke, it's difficult for any of us to defeat her."

Knowing everyone would be back by night, Yan Xiaobao reluctantly accepted the City Lord's dinner invitation but didn't want to stand up the important figure. Acknowledging his later significant meeting, Deng Wu led Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie upstairs to their rooms. Deng Wu selected two rooms at the end of the hallway and handed them to his two new guests. Upon entering, they discovered the suites were far superior to anything they'd stayed in during their travels to the capital.

"Thank you," Yan Xiaobao said to Deng Wu before the two young men entered their rooms. Each room had a bathtub, a luxury they'd missed for quite some time during their journey to the capital. After soaking for a long while in warm water, both managed to wash away all the grime from their travels. Once finished, they dressed in their best attire and tied their hair. Just as Yan Xiaobao finished, he heard a knock at the door. When he opened it, he found Cai Jie waiting outside. Yan Xiaobao wore a white robe embroidered with blue patterns of scarlet birds, while Cai Jie donned a red robe with golden embroidery. They glanced at each other and nodded in approval.

Descending the stairs, they saw Deng Wu, the Rong twins, Sha Yun, and Xu Biao waiting for them. "Save your formalities for the dinner appointment. When you return, we'll ensure Gao Yan and Wang Julong are here." They promised. Sha Yun pouted when Yan Xiaobao told her she couldn't join him for dinner. After all, it was just a meal.

With nods from his friends, Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie left the home and began walking toward the direction they'd been given. The sun had set, and dusk had arrived. It was the perfect time for a dinner gathering, yet Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel slightly uneasy about what the City Lord truly wanted. As they ventured into the night, a sense of foreboding settled over Yan Xiaobao.

Walking through the town, Yan Xiaobao wondered whether Saints might be preparing to attack him as soon as he reached their destination. The young man had to admit, ever since learning that the City Lord might be aware of his involvement in the war, he had become increasingly paranoid. At his side, Cai Jie appeared to be in high spirits, occasionally turning his head or glancing at him.

"Calm down," Cai Jie chuckled. "Although we're going to meet the City Lord, even if he knows your involvement, he should thank you for choosing the Siban Empire instead of going to the Sun Kingdom. Though they're allied, they haven't had a friendly relationship for years. If anything, I'd bet the City Lord will appreciate you." Yan Xiaobao glanced at him skeptically but chose not to speak further, though he kept glancing over his shoulder.

"That guy's much smarter than you," Lan Feng sighed, remarking. "I wouldn't mind sharing a grave with him."

"Sorry for not being so smart," Yan Xiaobao said bitterly. "I'm trying to learn, okay?"

"I know," Lan Feng replied, his tone apologetic. "I'm eager to recover my strength quickly, but you're right; we need to take our time, not rush it. I'm sorry."

Yan Xiaobao couldn't blame the Phoenix in his heart. He too wished for the bird to restore his body, but he also painfully realized he couldn't face the legendary An Hee in his current state. He was barely capable of handling a few Saints. People as strong as Wan Qiao or General Frozen were leagues beyond him. Thinking of Wan Qiao brought up thoughts of Li Xiaopeng, and he clenched his fists. He was still far from being able to challenge the most powerful Saints, and even those Saints admitted they couldn't hold a candle to An Hee. If they stood no chance, how could he?

While Yan Xiaobao thought deeply, Cai Jie hummed a cheerful tune, looking around and evidently enjoying himself. He didn't seem troubled like Yan Xiaobao and made no effort to ease the white-haired youth's concerns.

They reached the mansion sooner than Yan Xiaobao had anticipated, as his mind had been entirely focused on his conversation with Lan Feng, leaving him annoyed for the remainder of the trip. Arriving was something Yan Xiaobao felt unprepared for.

Still, Cai Jie moved ahead to the front door, and Yan Xiaobao shook his head to clear his mind. Soon, as Cai Jie followed him through the gates, a calm sense of tranquility spread through Yan Xiaobao's body. Whatever was going to happen would happen. Worrying over the City Lord's actions wouldn't change anything.

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Chapter 684: Different Lifestyles

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Seeing Yan Xiaobao's transformation, Cai Jie raised his eyebrow in surprise. The once nervous and excitable young man, now with his gray hair, seemed calm and collected; instead of being anxious, he wore a faint smile. His gaze was steady and filled with etiquette as he politely nodded at the guards who had let them in. Yan Xiaobao said nothing, but his entire demeanor had undergone such a profound change that Cai Jie couldn't help but feel astonished. He smiled softly again, feeling increasingly satisfied with his decision to follow Yan Xiaobao.

Yan Xiaobao felt the monk's personality taking over. The countless memories of diverse lifestyles from the monk made it difficult to truly feel at ease in Yan Xiaobao's own body. Though these memories and personalities had merged within him, they occasionally emerged and took control of his actions. Usually, this would be troublesome, but today the young man was grateful for the monk's calm influence, as it steadied him and cleared his mind. This allowed him to observe his surroundings more clearly, and his prior worries vanished entirely. Cai Jie had made a good point earlier. Wearing a gentle smile, Yan Xiaobao followed Cai Jie into the main hall.

The main hall was an enormous structure, and as they entered, they encountered a grand entrance chamber with a staircase that extended five levels high. The handrails of the staircase were made entirely of pure gold, while the stairs themselves were carved out of exquisite marble. At the sight of this, Yan Xiaobao felt as if his breath was taken away.

In front of them, the guard proceeded toward the staircase, and both Cai Jie and Yan Xiaobao followed closely behind. Neither of them outwardly showed any astonishment at the sheer display of wealth

flaunted before them. Though they both wore the finest garments made with the best materials, their appearances still paled in comparison to the magnificence of their surroundings. Despite their amazement, it was clear neither man was overwhelmed by the grandeur. Their eyes remained composed; their breathing steady. Yan Xiaobao raised an eyebrow briefly, while the gray-haired young man seemed entirely indifferent. The guard began to feel uneasy. Could it be that these experts had seen splendors far surpassing even those of the City Lord's mansion? Were they beyond being impressed? The guard knew his master, the City Lord, relished in using his wealth to humble and awe his guests as they were ushered to the lavish banquet table.

The guard led them down an expansive corridor on the banquet floor until they reached their destination. In front of them stood an imposing wooden door, thick and adorned with gold. One of the guards knocked, and it slowly creaked open before them. Stepping aside, the guard motioned for the two guests to enter; Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie complied seamlessly.

Yan Xiaobao had no idea what awaited him in the room ahead, but judging from the other parts of the mansion, he anticipated something extravagant. As he entered, he confirmed his expectations—the room didn't disappoint. At its center was a massive table crafted from heavy wood, surrounded by enough chairs to seat fifty people. The table was arrayed with rare and exquisite delicacies. Countless plates contained every imaginable type of meat, a wide variety of vegetables and salads, as well as an array of fruits and nuts.

Some chairs were occupied, while others remained empty. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie approached the table, intending to seat themselves wherever seemed appropriate.

"Come, come! Sit with me!" boomed a burly, towering man. Seated at the head of the table, he was unmistakably the City Lord. His gold-embroidered robe complemented the splendor of the mansion's golden and marble design. His massive belly protruded so dramatically that it seemed his robe might burst from the strain. This man was enormous—not just in girth but in stature. Both Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie were taken aback. Though he exuded the pleasure of carefree indulgence, the aura of power surrounding him was unmistakable. It was so intense that they immediately realized the man was akin to an Emperor.

The two guests had no intention of conversing with this imposing figure; instead, they nodded courteously as they made their way to the other end of the table. The chairs toward the nearer end, where the City Lord sat, gradually gave way to an arrangement occupied by experts from varying families and sects. All present seemed intrigued by Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie. Some guests widened their eyes in astonishment, while others struggled to contain their reactions. Most dared not look directly at Yan Xiaobao, yet they couldn't resist sneaking furtive glances. It was clear that Yan Xiaobao's involvement in the reputed "Beast Wars" had reached their ears.

Upon arriving at the seat adjacent to the City Lord, they discovered two empty seats reserved on either side of him. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie understood the intent and quietly sat down. Together, they raised their glasses to toast their host, offering a polite nod.

Seeing this, the City Lord broke into a beaming smile and stood, spreading his arms wide. "Welcome to my humble abode!" he declared. His voice was thunderous, reverberating throughout the room. Wine glasses trembled, and the floor seemed to quiver under his resonating words. "Today, we are fortunate to welcome two distinguished guests. Both of them are adventurers who have been traveling for days on end." He then turned to the two experts seated beside him, signaling for them to rise and introduce themselves.

"A fine day to you all. My name is Yan Xiaobao. I was born in a small village outside Liluo City," Yan Xiaobao began. His voice was steady, his smile warm and charismatic. "I have journeyed across the globe. From the furthest reaches of the Sun Kingdom, crossing into the Divine Domain, and eventually following some emigrants to return to my homeland—a land that once belonged to the Spanish Empire." Yan Xiaobao spoke with sincerity, his recounting straightforward and unguarded. Those present already knew his identity, and he saw no need for pretense—a candid account of his life's journey was enough. His words elicited varying reactions among the guests: some choked on their wine, eyes widening to their limits, jaws dropping in shock. Several glasses slipped from trembling hands, crashing to the floor.

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Upon hearing his words, the City Lord immediately burst into hearty laughter. His voice echoed throughout the massive dining hall. He was exceptionally animated, clutching his substantial belly with a heavy hand, causing it to quake like a tremor.

"A few years ago, there was news of a student associated with the Saints, whose master had obtained extraordinary powers. They said that this power allowed him to impart the Saints' abilities to others, something utterly unprecedented." The City Lord spoke after finally ceasing his laughter. "I remember that the young man was described as a pale-skinned youth with striking white hair. Unfortunately, shortly after the news broke, he vanished without a trace. Despite every kingdom actively searching for him, no one uncovered anything. I suspected that person might be you?"

Yan Xiaobao pondered for a while but found no reason to conceal the truth. "That was indeed me. I had no interest in the trouble this revelation brought, so I decided to continue adventuring." He admitted, causing the sound of other guests putting down their items or gasping audibly to fill the room.

The City Lord, however, seemed quite pleased with his response. He gestured for Yan Xiaobao to sit by his side. "I welcome you to my city!" he said in a genuinely friendly tone, "I am deeply honored to have such an unparalleled expert within my city." He then turned his gaze toward Cai Jie, who was seated nearby, his curiosity evident. Everyone present had heard of Yan Xiaobao, yet the mysterious man accompanying him was another story entirely. They knew nothing about this man, which made them particularly wary.

"Perhaps you could introduce yourself?" the City Lord asked politely, though his curiosity was unmistakable. It was impossible to discern what the Lord concealed behind his composed demeanor. Having served as the City Lord for many years, he understood the importance of caution—even when someone appeared vulnerable. A courteous person outlives the arrogant. Everyone, including Yan Xiaobao, closely watched Cai Jie with intrigue. Yan Xiaobao was a well-known figure, but this young man was a complete enigma. Considering his striking appearance and his companionship with Yan Xiaobao, one would assume he was renowned or at least had someone refer to him. Yet, it seemed no one paid attention to the golden-haired young adventurer traveling alongside Yan Xiaobao in Divine Domain.

After a moment of contemplation, with his fingers tapping against a wine glass, it was evident Cai Jie deliberated on how to present himself. Eventually, he stood up slowly, demonstrating no urgency. Even with the curious gazes upon him, he remained unhurried by their anticipation.

"My name is Cai Jie," he began his introduction in a manner understood by both Yan Xiaobao and the City Lord. "I am an adventurer. I have traveled to places you have never imagined and witnessed things you would deem unbelievable. My past isn't important, nor are the reasons behind my journeys. As for why I follow this young man, the answer is quite simple. He and I share the same goals in life. While I have traveled alone for years, I am pleased to have found someone who shares my purpose. As a result, I now have a companion to walk this path with."

As Cai Jie finished speaking, the City Lord opened his mouth, seemingly prepared to respond. However, Yan Xiaobao shook his head with an apologetic smile before the City Lord could say anything. "Even if you ask, I fear I cannot disclose my ultimate life goal to anyone," he said with an incredibly polite tone and a gentle voice. His words caused the City Lord to frown momentarily but, seeing the sincerity in Yan Xiaobao's eyes, he nodded instead of pressing further.

Rather than continuing the conversation, the robust Lord rose again and clapped his hands. From the hall's many doors, a group of servants emerged. Each guest had their own servant, each carrying a bottle of wine. The servants approached the guests quietly and poured a single glass of wine for each of them before retreating to the walls. With one servant per guest, it became apparent that these attendants always served the same individuals whose names they knew. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie both

nodded appreciatively to their respective attendants before observing the food-laden table, unsure whether half of the feast would even be consumed.

After the servants retreated, the City Lord beamed at all the guests and proclaimed, "Please dig in. Enjoy the food we have gathered for you, and eat your fill." Having finished his statement, the City Lord immediately sat down and reached for the first tray of food in front of him. Taking the tray into his hands, he piled the food onto his plate. As his eyes gleamed with excitement, he licked his lips in anticipation. It was clear the food delighted him immensely. Witnessing the City Lord indulge, many guests followed his example, piling their plates and reaching for every dish they could find. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie, both unfamiliar with such a banquet, mimicked the guests, intrigued by the array of food.

Initially, the atmosphere was tense, the guests hesitant and uneasy while watching Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie. Yet, it wasn't long before casual chit-chat began. The apprehensive ambiance steadily melted into the convivial air one would expect from such a grand gathering.

"So, young man, how did you end up in Divine Domain?" the City Lord abruptly asked, his face partially stuffed with a roasted animal leg. It resembled a chicken leg but, upon closer inspection, Yan Xiaobao ruled out chicken as the meat was dark and more akin to turkey in size. Yan Xiaobao deliberated about whether to answer truthfully but instead chose to keep his explanation vague. Having ascended to Great Marshall of the Divine Domain Army, he still wasn't certain what position he held under the sun's gaze. Although other experts conversed amongst themselves, creating an audible hum in the room, the moment Yan Xiaobao spoke, everyone fell silent, eager to hear his words. Clearly, the guests were intensely curious about the two newcomers. The City Lord quickly understood that while Yan Xiaobao confirmed his status as Great Marshall, he had no interest in divulging specifics about his role or actions. Recognizing this, the City Lord offered a knowing smile. Despite Yan Xiaobao's youth, he grasped the valuable nature of knowledge. Yan Xiaobao had been forthright in the past. He confided elements of his origin to his close friend Wan Qiao and openly discussed his world with Xu Biao during their first meeting. Through trial and error, Yan Xiaobao had learned moderation.

"Very well, since you can't delve into specifics, perhaps you could describe the Imperial regions that are inaccessible to most. What is Divine Origin truly like?" he asked with intrigue. Yan Xiaobao reasoned a general depiction of the sprawling forest wasn't problematic.

"Divine Domain is an immense forest," he began. "The forest is divided into numerous territories, governed by Saints known as Forest Kings. These Saints are the most formidable beings within Divine Domain. Anyone may challenge them, and the victor becomes the new Lord."

Although Yan Xiaobao paused to take a sip of wine, the City Lord posed another question: "How many Lords are there within Divine Origin?" While the query seemed innocuous, Yan Xiaobao, having served as Great Marshall of the Beast Army, knew better. Shaking his head, he offered another apologetic smile. "I cannot tell you, my Lord," he replied. "What I will say is that I've never heard of any kingdom or empire boasting more Saints than Divine Domain. As for how many Lords exist, I cannot say, as even I don't know the total number."

Yan Xiaobao anticipated the City Lord might be displeased with such an unsatisfactory answer, but the Lord simply nodded. He seemed content with the knowledge he had acquired. The remainder of the evening involved the City Lord questioning Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie about wars and beasts, met only with vague responses and numerous apologies. Even so, the City Lord appeared quite satisfied with what he had learned, constantly smiling throughout. As expected by Yan Xiaobao, more than half the food remained uneaten on the table. Just as the experts began to rise, the City Lord noticed Yan Xiaobao's frown and chuckled. "Do not worry—the leftovers will be sent to several orphanages across the city. While I love food, I hate waste. Poor children will enjoy this feast." Clearing his throat, the Lord cordially ushered all the guests into another room—a library. The space was filled with comfortable chairs scattered across the floor. At the back stood a table where the City Lord invited the guests to sit while offering light refreshments, snacks, and various drinks. Tea, lemonade, wine, and water were all available.

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Chapter 686: Among the Best

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Many guests eventually began chatting among different groups; some discovered books they could read, while others appeared to be discussing gossip or politics from across the Capital. The City Lord's eyes surveyed the room, laughter slipping from his lips. Yan Xiaobao held a favorable impression of the cheerful and fortunate City Lord, but he was also acutely aware that this towering figure had dimensions far beyond what his current demeanor revealed.

"We host banquets like this every week," the City Lord explained as he settled into his chair, with three others placed next to him. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie joined him. "If you'd like to join us weekly, I would be deeply honored. I understand Gao Yan is one of your friends, so you might not know much about this city or its intrigues. However, there are some matters among the upper echelons that are not discussed openly by the servants. Occasionally, we converse about these topics. Perhaps this would benefit the two of you." He proposed this, and Xu Yue gave it some thought. Before accepting, he did not need to hesitate; he was in need of allies, and these experts appeared to play significant roles within the Capital. Aligning with the upper classes of the Sun Kingdom was an option he could not overlook.

"Thank you for the opportunity," Cai Jie agreed. Why he accepted, Yan Xiaobao was uncertain, but he refrained from questioning it. He had long understood that Cai Jie was an enigma, far too difficult to fully fathom.

As they leaned back in their chairs, listening to the responses, the City Lord's face showed a faint smile. "In that case, I believe the best approach would be to spend an evening introducing you two to some individuals," he explained slowly, as Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie navigated the room, introducing themselves and being introduced to others. These were the clan leaders of some of the most distinguished families. A few were highly prominent, while others were Nouveau Riche, who had managed to purchase aristocratic statuses. Although certain experts seemed skeptical about meeting Yan Xiaobao, he noticed that everyone admired him for achieving so much at such a young age.

The banquet ended late, and Yan Xiaobao wondered if his friends were still waiting for him. When he thought of reuniting with Wang Julong at last, a sharp pang pierced his chest once again. A brilliant smile spread across his face, and his steps quickened with anticipation. He rushed back to the home shared with the Rong twins and all his friends. The journey back from the banquet was filled with complex emotions, but now that Yan Xiaobao returned, excitement and joy were the only feelings that overwhelmed him. His face shone as brightly as the stars, a smile he couldn't suppress lighting up his features, and his blue eyes sparkled with exhilaration. He would shortly see Wang Julong again, alongside Gao Yan. For the first time in years, their entire team would be complete once more. Cai Jie smiled beside him, Yan Xiaobao's excitement permeating everything around him. Although Cai Jie didn't know the people Yan Xiaobao was thinking about, he understood their significance to this young man. He couldn't help but smile too, moved by the happiness expressed by his newly found friend.

They raced through the city, and soon they arrived at their residence. Gazing at the Asian-style mansion, Yan Xiaobao saw the windows still glowing with light, a sign that everyone might still be awake. Seeing this, his smile grew uncontrollable, and he accelerated his pace as quickly as he could. When he reached the gates, the young man managed to dart through the open entrance without alerting the guards to anything other than the breeze sweeping past them. As they approached the entryway, Cai Jie's smile widened, and suddenly his skin shimmered with a silver hue before returning to normal. His feet lifted about ten centimeters off the ground, gliding past the guards unnoticed. Yan Xiaobao followed closely behind him, entering the mansion. Once inside, Cai Jie's skin gleamed once more briefly before dimming again in an instant.

Yan Xiaobao stepped into the house, standing in the foyer. Across from Xu Biao's office was a small sitting room used for waiting, though today it was packed with all of Yan Xiaobao's friends — even Ma Kong was present now. As he peered inside and realized they had all been waiting for him, his heartbeat quickened. Their faces were illuminated as brightly as his own. Rising to his feet, Yan Xiaobao entered

the room, his pulse racing as his eyes locked onto Wang Julong. She had grown older since the last time he saw her. Her hair was longer now, pinned up in an intricate bun. Her attire had shifted from her usual boyish clothing to feminine dress. Even faint traces of makeup could be seen on her face. At the sight of her, Yan Xiaobao felt as though his heart might burst from the intensity of its beating. Without hesitation, he ran toward her. He pulled her into a warm embrace, lifting her off the ground, spinning her while laughing out loud.

Xu Biao, Deng Wu, and even Sha Yun had anticipated this scene, while the Rong twins, Ma Kong, and Gao Yan stood utterly stunned by the sight of Yan Xiaobao's actions. Seeing the blush rise across Wang Julong's cheeks, their astonishment deepened, especially as her arms tightly encircled Yan Xiaobao with tears glistening in her eyes.

"You idiot!" she swore as she hugged him, as if terrified he might vanish again. "Don't ever do something like this again! We should have journeyed together, not you going off on your own. And then you dive headlong into a stupid war! Do you have any idea how worried we've been here??" she cried out. Usually an incredibly reserved girl, often tirelessly working in the infirmary to save lives, the beautiful and icy Wang Julong — often called the Ice Queen — now found herself shedding tears in the arms of the man she genuinely cared for. Seeing the crying girl embracing him, Yan Xiaobao was somewhat stunned. He gently ran one hand through her hair while firmly holding her with the other. Lowering his voice, he murmured apologies until she regained composure and returned to her senses.

Chapter 687: Among the Top Candidates_2

Sure! Here's the translation:

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As she remembered where she was and who she was looking at, her crying persisted for fifteen minutes, and she felt her cheeks flush red as she freed herself from Yan Xiaobao's embrace. She quickly muttered something under her breath: "That's... oh, I forgot about working at the clinic." As she escaped from the crowded room, she left her friends staring in stunned silence.

Yan Xiaobao's face carried a bit of a bashful smile as he walked over to Sha Yun, giving her a massive hug and thanking her for embracing him once more. He also felt guilty for not being able to reciprocate her feelings. "I'm sorry," he whispered quietly to her, his face showing a pained smile. Sha Yun knew about the feelings between Yan Xiaobao and Wang Julong. Even though she tried to brush them aside, she couldn't ignore them, and finally, she accepted her emotions.

After releasing the Snake Woman, Yan Xiaobao went to every person in the room, gave them a hug, and said a few words about how he missed them. Seeing them all in front of him, Yan Xiaobao didn't mind being in a new city; he genuinely felt at home for the first time in a while. Over the past few years, he had lived in many places. Though he had traveled the world and seen things he never imagined, being surrounded by his friends brought him the comfort he truly needed.

"Alright, we should all get some sleep," Rong Hui finally said after Yan Xiaobao had hugged and thanked everyone in the room. "I'll need to head to the academy tomorrow, and everyone else has their own work. What's your plan?" she asked Yan Xiaobao. But the young man simply smiled at her and shook his head, signifying he didn't have any plans. Rong Xing nodded, stood up, and gently ushered everyone toward their rooms. In the end, only Yan Xiaobao, Cai Jie, and herself were left in the room.

"You two can stay here as long as you want." She personally led the two experts to the rooms they had been assigned earlier, continuing, "Deng Wu and Wang Julong have some issues. You need to spend some time talking to them before tomorrow," she sighed, her face carrying a sorrowful expression. Yan Xiaobao was curious about what had happened but chose not to ask. He knew his two friends would rather tell him themselves the next day, and he respected their decision. Nodding to show his understanding, Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie left the room, heading to their assigned quarters, where they both decided to open the windows and sit quietly under the moonlight to cultivate their energy.

The night passed without incident, as everyone was either asleep or cultivating. The moon slowly descended in the night sky as the sun gradually rose, heralding the promises of a new day. The mansion came alive with activity, as servants bustled about preparing breakfast and other necessities for the household's ladies and gentlemen. Yan Xiaobao left his room and immediately found Cai Jie waiting outside. Xu Hui often wondered what plans the golden-haired young man might have after following him to the Sun Kingdom's capital. Both of them knew they were far from having any chance against An Hee, yet, for some reason, he seemed determined to follow Yan Xiaobao. Regardless, the young man with white hair felt a sense of calm with Cai Jie standing behind him.

Leaving the residential quarters, Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie made their way toward the dining area, where they found all their friends.

"Good morning," Yan Xiaobao greeted as he sat down at the long table beside Cai Jie. Food was immediately brought over for him and Cai Jie—a massive platter piled with meats, fruits, bread, and butter. A cup of hot tea was placed on their plates, and soon Deng Wu and Wang Julong had seated themselves across from them. "We need to talk to you after breakfast," Deng Wu said, his eyes no longer carrying the carefree spirit of their youth. Instead, a shadow was evident within him, a shadow that seemed to drown out everything deep inside. Wang Julong's eyes held the same shadow. At Deng Wu's words, Yan Xiaobao nodded after finishing the sentence. A sense of concern stirred in his heart,

and he worried about what might have changed in his two friends. This unease grew as he looked at Wang Julong, who had always been a woman of few words but never had darkness surrounding her like this. The more he observed his friends, the heavier his anxiety became.

He quickly finished his food, and Deng Wu and Wang Julong led him to a smaller room where the three of them sat down to talk. From the moment Yan Xiaobao first arrived at the capital, Cai Jie hadn't followed him in. The golden-haired young man understood that this was a private matter.

Seated in the room, Yan Xiaobao wasted no time studying the expressions of his two friends, trying to understand what had happened.

"What happened while I was away?" he asked with a clear and steady voice. Yet, as neither Deng Wu nor Wang Julong answered, Yan Xiaobao understood that it was difficult for them to speak. Tears began to well up in Wang Julong's eyes as she slowly bit her lip. Deng Wu cleared his throat before speaking hesitantly. "We didn't know at first," he said slowly. "It happened while we were in the underground city. When we returned to the capital, we encountered the twins, who told us what occurred during our absence."

"The war in Liluo City didn't end with our disappearance. Although the Royal Decree allowed us to save our families, it was overridden by the Third Prince. He personally carried out a 'purification' of our families, leaving only Wang Julong and me alive. The rest were slaughtered—children and elders alike couldn't escape with their lives. We barely survived, as we had actively worked to save our families."

The more Deng Wu spoke, the wetter and redder his eyes became. Wang Julong sat quietly as tears streamed down her cheeks. Watching Wang Julong crying and Deng Wu distraught, Yan Xiaobao felt rage rise within his chest. Despite the Royal Decree allowing their families to live, the Third Prince had overturned it. Yan Xiaobao clenched his teeth; fury burned in his eyes as anger surged within him. He yearned for more information about this infamous Third Prince so he could kill him. His killing intent was hard to control, but with heavy breaths, he regained composure. He couldn't imagine how devastating this was for his two friends, and he pulled Deng Wu and Wang Julong into a long, comforting embrace.

Meanwhile, Cai Jie wandered through the mansion searching for Yan Xiaobao. Earlier that day, Yan had excused himself to speak with his friends, but several hours had passed, and Cai Jie had yet to see him again.

"What am I even doing?" he muttered to himself as he peeked into one room after another. "I'm Cai Jie, not someone who blindly follows others. But he reminds me of home." He let out a bitter laugh at his

own words. "I've been alone for too long. How could someone on this plane make me think of home?" Finally, he opened a door to find Hui Yu sitting on a sofa. The moment Cai Jie saw Hui Yu, he froze. Gone was his usual playful or energetic expression; in its place was a chilling, murderous smirk tempered by suppressed fury.

Standing in the dark room, watching the young man with his head in his hand, Cai Jie felt the powerful killing intent radiating from him. The intensity of this aura was unnerving, even for Cai Jie. Yan Xiaobao seemed deeply consumed by his thoughts, unaware of Cai Jie's presence. He simply sat on the sofa, brooding over everything he had learned from Deng Wu and Wang Julong. Remembering the tears in their eyes, imagining the grief they endured, and considering the guilt they could never shed was enough to ignite a searing fury within Yan Xiaobao. Though his rage wasn't for his friends, it now consumed him in solitude.

The mastermind was the Third Prince! That was all Yan Xiaobao knew—the only clear fact in all his thoughts. Yet, now he had no idea who the Third Prince was or any details about him. After observing Yan Xiaobao for a long moment, Cai Jie finally sighed. He liked Yan Xiaobao. He reminded him of home, and though Cai Jie knew this feeling must be an illusion, having been away for so many years, he still cherished it greatly.

Chapter 688: Familiar Feeling

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Walking into the room, he sat next to Yan Xiaobao. The moment the white-haired man sensed movement in his body, he reacted. He raised his head, and like him, red eyes fell on Cai Jie. Staring at him for a while, Yan Xiaobao wanted to do something. For some reason, every time Yan Xiaobao saw Cai Jie, he felt a sense of familiarity, even though he couldn't grasp what this man truly desired or why he chose to follow him.

"While I'm in the Capital, there are things I need to do," Yan Xiaobao sighed, his eyes gradually returning to their clear blue hue. The anger deep within him began to fade. At the core of Yan Xiaobao's being, in his middle dantian, there was a small flame of furious fire. This fire was usually controlled by Yan Xiaobao's will, tightly contained, but after the devastating news, it had proven difficult to suppress. When it erupted, it surged through every corner of his body, causing his blood to burn from the inside out, driving his energy into a frenzy, and greatly amplifying his strength. This anger had been kept in check for many years, but now, after hearing what happened to Wang Julong and Deng Wu's families, and knowing how his friends had suffered, this flame had finally been unleashed again. Though it had now retreated, it wouldn't take much for it to flare up once more and seize his body. Containing it demanded significant physical and mental energy, and Yan Xiaobao understood this to be a pressing concern.

Looking at Cai Jie beside him, he felt his inner turmoil slowly settle once again. Whenever he looked at this young yet strangely familiar man, he felt a sense of safety.

"Tell me what happened. Before we deal with An He, it seems we have a few other matters to address," Cai Jie said with a smile on his face, looking at Yan Xiaobao. The other man couldn't help but feel deeply grateful. Cai Jie undoubtedly possessed many hidden skills and, like Yan Xiaobao, he was undeniably powerful. Knowing that Cai Jie had already managed to handle the Crusaders, Yan Xiaobao knew he could rely on him, so he began to speak slowly. "A few years ago, there were some problems in our old city. As a result, the Third Prince used his power to destroy two families—families that belonged to my two close friends. They didn't just kill the adults or cultivators; they slaughtered every single member of their households, except for those two. They're now weighed down with guilt, and I know of only one way to help them: revenge!"

"I see," Cai Jie said after contemplating for a moment. "It seems we need to deal with this Royal Family heir. Such a hassle," he said, shaking his head. "We know nothing about this Third Prince, but we can gather a lot of information in two ways." He continued, and Yan Xiaobao was glad to hear Cai Jie integrate revenge into his own plans. Considering Cai Jie's words, Yan Xiaobao nodded. "I'd like to get as much information as possible from Gao Yan first, and then we can gather some intel from the banquet. Although they come from different factions, we don't know if anyone might be untrustworthy. If there's anything, I think we should collect information about everyone attending the banquet and figure out whom we can trust and whom we cannot," he said.

Cai Jie nodded, his gaze growing distant. "Come on," Yan Xiaobao said with a wry smile on his face. "Let's go find Gao Yan and see what his little birds have to say about the Third Prince and our friends in the City Lord's Attic."

Cai Jie stood up, and the two young men set off together to find Xu Biao. This elderly man, now training with all his might, had been working under Gao Yan ever since returning to the surface. Having previously worked a desk job, he welcomed any task that could make him forget the losses he had suffered. His days were now consumed by work, filing and compiling information, sorting through sources, and establishing new channels for information gathering.

As they walked through the house, they found Xu Biao in his former office. But unlike the last time, Xu Biao now sat on the ground, his legs crossed, arms resting on his knees, and eyes closed. He was clearly frowning, and Yan Xiaobao could sense that, despite the passage of more than a year, Xu Biao hadn't gained any new strength since their last encounter. He remained on the same level of the King Ranking as before, his power matching Yan Xiaobao's own.

Slowly, Xu Biao opened his eyes, a faint smile appearing on his lips as he saw Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie. The old man was deeply grateful to Yan Xiaobao for the information he had given him and was willing to assist him in any way he could. Seeing Yan Xiaobao seek him out, Xu Biao realized they must need something.

"What can I do for you?" he asked curiously as he stretched, the sounds of his body making it clear he'd been seated for several hours, likely channeling his internal energy.

"We need some help," Yan Xiaobao said with a smile. "We need information about the Third Prince of the Sun Kingdom, as well as details on every single member attending the City Lord's banquet. I need everything you have. Perhaps you can help us?" he asked. Xu Biao, after all, was their primary source of information, so Yan Xiaobao hoped he might already have what they needed. Unfortunately, the old man shook his head apologetically.

"All the information is kept in Gao Yan's office, in another location," he explained. "You'll have to go there to retrieve the intel."

Chapter 689: Familiar Feeling_2

"His office is in a room at a hotel in the city. The hotel is called Black Lion. Go to second floor, room seven, and knock, then tell them you need Gao Yan. They should let you through," Xu Biao explained. Yan Xiaobao nodded to indicate he understood and to express thanks to Xu Biao. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie left home and began making their way across the city. Muchuan City was full of humans, but the two young men walking through town still attracted strange looks.

At first, they were in the district of nobles and wealthy merchants. These streets were mainly traversed by guards in carriages and aristocrats. The roads weren't very busy at first, but as they moved closer to the city center, the streets became increasingly crowded. Commuters packed the streets, forcing carriages to crawl along at a snail's pace. Children darted through the throngs of people, occasionally snatching wallets.

Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie steadily advanced over time and soon arrived at one of the largest marketplaces in the city. Many carriages from outside the city were parked here, and merchants hollered out the prices of their goods one after another. As they ventured further into the marketplace, the crowd filtering among the stalls made it easier to navigate the surrounding streets. Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie walked through the market while keeping an eye out for the Black Lion.

After spending some time wandering the expansive market, Yan Xiaobao finally let out a sigh and grabbed a young thief who happened to rush past them. Taking out a large Gold Coin from the storage stone hanging around his neck, he held it up for the young thief, whose eyes glimmered with both greed and disbelief.

"If you tell us where the Black Lion is, this is yours," Yan Xiaobao said with a smile. Following the boy's guidance through a series of narrow alleyways, they eventually reached a derelict and grimy section of the marketplace and found themselves at the edge of one of the poorest areas in town. Here stood a large hotel with a broken sign hanging askew from one hinge. Most of the paint had peeled off, but one could make out a crude black lion on the sign. Upon seeing this, Yan Xiaobao raised his eyebrows in surprise but quickly handed the Gold Coin to the child. Together with Cai Jie, the two young men entered the shabby hotel, ready to find Gao Yan. Standing before the inn, both Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie stared at it intently. The building looked so decrepit that no one would assume it was safe. Through the broken doors, they could hear loud voices and rowdy gatherings. The smell of beer and food wafted out from the broken windows and doors. Exchanging a glance, Cai Jie finally shrugged, and they opened the door to step into the dilapidated inn.

Both were startled to see that, despite its dilapidated exterior, the interior wasn't in ruins as they had expected. As soon as they entered, the room fell silent, and Yan Xiaobao noticed everyone had turned to look at them. Behind the counter, a man eyed the two newcomers suspiciously. Yan Xiaobao sighed as he walked toward the man.

"I'm here to visit a friend who's staying at this place. His room is on the second floor, room seven," Yan Xiaobao said softly. Because the inn was so quiet, everyone overheard him. Upon hearing these words, the atmosphere suddenly grew hostile, and Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but brace himself. If it came down to fighting the experts in the inn, it wouldn't be hard for him to take them down—especially with Cai Jie by his side.

"Just go up and tell him Yan Xiaobao is here to speak with him," he sighed again. The man behind the counter made a gesture, and a young boy immediately dashed upstairs to relay the message. As Yan Xiaobao glanced around the room, he noticed some of the civilians had no cultivation base, while the cultivators present wielded Gold cultivation power. There were no Emperors or Saints, but representatives from all other levels were present. Everyone kept a close eye on the two unknown men who had arrived at the inn, growing more vigilant by the second.

Yan Xiaobao said nothing and simply waited for the boy to carry the message. After a while, they suddenly heard a door slam against the wall, followed by the sound of footsteps rushing down the stairs. Gao Yan soon appeared on the staircase. His hair was disheveled, his eyes scanning eagerly for whoever

had come to see him. The moment he spotted Yan Xiaobao, a smile broke across his face, and he hurried forward with his arms outstretched, ready to give his friend an embrace.

"You should have told me you were coming!" Gao Yan exclaimed loudly as he pulled the white-haired young man into a hug. The sudden display of affection made everyone in the room stare. Gao Yan was not known for being overly affectionate, so his behavior toward Yan Xiaobao made it immediately clear that Xiaobao was someone very special.

"Hey, how are you? We're here for some information. We're hoping you can help us," Yan Xiaobao said with a cheerful smile. The older man released him from the hug and immediately nodded, his expression turning serious. "I'm doing well. It's good to see you. Let's head upstairs—I'll tell you everything you might need to know," Gao Yan answered as he turned and walked toward the staircase leading to the second floor. This time, no one tried to block or glare at Yan Xiaobao and his companion; instead, their expressions were filled with curiosity and interest. Amazingly, the general perception of the pair had shifted in such a short amount of time.

Once they left the ground floor, the inn underwent a sudden transformation. It was no longer dilapidated or run-down. Though it wasn't lavishly decorated, everything within it was made from solid, high-quality materials. The stairs didn't creak, nor were the walls riddled with mold, as might have been expected when viewing the hotel from outside. Examining the room, it seemed warm and sturdy, entirely unlike its exterior. Yan Xiaobao's curiosity was evident as he glanced around, prompting Gao Yan to smile and explain, "We don't want to mislead people." He added, "This is our headquarters. I work with the downtrodden citizens of the city. The shop needs to look like somewhere our clientele would feel comfortable visiting." Hearing his reasoning, Yan Xiaobao mostly understood but still nodded to express gratitude for the clarification.

Chapter 690: Familiar Feeling_3

On the second floor, the corridor's left side has seven doors, while the right side is lined with windows. Some of the windows were shattered, and others were smeared, perfectly matching the eerie, dilapidated style of a creepy old inn.

"The rooms upstairs are regular ones," Gao Yan said. "But on this floor, while there are seven doors, only one leads to a room. If someone tries to open any of the other six doors, it will trigger an alarm, and escaping the building would be impossible." A sinister expression flickered briefly across his face but disappeared so quickly that Yan Xiaobao almost doubted he had truly seen it.

Yan Xiaobao nodded quietly, understanding that this was the place for collecting, organizing, and archiving all information. It was the heart of Gao Yan's intelligence operations. Downstairs, people brought in information and received coins as a reward. One could say his business was undeniably

thriving. All six tables in the room were occupied, but at the back of the room stood a larger desk. On this desk, Memory Stones and scrolls were scattered haphazardly, placed wherever they could fit. As he approached the desk, Yan Xiaobao instantly realized it belonged to Gao Yan, and he couldn't help but smile silently.

Standing by the desk, Gao Yan grumbled about its chaotic state, as many Memory Stones littered its surface. In one of its drawers, he discovered a storage stone where he had stashed several Memory Stones and scrolls. He shrugged and smiled bitterly at Yan Xiaobao. "Usually, Xu Biao would handle sorting and filtering the new information we acquire, but unfortunately, he's been tied up cultivating since yesterday for some unknown reason, so I've had to take care of it myself," he explained before sitting down. He stretched out his hand, and two servants promptly appeared carrying a few chairs. Once they arranged the chairs before Gao Yan's desk, they swiftly vanished from sight.

"I suppose one of the reasons you're here is to inquire about the Third Prince," Gao Yan sighed, retrieving a Memory Stone from inside his robe. "This contains everything we know about the Third Prince. He rarely appears in public, so most of what we've gathered comes from the palace servants. Much of it originates from dubious sources, so take it with a grain of salt," he said as he handed the stone to Yan Xiaobao, who accepted it gratefully.

"Do you need anything else?" Gao Yan scanned the room as he asked, to which Yan Xiaobao nodded. "I need all the information you can gather on the nobles invited to the City Lord's dinner," Yan Xiaobao stated. Gao Yan nodded in response but remained unmoving. "The City Lord's dinner..." he muttered, only standing up after a few minutes. He walked to the bookshelf on the far end of the room and returned with four different books. Opening them, Yan Xiaobao noticed that the books had no pages; instead, they contained Memory Stones. Gao Yan eventually retrieved twelve stones, plucking several from various books. Remaining seated, he placed one Memory Stone after another against his forehead. Golden-blue flashes followed as Gao Yan absorbed all the information, one stone at a time. After storing it all in his mind, he picked up twelve empty Memory Stones, repeating the same process with these stones. Silver-blue flashes lit up again as the stored information was transferred back into the new stones. After duplicating the contents onto the stones, Gao Yan handed a set to Yan Xiaobao.

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