

Revival 571

Chapter 571 Attitude

Cao Yanhua perceived the scene very acutely, realizing that there seemed to be some sort of conflict between Jang Shangbai and Yang Jian, beyond the mere mocking one does when they simply find someone disagreeable.

Jang Shangbai's face was very unpleasant.

He had spent the previous night driving around the city for this Yang Jian, not only that, but also on tenterhooks for fear that Yang Jian would suddenly appear before him and attack.

To his surprise, this guy had the nerve to go sleep in the Ping'an Hotel instead.

However, by the time he learned of this news, it was already morning.

"Yang Jian, do you know what you were doing last night?" Jang Shangbai paused his steps and stared at him coldly.

"Of course, working overtime and sleeping. Why? Did you have something to look for me for last night?" Yang Jian replied with a calm expression.

Jang Shangbai sneered, "Is there any point in lying to deceive people at this time? Don't think I don't know about your actions last night. While our circle of friends was busy dealing with the Ghost Painting

incident, you dared to attack us viciously. Several of the Ghost Controllers have been killed by you. If you don't give me an explanation today, I see no need to proceed with this meeting, nor will you think about returning to Dachang City."

What?

Cao Yanhua immediately froze, his gaze filled with surprise and doubt as he looked at Yang Jian.

This guy started a conflict with people from the circle of friends?

However, Wang Xiaoming seemed not to have heard, still keeping his head slightly bowed and his eyes closed.

On the other hand, the unremarkable Liu Xiaoyu had her eyes wide open, looking incredulous.

Yang Jian looked at him, "Without any evidence, how can you falsely accuse someone out of thin air?"

"Without evidence?"

Jang Shangbai, with a bit of anger, threw a document on the conference table, "I guessed you might deny it, so here's the evidence."

Cao Yanhua immediately frowned and browsed through it. Indeed, it depicted several friends from the circle gruesomely dead, a Ghost Controller named Zhang Jian missing, another named He Tianxiong out of contact, and besides, surveillance cameras had captured photos of Yang Jian at several crucial locations.

Although there was no concrete proof, these things were already quite telling.

Yang Jian didn't so much as glance at the so-called evidence. He said, "That's just the evidence in your hands. Do you think I would believe it? What if you just mocked up a photo to frame me? Look at this evidence—missing? What a joke, putting the blame on me for going missing, perhaps they couldn't stand it and died from the revival of a vengeful ghost."

"Sudden death of a Ghost Controller is quite normal; what's there to make such a fuss about?"

Jang Shangbai's face darkened as he tried to suppress his rage, "Zhang Jian disappeared in a bar; you also went to a bar that night, and the surveillance caught your picture. Are you going to deny that?"

"I, as a single young man for many years, going to a bar to relax when bored seems quite reasonable, doesn't it? How can you be sure that the bar where this Zhang Jian disappeared is the bar I went to?" Yang Jian replied nonchalantly.

Bang!

Jang Shangbai could no longer restrain his anger upon hearing such sophistry, and he slammed the table violently. The sturdy wooden table immediately cracked.

"Your denial is useless. You know in your heart what you have done. Whether you admit it or not isn't important. What's important is that since you chose to act, you must be prepared to face the consequences of your actions."

Yang Jian's eyes narrowed, "Oh? You want to take action based on an unfounded piece of evidence? You want to do it here? I don't mind, but you better be prepared to be taken down by me. If there's anyone who wants to help, they can come at me too, it's almost time for the meeting, but we should have enough time."

"After all, for me, it's just a matter of a few dozen seconds."

As he finished speaking, the lights in the entire conference room flickered, as if interfered with by something, and a chilly aura filled the air.

"Yang Jian."

Cao Yanhua was both shocked and furious, hastily reprimanding, "Let's all calm down first and tell me what exactly is going on here."

Yet Jang Shangbai was not intimidated, he said, "Isn't everything clear? Yang Jian is making a move against us, first Zhang Jian, then He Tianxiong, and who knows, maybe I will be next. Not to mention that he personally took out Gao Zhiqiang back at the headquarters. One by one, our circle of friends has lost

three ghost masters at his hands. Minister Cao, if you don't take care of this matter, then we may have to resort to the simplest solution."

At this moment, Cao Yanhua was also convinced that indeed, Yang Jian was targeting the people in their circle.

This was indeed in line with his character and style.

"Yang Jian, you're going too far," Cao Yanhua sternly rebuked.

However, hearing this, Jang Shangbai furrowed his brows.

That was it, just a scolding? Nothing more?

He had a vague feeling that although Cao Yanhua appeared furious, in reality, he did not have much of a reaction to Yang Jian's actions.

"Too far? Deputy Minister, shouldn't that be said to Jang Shangbai instead? Conveniently, I have a recording here which you might want to listen to," Yang Jian didn't say much more and just pulled out his phone, tapped play, and let a recording play out.

"Yang Jian is still around, right? Once the Ghost Painting incident actually occurs, then we can proceed to kill Yang Jian without having to worry, and just pin the blame on the Ghost Painting incident. That

way, we won't have to keep wasting our energy on watching him, and we can also finalize things before the captain's plan is implemented..."

It was President Fei's voice.

The recording continued:

"To take care of this troublemaker on the way is not bad," another person seemed to agree with the plan.

"Perhaps we could even use this opportunity to pressure Minister Cao into using the Coffin Nail," spoke the voice of Jang Shangbai.

"..."

As the recording ended, the originally noisy conference room suddenly fell silent.

Jang Shangbai was completely stunned.

That recording was... from the last secret meeting they had.

How could a recording of such a confidential meeting be leaked?

Wait a minute.

Jang Shangbai immediately thought of Li Yao, the only female assistant who could have had access to the upper echelons.

If Li Yao had already turned traitor, it would not be impossible for her to find an opportunity to install a listening device at some point.

"So, you see, they were the ones who made the first move. I was merely exercising preemptive self-defense. You people from the circle sure have some nerve, though, casually talking about killing me. After all, I am, at the end of the day, in charge of a city. It would seem quite inappropriate for me to be taken out by you guys out of the blue, wouldn't it?" Yang Jian said with a calm expression.

Hearing these recordings, Cao Yanhua was now thoroughly enraged.

In his view, the death of a few people in the circle was trivial, merely potential risks. It was no big deal if Yang Jian truly took out a few of them, they should at most focus on the bigger picture with a few words of criticism and reprimand.

After all, the value of these people could not compare to a Ghost-Eye Yang Jian.

But the circle's plan to take out Yang Jian was unacceptable.

If Yang Jian had truly been taken out, it would have been an absolute earthquake for the headquarters.

...

Just think, if ghost controllers who resolved S-class paranormal events in our country were foolishly killed by certain people, what would everyone else think?

By then, the prestige of headquarters would be undermined, numerous conspiracy theories would abound, morale would collapse, and it would be harder to lead the team... A situation that is already deteriorating might even face the possibility of complete collapse.

Of course, adverse situations are definitely advantageous for the Friend Circle, and perhaps at that time the headquarters might even rely on the Friend Circle to stabilize the situation. If so, who will call the shots here in the long run?

By that point, the Friend Circle's plan to eliminate Yang Jian would have been completely successful.

In an instant, Cao Yanhua thought of many things, even breaking out in a cold sweat involuntarily, wishing he could immediately capture the person who planned this for the Friend Circle, because they were incredibly dangerous, possessing far-reaching vision and strategic-level planning, not at all in the same category as these ghost controllers.

"Jang Shangbai, you had better give me an explanation, or today I will sanction all industries owned by your Friend Circle and terminate all cooperation with you."

Jang Shangbai panicked. He had come to attack with an army of accusations, hoping to use headquarters to deal with Yang Jian, or at least bring him some trouble if he couldn't succeed. He didn't expect Yang Jian to be so well-prepared, even obtaining this most incriminating recording evidence. Now, the situation was completely reversed.

If things go wrong, the Friend Circle might really be finished this time.

"It's fake, this recording is fake, saying that a few random recordings spliced together are evidence, you think I'd believe that?" Jang Shangbai said, his head held high.

This recording must never be acknowledged.

But why does his statement sound so familiar?

Yang Jian nodded, "A recording indeed doesn't count as much evidence. If you think it's fake, then let's just say it's fake. But as you said before, evidence or who is right or wrong doesn't really matter to people like us. What matters is who survives in the end."

"If I am killed by you, then I am wrong, and you are right. Conversely, if I survive and you are killed by me, then you are the ones who are wrong."

"What do you think, Jang Shangbai?"

Jang Shangbai's complexion was awful, but he did not speak.

Yang Jian smiled faintly, his smile tinged with a hint of coldness: "So, back to the earlier question, shall we try our hands here? Either you kill me, or I kill you?"

The lights in the conference room flickered, and everything around seemed to gradually change color, layers of a blood-like, viscous red light constantly encroached on everything around.

Without anyone noticing, a strange, pupil-less eye appeared on Yang Jian's forehead. It turned slightly as if a fierce ghost was spying on everyone here. Besides, a hand with a bluish tinge's palm extended out from an inconspicuous corner of the conference table, and as time passed, these types of palms seemed to grow more numerous, some even crawling onto the table.

The ground had turned pitch black, as if enveloped in a giant shadow, with an icy cold sensation continuously invading the body.

All signs indicated that ghosts seemed to be invading this conference room.

And they were about to make a formal appearance.

Behind him, Liu Xiaoyu's breathing became rapid. Her body tensed up, and although she knew Yang Jian wouldn't harm her, facing such terrifying ghosts in person was not something many normal people could calmly handle.

In stark contrast was Wang Xiaoming.

From beginning to end, his head was slightly bowed as if he was sleeping, utterly indifferent to the situation here.

The most unstable person was Cao Yanhua; he was both shocked and afraid, unsure of how to handle the current scene.

The conflict between the two men was not as simple as previously thought.

From the recent events, it appeared that Jang Shangbai of the Friend Circle had long planned to kill Yang Jian, but Yang Jian, knowing the news, acted first.

Theoretically, it didn't seem wrong for Yang Jian to take the initiative, but in reality, acting in the conference room would definitely have a very negative impact, which is utterly unacceptable.

Should he stop Yang Jian?

Stopping him was easy, but what would Yang Jian think after being stopped?

Means are not important, but attitude is very important.

"Wait a moment, let's all calm down. Let's put this on hold for now and discuss it after today's meeting. Don't cause trouble at this time," Cao Yanhua said, attempting to stabilize the situation for the time being.

Jang Shangbai did not take his words to heart but watched Yang Jian with extreme wariness.

If this guy decided to act, it wouldn't be something Cao Yanhua could dissuade with a few words, nor would Jang Shangbai stake his life on it. So if Yang Jian made a move, he would hit back without hesitation.

Both are controllers of three ghosts; there's no reason he would be beaten so badly.

As the atmosphere became increasingly tense and the surroundings grew even more ominous, it seemed that in the blink of an eye, the two men would start fighting within the conference room.

However, at this moment, the conference room door opened once again.

A number of people attending the meeting walked in.

"Did I come to the wrong place? The atmosphere feels a bit off," said one of the newcomers.

In the crowd, Leuk San with his waxen face paused at the door, gazing briefly with his numb, lifeless eyes, instinctively stopping at the entrance.

Because one step further and he would enter Yang Jian's Ghost Domain.

"Are they fighting? Then maybe I should wait a bit longer to go in," said an ordinary-looking man, whose face seemed vaguely familiar but whom no one could quite remember.

"Brother Tui is here so early? Huh, what's going on, are they going to fight?" asked Feng Quan, who appeared surprised. His skin was slightly dark and covered with fissures, emitting a damp, rotting scent like a corpse buried in mud, making those around him feel uncomfortable.

"Ahem."

A light cough sounded. An old man in '80s-style clothing, his face lined with wrinkles, appeared at the back, leaning on a cane.

Upon seeing Old Qin appear, Yang Jian slowly diverted his gaze away from Jang Shangbai.

The lights in the surroundings flickered before returning to normality.

"Even if you don't take action, Yang Jian, today's incident won't just end so easily," Jang Shangbai began to speak.

"I know," Yang Jian said. "There has to be an outcome sooner or later."

Jang Shangbai fell silent and took a seat casually, picking up the documents he had thrown on the table earlier.

He knew he had lost today.

Because the stance of headquarters was clear to see.

The Friend Circle was largely done for.

Chapter 572 Forming a Team

Yang Jian hadn't planned on taking action against Jang Shangbai at headquarters; he was merely testing the organization's stance and demonstrating his own resolve.

The purpose was to see which side the headquarters would take.

If Cao Yanhua chose to stand with Jang Shangbai and isolate himself, then Yang Jian would not hesitate to resign and go home; on the contrary, if Cao Yanhua sided with him, he would feel free to make his move against his circle of friends.

Cao Yanhua would surely understand this point.

No one would tolerate a bunch of restless enemies targeting them from the outside.

Moreover, Cao Yanhua knew Yang Jian's temperament, so there was no room for compromise, tolerance, or reconciliation between them.

The brief impulse was soon subdued.

The attendees for the meeting had also nearly all arrived.

In addition to Cao Yanhua and Wang Xiaoming, who were responsible for the content of this meeting, there were also main participants from the previous haunted painting incident: Li Jun, Chen Yi, Guo Fan, Zong Shan... Su Fan, Leuk San.

Those who had attended the last meeting were also present this time, such as Feng Quan, Cao Yang, and that stranger whose face could never seem to be remembered clearly, Li Leping.

This time, there were also a few newcomers, the survivors from the last training base: Zhang Lei, Huang Ziya, and that college student, Wang Jiang.

Of course, the person Yang Jian was most wary of, the old man from the Republic of China Period who had survived to the present, Old Qin, was also in attendance.

The number of people was even greater than last time.

Amongst the crowd, Yang Jian even found an inconspicuous troublemaker.

Xiong Wenwen?

He had worked with this troublemaking kid at Caesar Hotel last time. His Ghost had a very special ability to foresee the future about ten minutes ahead, which was very important in dealing with supernatural events.

Counting Jang Shangbai and a few others.

Looking around, the meeting room was filled with an astonishing number of more than fifty ghost masters, and most importantly, the majority of them were not city heads.

That is to say, many people hadn't attended this meeting.

"More people than last time, Brother Tui, nothing big is going to happen, right? Have you received any insider news lately?" Feng Quan whispered.

Yang Jian shook his head: "I'm not sure, I've been in Dachang City recently but haven't paid much attention to news from headquarters. How about you? What have you been up to lately? You seem to have been away for a while."

"Of course I went on a business trip, almost didn't make it back. And you?" Feng Quan's complexion wasn't great, as if he had gone through a particularly bad incident.

"Me? You know what happened, don't you? A few days after surviving the Ghost Envoy, the haunted painting incident occurred. Just yesterday, I managed to remove a haunted painting from a school. Although it wasn't a life-threatening situation, it did pose a great risk. That painting, it isn't easy to deal with," Yang Jian spoke softly.

"It's uncertain how many more meetings like this we can have. Maybe we won't see each other next time," Feng Quan sighed.

Everyone's life wasn't easy; one could die at any given moment.

Yang Jian's eyes flickered: "That's why we can't keep dragging on with these continuous supernatural events. We can't afford it. We need to find a breakthrough. Otherwise, if we deal with these supernatural events one by one, we're bound to die sooner or later."

"Oh, Yang Jian, have you found anything recently?" Zhang Lei approached from the other side to ask.

"There's a bit of an uncertain lead that might require taking some risks," Yang Jian shook his head slightly: "It could be an opportunity, but maybe I'm overthinking it."

Feng Quan's grim face squeezed out a stiff smile: "Forget about that for now. By the way, have you been in contact with Tong Qian? She should have arrived here around the same time as us, but I haven't seen her at all, and she didn't attend this meeting. I tried to get her help on my last business trip but couldn't reach her."

Tong Qian?

Yang Jian was reminded of her immediately.

Tong Qian had also come here, but looking around the meeting room, he saw no sign of her. Given the current situation, it was improbable for headquarters not to contact Tong Qian.

And Tong Qian was no longer an ordinary ghost master.

Having tamed two Ghost Faces and survived a simultaneous crisis, she had become one of the top figures.

"I don't know; I haven't seen her either," Yang Jian honestly replied.

"Could she be... dead?" Feng Quan speculated.

Yang Jian immediately responded: "Impossible. Killing Tong Qian is extremely difficult; ordinary people not to mention, an encounter with her would likely result in death. A supernatural incident might be possible, but her survival rate far exceeds that of a regular person controlling two ghosts, so the likelihood of her death is small, not to mention the chances of her ghosts reviving are even smaller."

Nobody knew Tong Qian's uniqueness better than he did since he had personally created the anomaly according to the methods on the human skin parchment.

"It seems we need to take some time to look for her. I don't have many acquaintances left alive; we can't just neglect this," Feng Quan mused.

Yang Jian nodded: "You're right. I'll keep an eye out for this matter."

As they were talking, the meeting was about to begin.

At this moment, Liu Xiaoyu passed on some materials from behind, "Yang Jian, this is the documentation for this meeting, take a look first."

"Hm? You're still here?" Yang Jian said, surprised, as he took the materials.

Liu Xiaoyu gave him a quirky look, "This isn't your house, why can't I be here?"

"What about mine? How come I didn't get one?" Zhang Lei asked from the side.

"I'm Yang Jian's operator, not responsible for you," Liu Xiaoyu rolled her eyes.

"Uh..." Zhang Lei fell silent.

That kind of made sense.

Yang Jian opened the materials, which bore several black characters: Team Leader Yang Jian (candidate)

"It's the team leader plan," Feng Quan said, surprised after a glance.

"How come you don't have one?" Yang Jian asked as he saw that Feng Quan didn't have this document in hand.

Feng Quan's face showed an oddly awkward expression, "Not clear."

He had once been the first person in charge of Dachang City. The second in charge was Zhou Zheng, who died in the Ghost Door Knocker incident. The third in charge (temporary) was Zhao Kaiming, who died in the Hungry Ghost incident, and the fourth was Yang Jian.

By seniority, Feng Quan should be one of the oldest.

Yang Jian looked at the other people around the conference table.

There weren't a few who had received the team leader position.

Li Jun, Jang Shangbai, Leuk San, Li Leping... Cao Yang.

At this time, Cao Yanhua, the deputy minister, started speaking, "I think some of you have already received the materials in hand, this meeting is mainly because of two issues. The first is to fully confirm the candidate list for the team leader plan, the second is to discuss how to handle the Ghost Face incident."

"Through recent discussions, those currently holding the documentation have been confirmed as team leader candidates. If no one has any objections, then this list is unlikely to undergo big changes."

"Wait a second."

At this time, a man named Xu Yiping spoke up with a stern face, "I want to know, with so many people, what is the basis for headquarters to determine the team leader candidates? It's not that I don't trust you, Cao Yanhua, but there ought to be a reason for such a decision. Otherwise, I won't agree to it."

Many people didn't speak up, but their gaze rested on Cao Yanhua.

The so-called team leader plan hadn't been agreed upon by most people; it had been internally designated by headquarters, which made it hard to convince others.

But Cao Yanhua had his own considerations.

If the plan had to be approved by most people, then countless conflicts might arise, stirring up numerous disagreements; therefore, internal assignment was the best method.

Cao Yanhua said, "Xu Yiping, I'm aware of your concerns, and you're definitely not the only one with objections. If everyone needs a reason, then this should suffice."

After speaking, he gave a signal to the staff.

"Turn on the projector."

Soon enough, a list was projected in front of the conference table.

The list included nearly everyone's name and each name was followed by a corresponding score, with Yang Jian surprisingly at the top.

His score far surpassed the second place by a large margin.

"Each of you has a score at headquarters, which is based on the supernatural incidents you've resolved," Cao Yanhua said sternly. "You can see that the scores of each team leader candidate are without exception the highest. Xu Yiping, you are ranked twenty-sixth, far from being considered for the team leader role."

The revelation of the score chart caused many to frown.

Cao Yanhua continued, "Let's take the top scorer Yang Jian as an example."

After saying that, the slide advanced to the next image — a comprehensive dossier on Yang Jian.

"Yang Jian has resolved a C-rank Headless Ghost Shadow incident, an A-rank Human Head Balloon incident, and also an S-rank Hungry Ghost incident, plus he saved lives twice in an S-rank Ghost Envoy incident. And he recently dealt with the Ghost Face incident."

"The scores he received for these incidents are according to internal evaluation standards which are very strict and are also subject to fluctuations based on the actual circumstances. You need not question this."

Yang Jian, seeing his comprehensive information displayed in front of everyone, couldn't help being startled.

However, his score did indeed seem somewhat illogical.

Basing on the scoring standards, Yang Jian didn't qualify as one among the team leader candidates. His score was entirely due to the S-rank Hungry Ghost incident which alone added a hundred points, and it was these hundred points that far exceeded the second place by a wide margin.

Cao Yanhua continued, "If you still have doubts, you might as well roughly estimate your own score against the standards. The variance shouldn't be significant. See if you can surpass any of the team leader candidates. If you can't, then please retract your concerns and acknowledge this list."

"If anyone truly surpasses several team leader candidates, feel free to speak up in front of everyone here, and I will personally provide you with a reasonable explanation."

"You have ten minutes for self-evaluation. If there are no objections after ten minutes, then the team leader plan will be thus decided. Following that, we will start discussing the Ghost Face incident."

Cao Yanhua didn't give a lengthy speech; he simply announced the list of candidates for the team leader plan in a very concise and rapid manner, then moved on to the second agenda of the meeting.

The team leader plan was predetermined—there was no such thing as voting or soliciting anyone's opinion.

It was merely for the sake of fairness and to avoid conflicts that this explanation was specially given.

The conference room quietened considerably at this moment, as many people quietly assessed their own situation, then shook their heads to indicate their own experiences were, indeed, not sufficient to qualify as candidates for team leader.

Others felt indifferent, thinking what use was there in being a team leader when one's own survival was uncertain, let alone seeking a promotion or raise? Joining the headquarters was merely a way to stay alive, not a real commitment to lay down one's life.

"I understand now why I wasn't on the candidate list." Feng Quan glanced at his own ranking, which was pitifully low.

He had participated in the Ghost Coffin event, but if evaluated based on the criteria from above, he would only receive a consolation score.

Afterward, he was trapped in the Ghost Coffin for over two months. During that time, the person in charge of Dachang City had changed, and naturally, there were no achievements to his name.

He earned a few points during the Human Head Balloon event and Yang Jian's operation, plus these two business trips.

But even so, his total score still fell short of resolving a single A-level supernatural event, let alone the fact that Yang Jian had one more S-level supernatural event under his belt than the others.

Especially since that event was completed alone; with such an assessment, no one could compare.

"No wonder Cao Yanhua wanted me to voluntarily withdraw from the team leader candidacy," Yang Jian's eyes narrowed slightly, "With my score so high, if I'm not chosen as the team leader, then no one else will stand a chance either, and this team leader plan will become a joke. Cao Yanhua is using me as an example to convince everyone."

"But it doesn't matter... whether it's becoming a team leader or joining headquarters, it's just to better survive and increase one's chances of staying alive."

"Beyond that, nothing else has meaning."

Yang Jian's curiosity grew as he looked at Jang Shangbai.

Why was this guy's score so high when he was always lurking around locally?

"His score must have been boosted by his circle of friends, with the credit for many events attributed to him, all to prop up a team leader," Yang Jian speculated after some thought.

"Li Jun has issues too; he's always been Wang Xiaoming's bodyguard and logically shouldn't have the score to be a team leader... Pre-determined, maybe?"

"Cao Yang? That guy is also a team leader?"

After giving it some thought, he began to understand what this role of team leader was all about.

Behind every team leader stood a faction.

Take Jang Shangbai, for example—behind him were the capitalists from his circle of wealthy friends.

Li Jun had an obvious backer as well.

Cao Yang? Speaking of which, Cao Yanhua also carried the surname Cao; perhaps he was a relative or a second-generation heir.

Leuk San... not well known to him, and maybe insignificant in this city, but elsewhere he might represent a colossal force.

The only exception was himself, a bona fide nobody—if not for his rise during the Hungry Ghost incident, he'd likely still be a nobody at the conference table, merely listening and observing.

The waters here were deep indeed.

Yang Jian sighed inwardly; indeed, as long as a person breathes, there's a play of power and interests at hand. No wonder Cao Yanhua advised him to give up on the team leader candidacy.

At the time, he hadn't delved into it too deeply. Now that he thought about it, this role was indeed unsuitable for him, and Cao Yanhua hadn't wronged him.

It was as if he was occupying a spot without making use of it—superfluous; after all, he belonged to the kind that if fed well himself, the whole family wouldn't starve. Minding Dachang City alone was enough for him.

"This team leader position should not be taken."

Yang Jian looked over the information that detailed the responsibilities, obligations, and of course, the powers that came with becoming a team leader.

But he wasn't interested because he hadn't joined the headquarters for these things.

"Maybe I should make another deal with Cao Yanhua at some point; this spot should be worth quite a bit." He pondered whether it might be wise to trade it for something of actual benefit.

Just then, Zhang Lei leaned in and said, "Yang Jian, I heard that becoming a team leader means you can recruit team members. How about I join your team? It will surely be less likely for us to die if we form a team and encounter special events."

"I want to form a team, too," Huang Ziya pushed in, afraid to be a step too late.

Feng Quan added, "Count me in as well."

Just when Yang Jian was considering giving up his team leader spot, he had to rethink upon hearing their suggestions.

Dealing with supernatural events as a team was certainly advantageous—a larger team meant more help, and facing ghosts like Ghost Envoys that play with numbers wouldn't be as passive, not to mention the complementary abilities of team members.

Of course, there were downsides to forming a team.

If a member encountered a problem, you'd have to face more than just one ghost, increasing the level of danger.

Therefore, the decision to form a team had to be extremely cautious; a bad teammate was definitely not an option.

"Don't rush this, let me think about it." Yang Jian didn't refuse, but he didn't agree either.

Zhang Lei and Huang Ziya seemed very eager; they had seen Yang Jian's abilities. Even the certain-death Ghost Envoy incident ended up with him surviving it against all odds. If not now, when would they ever get the chance to grab on to his coattails?

"You must consider me first, you know what I'm capable of," Zhang Lei said earnestly.

Huang Ziya added, "Though I might be slightly lacking, I'm a woman, don't you think a team could use another woman? And I have excellent execution skills, I'm definitely not the type to mess things up, you know that."

"I think those two are pretty average. If you're thinking about team members, you could consider Tong Qian," Feng Quan suggested.

"Yang Jian, I heard everything you said."

At that moment, the brat, Xiong Wenwen walked over and said loudly, "If you let me join your team, I'll introduce you to my mom, she's really beautiful, lots of people want to date her, but I've scared them all away."

Many people were taken aback by Xiong Wenwen's words.

To cling to someone's coattails, you'd even throw your mom into the fray?

"The way you put it, I suddenly feel like I'd be taking care of a child," Yang Jian remarked.

"Hey, you think you can take advantage of me?" Xiong Wenwen immediately retorted: "Believe it or not, one day I might pee on your head while you're sleeping?"

"I don't believe it, what if you wake your mom up? Then you'd definitely get a beating," Yang Jian replied.

"How would my mom ever be woken up by that?" Xiong Wenwen didn't catch on at first.

Zhang Lei and Huang Ziya couldn't help but laugh at this, as adults, they got the meaning right away - Yang Jian took advantage of Xiong Wenwen again.

Xiong Wenwen didn't quite understand what was happening, but judging from the laughter of the people around, it surely wasn't anything good.

"You believe I'd spit on you?" he said, fuming with anger.

Yang Jian nodded: "That, I do believe."

Seeing this scene, Jang Shangbai's expression darkened even more. What he cared about wasn't Yang Jian becoming the team leader, but the fact that so many people were willing to team up with Yang Jian from the start. Once such a team was formed, they wouldn't just be dealing with Yang Jian alone, but a whole group of people.

People in the social circle didn't take Yang Jian seriously precisely because he was on his own - they didn't need to worry about numerous intricacies when dealing with him.

"The two rookies are one thing, but if Feng Quan and Xiong Wenwen join his team, then Yang Jian would really be difficult to handle." Jang Shangbai had also tried to woo Xiong Wenwen to their circle.

This kid's abilities were just too unique to ignore.

However, there was a hiccup along the way, they targeted the wrong person to persuade, leading Xiong Wenwen to believe they were after his attractive single mother, and thus the plan fell through.

"Time's up, so the team leader plan is settled. Xu Yiping, do you have any objections?" At this moment, Cao Yanhua spoke up again.

Xu Yiping was silent for a moment before saying, "I have no objections to the team leader plan."

"What about you, Su Fan?"

Su Fan said calmly, "I'm not interested, you guys can decide as you wish."

"Zong Shan, what do you think?"

Zong Shan shrugged, "It's only natural I can't be the team leader if my score isn't as high as the others. I have no objections regarding the others, though Li Jun seems a bit lacking to me. I don't remember him making any special contributions."

"This time, Li Jun's leadership indirectly solved the Ghost Envoy incident, with zero casualties, plus he successfully brought back quite a few special items. Is that reason enough?" Cao Yanhua said.

They had specifically arranged for Li Jun to lead the mission this time so he would be eligible to become a team leader; otherwise, it would be difficult for him to convince everyone.

"Then I have no further questions."

Cao Yanhua nodded, "Very well, since no one has any more objections, let's consider this matter settled. From now on, it's not to be discussed again. Now onto the main topic for today."

At that moment, the slide changed.

"Ghost Painting Incident."

The words appeared on the screen.

For Cao Yanhua, the team leader plan was just an announcement to everyone, not something to be specifically discussed at the meeting. Taking up over ten minutes of time was already quite long; the real mission was this Ghost Painting incident that had emerged over the past few days.

Classified as an S-level paranormal event by international standards, Cao Yanhua dared not treat it with any carelessness or oversight; it had to be resolved quickly.

As long as the issue remained unresolved, he would be uneasy, and many plans couldn't proceed as previously scheduled.

Seeing the four characters on the screen, the whispers around the conference table subsided significantly.

The atmosphere gradually became more solemn.

Those four characters seemed to possess some weird power that made it impossible for anyone to relax.

Chapter 573 Background in the Painting

The focus of the meeting was not the captain's plan; it was the ghost drawing incident.

This was an S-Class supernatural event that stemmed from the Ghost Envoy incident and had previously caused an outbreak abroad, annihilating a top-tier team of spirit manipulators and resulting in an unimaginable number of deaths. To this day, a certain area abroad still suffers from Chilling Syndrome.

Cao Yanhua's expression was grave as he gestured to a staff member.

Immediately, the slide changed to an information graph detailing all intelligence on the ghost drawing incident.

"The ghost drawing incident was primarily triggered by the Ghost Envoy's mission. Proposed by Professor Wang, the plan was to lure the ghost drawing to the outskirts of the city to suppress the Ghost Domain of the Ghost Envoy, thereby completely resolving the Ghost Envoy incident," Cao Yanhua pointed at the picture and continued, "The plan was very successful."

"The Ghost Domain of the Ghost Envoy was completely covered by the ghost drawing, and the Ghost Envoy disappeared..."

"However, some mistakes occurred while wrapping up the plan. Chen Yi, Zong Shan, and Guo Fan, who implemented the plan to lure the ghosts, did not manage to lead all five ghosts that emerged from the ghost drawing to the designated location. Two of the ghosts disappeared during a switch of the Ghost Candle."

Having said that, he pointed to another photo.

The photograph showed a dimly lit road with five eerie figures standing in the middle, seemingly walking towards the camera.

The silhouettes of these five people were familiar, resembling Li Jun, Su Fan, Leuk San, Ah Hong, and Xu Yiping.

No, it wasn't just resemblance; these were their likenesses.

"Does this mean that the painting can change the appearance of the ghosts into any one of us?" Cao Yang raised an eyebrow, pinpointing the heart of the matter.

"It seems beyond doubt," someone agreed.

"If it's just a change of appearance, it should be easy to spot, right? After all, ghosts are different from humans, and that eerie feeling can't be hidden no matter what," Jang Shangbai frowned and said.

"Perhaps it's not as simple as we see it. Only after real contact can we understand why the ghosts change their appearances, why five ghosts can emerge, when there should only be one ghost drawing and one Source Ghost," someone else began to express doubt.

Cao Yanhua continued, "The two ghosts that disappeared were in the guise of Su Fan and Leuk San. Whether this is pivotal information, I don't know, but you must keep it in mind. Not long after these two ghosts vanished, the ghost drawing incident appeared in the downtown area."

"Here are a few photos of the ghost drawings we've collected. Take a look."

As he spoke, the slide flickered, and four photos of ghost drawings appeared on the screen.

Each ghost drawing was largely similar: antique carved picture frames, peeling red paint, indistinct oil paintings depicting a woman with unclear facial features, wearing red, European-style clothes. Her pale hands and the surrounding style of the painting were discordant.

"The backgrounds are different," Yang Jian observed as he looked at the four ghost drawings, his expression shifting slightly.

While the ghost drawings all looked similar, with the image of a woman on them, the background behind the woman, which made up the painting, was completely different in each.

The background of one oil painting depicted a group of high-rise buildings shrouded in darkness, hazy windows, with vaguely discernible silhouettes of people—by the shape and façade, it seemed like an upscale residential area in a metropolis.

The second oil painting had a similarly gloomy tone, but the contents had changed to a park shrouded by trees, with a few figures standing on the park's pathway.

The third oil painting was equally dark and mysterious, not depicting a residential area or a park, but a school with a dormitory building occupying most of the space and other architectural outlines barely visible in the darkness.

The fourth showed a city road teeming with traffic, numerous vehicles stuck in congestion, and many tall buildings nearby.

"As you've probably noticed, the backgrounds of these four oil paintings are all different. According to my comparison, the buildings in the background should be Shangfeng Residential Area, Forest Park, Dajing University, and... Sky Bridge Avenue."

Cao Yanhua said, "And all these places are where incidents occurred, where killings happened because of the ghost drawings."

"Different backgrounds in the paintings, the same ghosts appearing over and over. All of this is like a puzzle, especially the last point: how do the ghost drawings appear out of thin air? This is the most pressing question we need to clarify."

"It's not that easy to clarify. If it were, the incident wouldn't have been so devastating abroad. I'm sure this question has been discussed countless times by others," Jang Shangbai said, shaking his head slightly.

"I agree with Jang Shangbai. We're unlikely to unravel the ghost drawing situation here based on scraps of information," Chen Yi nodded and continued, "Yang Jian, I heard that you dealt with a ghost drawing incident last night. And the ghost drawing you encountered was different from the ones we've dealt with; it formed a Ghost Domain and covered two floors."

"Have you had contact with the ghost in the drawing? Why don't you share your thoughts?"

At this point, everyone turned their attention to Yang Jian.

After all, they were likely to face the Ghost Drawing incident next, and they didn't want to miss any clues. Now was the best time to have Yang Jian speak out.

After this period, Yang Jian probably wouldn't be as willing to share information.

Cao Yanhua's expression changed, and he also looked towards Yang Jian, "Yang Jian, you have experience in dealing with this. Can you share something?"

Yet Yang Jian was very calm, "There's not much to say, it's much the same as other supernatural incidents. The Ghost Domain affects the surroundings, and ghosts wander within the Ghost Domain... The only thing worth noting is that in the Ghost Domain, the Ghost Drawing and the ghosts are separate. To capture them, you must first find the hidden Ghost Drawings; otherwise, the ghosts cannot be resolved. Because even if you deal with the ghosts first, new ghosts will continue to emerge from within the Ghost Drawings."

"So, the drawing is the source."

"Resurrection?" Feng Quan exclaimed, surprised.

"No, not resurrection, it's different from that. A Ghost Drawing represents one ghost, the Drawing won't change, but it will keep allowing the ghost inside to appear, similar to... resurrection," Yang Jian thought for a moment before saying.

Resurrection is much more frightening. Resurrection means the ghost itself restarts, implying that you have to deal with it all over again, but with Ghost Drawings, it's not necessary; you can completely avoid the ghost inside, find the Ghost Drawing, and then figure out how to capture it. The difficulty is relatively lower.

"Yang Jian, how did you capture it then?" Li Jun asked.

Yang Jian didn't hide anything, "First deal with the ghost wandering in the Ghost Domain. While the ghost has not yet emerged from the Ghost Drawing, take action to capture the Ghost Drawing. That's my method."

"So, are you saying that to capture a Ghost Drawing, at least two people need to cooperate? One person to deal with the ghost, and another person to find the Ghost Drawing and stand guard there waiting for the opportunity?" Li Leping slowly said.

"In theory, that's correct, but that's only a normal Ghost Drawing after all. What about the Source?"

Yang Jian said, "The Source certainly isn't as simple as you imagine. But now that we're on the subject, who are you? I don't recognize you at all."

"My name is Li Leping. Just remember my name. As for the rest, you won't remember," said Li Leping.

Li Leping?

Turning his head, the only thing Yang Jian indeed remembered was this name, and it seemed as though he had some interaction with this person in the last meeting. However, the memory of this person... simply did not exist.

A person who cannot be remembered?

Indeed very peculiar.

Yang Jian looked at him again, but in the blink of an eye, he had forgotten once more, and it wasn't the first time.

He estimated that the next time he saw him, he would still not recognize him unless he took the initiative to say his name.

"So is the main purpose of this meeting for everyone to discuss how to resolve the Ghost Drawing incident?" someone asked.

Cao Yanhua said, "Yes, three days—I give everyone three days. No matter what method you use, even if you have to turn the whole city upside down, you must find the Ghost Drawings and confirm the Source. If someone can do that, headquarters can fulfill one not too excessive request for them."

"If someone can resolve the Ghost Drawing incident directly, then I can make an exception and promote them to be the candidate for this operation's team leader."

Three days?

Yang Jian's expression changed slightly upon hearing this deadline.

Previously, he had told Cao Yanhua that he would stay in the city for only five more days, and as two days had already passed, in another three days he would return to Dachang City, and then everything here would be of no concern to him.

But now, at this critical moment, this issue emerged.

It seemed his next three days wouldn't be too easy.

However, the deadline set by Cao Yanhua was not calculated specifically for Yang Jian, but was made after thorough thinking and evaluation.

Because if the Ghost Drawing incident can't be resolved in a short period, it will definitely bring a huge impact.

Moreover, many people cannot stay here for a long period and will have to return to their own cities eventually, so three days is about the limit for most people. Any longer would be inconvenient for the other cities as well.

"Solve the Ghost Drawing incident and directly become the team leader?" Many people's eyes flickered, seemingly tempted.

They had already learned about the authority of the team leader during the earlier discussion.

Indeed, it was tempting.

To govern a large region, dozens of cities big and small, to be able to form your own ghost-managing teams, while also having unconditional support from headquarters for some key materials, and ensuring the priority of the team leader's survival...

Anyone with even a slight ambition would find it hard not to be moved.

But thinking about the difficulty and complexity of this incident, he shook his head secretly.

To resolve the issue of ghost drawings, it was necessary to gather so many top-notch ghost-managers, and though there were cautious thoughts, the eerie and dangerous levels of that thing were also self-evident.

A moment's carelessness could likely result in an immediate wipeout of the team.

"If nobody has any questions, then next, Professor Wang will be responsible for explaining the relevant information about the incident involving ghost drawings," Cao Yanhua said.

It was at this moment that Wang Xiaoming, who had a defeated look and a slightly haggard appearance, finally raised his head slightly, as if he had been sleeping the entire time before.

"The files on the ghost drawing incident were always in the hands of foreigners, and their information should be preserved, so we can only organize what we've gotten and speculate... Below are some of my personal opinions and the situations I've analyzed, which you may listen to..."

Wang Xiaoming stood up and pointed to the four photos of ghost drawings on the screen: "Firstly, I deduce that if we want to truly find the source of the ghost drawings, it's highly likely that we need to enter into any one of the ghost drawings again."

His words were concise, directly stating the key point.

"What? Enter the ghost drawing to find its source?" someone immediately exclaimed in shock.

The level of danger was too high.

Searching for something in the face of the ghost, if one couldn't withstand it, they would definitely get killed inside the ghost drawing.

"It's just my personal conjecture," Wang Xiaoming continued. "You can look at the backgrounds of the four ghost drawings: Shangfeng Residential Area, Forest Park, Dajing University, Sky Bridge Avenue. Did you notice that all these locations are non-repetitive? Although the fifth and sixth ghost drawings have not appeared, if they do, it should be able to prove my conjecture is not wrong."

Wang Xiaoming continued, "The background of the ghost drawings should have a certain connectiveness, meaning, if you can enter one ghost drawing, it's highly probable you could reach another ghost drawing."

"The feasibility of entering ghost drawings has been proven, because the bodies of several victims were found inside the ghost drawings. Look closely at this corner," he pointed again to an inconspicuous, dimly lit corner of the first ghost drawing.

The portion of the image in that area was enlarged. A figure dressed in modern women's clothing lay there; although the body was shrouded in the darkness of the background, a vague silhouette was still discernible.

"Professor Wang, this is just speculation," Jang Shangbai said gravely. "We can't just act on a guess and risk entering the ghost drawings to look for the source; many people might die."

"Without any clues, we can only rely on existing conditions to speculate. This is the only method," said Wang Xiaoming earnestly. "Besides this, there is no better way, and I believe my deduction is correct."

"Assuming the ghost drawings are indeed interconnected, what if we enter and can't find the source? Wouldn't we just die inside?" someone asked.

"That's a very silly question," Wang Xiaoming said. "The ghost drawings are both the entrance and exit. I have the photographs of four ghost drawings, meaning there are four exits. The precondition is that you don't get lost inside, as that is the world of ghost drawings. What might happen or what you might encounter, I'm not clear."

"Even entering the ghost drawings could be a trap. I'm merely bringing up this possibility. If we want confirmation, someone will have to take a risk."

Take a risk?

What a joke, this was a matter of risking their lives.

"Moreover, you'd better act quickly. The background of the ghost drawings is like a puzzle, seemingly putting together pieces of the region. If all the regions are connected, then perhaps all exits will no longer exist. The ghost drawings could very likely resuscitate completely, and at that time, the Ghost Domain of the ghost drawings would probably cover an entire city, with the range... continuing to expand."

"As for the reason the ghost drawings have appeared, I'm still not sure, because there's no information available; it feels as if they appeared out of thin air. So, you'll need to search for clues yourself."

"There's another possibility..."

As Yang Jian listened to Wang Xiaoming's explanation, his heart gradually sank.

His hypothesis was bold and made sense, something he hadn't imagined before.

The ghost drawings were interconnected?

To find the source by entering the ghost drawings?

"If Wang Xiaoming's deduction is true, then within the Ghost Domain that covered two floors when I was dealing with the ghost painting, there should have been an entrance that led deeper into the ghost painting, but I didn't find one... or could it be that his conjecture about the ghost painting is wrong?"

While Yang Jian was reflecting, he also heard another possibility that Wang Xiaoming had guessed.

The ghost painting is just a mere ghost, hidden somewhere in the city, and by finding it, the incident could be resolved.

But Wang Xiaoming was very dissatisfied with this guess.

It was too simple.

If it were that simple, it should have been resolved abroad long ago, so he leaned towards the first guess, but Wang Xiaoming did not deny this possibility either.

What if it really is that simple?

Besides, he had a third guess, a fourth guess... it's just that the likelihood was even smaller, he didn't speak of them to avoid confusing everyone's thoughts.

To further confirm these, they needed clues and intelligence brought by the actions of everyone involved.

"What a troublesome matter," Yang Jian sighed with increasing frustration.

Two ghosts that emerged from the ghost painting. They were suspected to be able to change their appearance, and their last images were those of Su Fan and Leuk San.

The background of the ghost painting was suspected to be connected together, like a puzzle, eroding the city, and once the puzzle was completed, there was a risk that the ghost painting could fully resurrect.

The ghosts that continuously emerged from the ghost painting, similar to a restart, necessitating the cooperation of two people to deal with them.

The Ghost Envoy that disappeared inside the ghost painting.

The team from abroad, top ghost handlers, that was wiped out—where are the ghosts that had been with those people?

Complex.

Incredibly complex.

All the clues were utterly disordered, conjectures upon conjectures, guesses upon guesses, with no connections to be made.

It was much more complex than the Hungry Ghost incident in Dachang City back then.

At that time, they just needed to find the Hungry Ghost's pattern of killing and locate its source.

But what about this ghost painting?

The various paintings that appeared out of thin air, the many inexplicable oddities, with no known pattern of killing or appearance, and no clue about its source, everything was just a mystery.

"The ghost painting can also suppress my Ghost Eye, I'm at a natural disadvantage facing it, it would be best not to get involved in this incident, otherwise, if real danger struck, I could very well fall here," Yang Jian concluded.

He felt there was no need to get involved, at most he would just hang around for a few days and then slip away.

With so many people here, there was no need for him to show off.

And moreover...

Yang Jian glanced at Old Qin, who had been sitting motionless in a chair next to him since entering the meeting room.

With this elder here, the situation probably wouldn't get too bad.

Having made up his mind, Yang Jian decided to still focus his immediate attention on Jang Shangbai and the friends behind him.

The conflict with him today was a harbinger and a signal.

If he wasn't mistaken, what followed would be a wave of retaliation from the friend circle.

As long as he could withstand it, even if the friend circle didn't completely collapse, they would be weakened in the future, and at the very least, they wouldn't dare talk about getting rid of him when facing him again.

Chapter 574 Demanding

The duration of this meeting was longer than the last one, with most of the discussion centered on how to deal with the issue of the Ghost Paintings.

Wang Xiaoming presented several key strategies based on the clues and information available, but many were skeptical and didn't fully believe in his proposals, since everything was conjecture and had not been confirmed.

Cao Yanhua seemed to have made a decision as well, demanding that the ghost masters within the city find the source within three days; if they could solve it, that would be best, but even if they couldn't, under no circumstances could they allow the Ghost Painting incident to erupt.

The meeting came to an end around eleven in the morning.

And so, the action on the Ghost Paintings began silently.

Some withdrew, while others wanted to join in the fray for the position of team leader. Of course, there were not a few like Yang Jian who planned to lie low like a salted fish.

Although everyone had their own ideas, action was still underway.

Cao Yanhua didn't expect everyone to go to great lengths; it would suffice if a portion of people took it seriously.

"That's all for today's meeting. You can all begin taking action. Also, Jang Shangbai and Yang Jian, stay behind. I have something to say to you two."

At the end, Yang Jian and Jang Shangbai were singled out.

Both were well aware that this was because of the prior incident and Cao Yanhua intended to mediate.

"Brother Tui, there won't be any trouble, right?" Feng Quan hesitated before preparing to leave, "I won't go too far for now, just staying around headquarters for a bit. If you guys really start fighting, just shout and I'll rush in immediately."

"Don't worry, a fight won't break out," Yang Jian said. "But we can talk about forming a team later; I'll also take this opportunity to ask about Tong Qian's matter. Just wait for me at the Ping'an Hotel."

"Okay." Feng Quan nodded and then left.

Zhang Lei, Huang Ziya, and Wang Jiang said their goodbyes and departed as well.

Xiong Wenwen was also escorted out of the meeting room by designated personnel.

The once somewhat crowded meeting room was now left with only Yang Jian, Cao Yanhua, Jang Shangbai, and Old Qin, who sat motionless in a chair on the side. As for Wang Xiaoming, he seemed uninterested in this power struggle; he left faster than anyone, apparently preparing for the Ghost Painting incident.

"Vice Minister, if you're looking to break up the fight, I think we might as well forget it. You might not manage to persuade us," Yang Jian began, breaking the stalemate as soon as others had left.

Cao Yanhua's eyes shifted slightly, "What happened in the social circle was indeed over the line, but continuing to fight is not a solution for either of you. Right now, we need to prioritize the big picture."

"If it were truly about the big picture, the social circle wouldn't have struck first," Yang Jian said with a cold smile. "They ignored the big picture, so why should I care about it? If you think I'm easy to bully, Vice Minister, then you might as well fire me. I can do without being the team leader; I'd rather retire in Dachang City and wait for death."

"Given my current state, I'm not sure I can live into my sixties or seventies, but hopping around for a decade or so shouldn't be a problem. That would be better than being confusedly killed by someone."

Cao Yanhua's lips twitched.

He dared to fire Yang Jian, and higher-ups would dare to suspend him. If news of Yang Jian leaving headquarters were to spread, foreign forces would likely scramble to woo him, especially at this critical time when any issue with a team leader candidate could trigger a series of chain reactions.

That's why he didn't want to see Jang Shangbai and Yang Jian locked in a death match.

"It hasn't yet reached a point where things can't be settled," Cao Yanhua said coldly. "Let's do this, you give a condition, and I can discuss it with the social circle. Jang Shangbai, you also step back. This whole situation was a wrongdoing on your part, and you should understand how severe the consequences could be."

Jang Shangbai then said, "Many issues are not for me to decide alone. I have my opinions, but if Yang Jian chooses reconciliation, I will do my best to assist."

He knew that if headquarters intervened, things could get very complicated. It wasn't about simply killing Yang Jian and being done with it but about weighing future gains and losses.

Therefore, reconciliation was possible.

After some reflection just now, he had already calmed down considerably.

"Yang Jian, what's your answer?" Cao Yanhua asked. "The social circle has made a mistake, and a lesson should suffice. But I can guarantee this one time; if there is a next time, I won't need you to speak up, I will personally order the dismantling of the entire social circle."

To him, taking the opportunity to suppress the social circle was sufficient. Truly destroying it was out of the question.

So as long as the objectives of headquarters were met, he did not want the situation to worsen.

"Children need to be taught a lesson when they make mistakes, adults making mistakes calls for more than just a lesson," Yang Jian stated. "I can sit here alive at this meeting today not because I am a team leader candidate but because I am cautious enough. If one's life can be bargained with, then perhaps Jang Shangbai, you should set your conditions and see what they might buy your life with."

Jang Shangbai's expression changed slightly; there was a hint of embarrassment in his eyes.

This Yang Jian simply did not take him seriously enough. Although he had reservations about Yang Jian, he couldn't allow such arrogance and insolence.

Cao Yanhua said, "Yang Jian, don't say these biting words. I know you're reasonable, or else a fight would have broken out earlier. Make your condition. Continuing to fight benefits no one, and I am also aware that you refuse to back down out of concern for future retaliation from the social circle. But as long as you agree to reconcile, I can vouch for you in the name of headquarters. Your feud ends here; there will be no acts of retaliation."

Yang Jian's gaze fluxed slightly.

He didn't trust anyone, nor any promises. He only believed in the cruel reality.

Because reality does not lie.

But he also understood that it would be difficult to destroy the social circle alone, especially with Cao Yanhua intent on preserving it.

Headquarters and the circle probably had many unclear relationships as well.

It was like the business dealings between two companies.

"I don't like this," said Yang Jian, fixing his gaze on Cao Yanhua. "But since you asked me to propose a condition, I do have one. If the social circle can meet it, I will immediately drop the previous issues."

Change his mind?

Jang Shangbai was somewhat surprised; he had not expected this bull-headed youth to actually be persuaded.

Or was it that Yang Jian had been pretending all along? That he wasn't as reckless as he seemed?

"You say," said Cao Yanhua.

"The social circle has something that I want," Yang Jian said, pulling out a photo from his pocket.

The photo showed a pair of scissors entangled with black hair, old and rusty.

Ghost Scissors!

The two characters on the photo were exceedingly clear.

Cao Yanhua furrowed his brows, seemingly seeing this object for the first time.

But Jang Shangbai's expression changed abruptly, somewhat astonished, "Where did you get this photo from?"

"Of course, I have my channels. I've made my offer, so can your side agree?" Yang Jian said in a deep voice.

Jang Shangbai's gaze flickered, "I need half a day to give you a reply."

Feeling Cao Yanhua's pressing stare, he didn't outright say it was impossible, but could only muster up the courage to give it a try.

"Remember, you only have half a day. If you can't do it, by tomorrow morning I will shut down all of your circle of friends' industries," Cao Yanhua added pressure on behalf of Yang Jian at this time.

"Let's leave it at that for now. I'll give you a reply as soon as possible," Jang Shangbai said pensively, picked up the photo, and left.

Seeing how hurriedly he left, Yang Jian couldn't help but let out a cold laugh, "He won't agree because that thing isn't in Jang Shangbai's hands. I thought he would drag it out for a day, but since he said half a day, I will give him half a day for Cao Yanhua's sake. I want to hear definite news before six this evening. Now that I've made my offer and set the time, that's me taking a step back."

"If he refuses or tries to bluff, then Cao Yanhua, don't bother with it anymore. This is my final bottom line; don't put me in a tough position."

Cao Yanhua spoke, "I will put pressure on them. After all, it's just a supernatural object; it really doesn't make sense to refuse. Let's leave your issues with them there for now. You head back first, and I'll notify you if there's any news."

"No, there's still one more matter. I have something else to discuss with the deputy minister," Yang Jian said, pushing a document forward.

"This captaincy, as you wish, I can relinquish it, but..."

Cao Yanhua was somewhat surprised. Last time he had persuaded Yang Jian but to no avail; he still wasn't planning on giving up the captaincy; how come he suddenly saw the light this time?

"State your conditions. As long as they're not excessive, I can satisfy them," Cao Yanhua said without the slightest hesitation, prepared for this discussion.

It would indeed be a good thing for headquarters if Yang Jian were willing to give up a position.

After all, there were too many uncertainties after Yang Jian became captain. Many people were really uneasy, having seen everything he had done, especially resolving the issue of Wang Xiaoqiang, Wang Xiaoming's brother, which was quite a thorn. But Yang Jian's merits were there, undeniable; not making him captain would hardly be convincing, so convincing him through a trade was the only option.

"This will require some careful discussion," Yang Jian said with a smile creeping on his lips.

The smile was cold but also sly.

Cao Yanhua steadied himself, feeling that this Yang Jian was getting more and more difficult to deal with. He didn't seem at all like a high school student; that apparent recklessness and impulsiveness were merely a good cover.

But no matter what, Yang Jian was highly credible, never fooling anyone, especially strong when dealing with supernatural incidents.

If that weren't the case, Cao Yanhua wouldn't be so tolerant of Yang Jian.

It's not the flaws that people fear, but the lack of strengths.

"Retain my rights to form a team and appoint the next person in charge of Dachang City, plus withdrawal from the Ghost Painting case, a supernatural item, and three Ghost Candles," Yang Jian listed his demands.

Cao Yanhua immediately replied, "The right to form a team must remain with the captain; otherwise, who could control you later on? However, I can give you no more than six spots to form a small team. As for the next person in charge, you can recommend someone, and the headquarters will consider it. You cannot withdraw from the Ghost Painting case; besides, you can choose either the supernatural item or the three Ghost Candles."

This almost cut Yang Jian's requests in half.

"If it's going to be like this, then I should also have the right to refuse future tasks from headquarters. It wouldn't be fair to have me do a captain's job without being one," Yang Jian countered.

"That's acceptable, provided you're responsible for the area near Dachang City. You can refuse tasks, but not under special circumstances," Cao Yanhua felt this was feasible as well.

Yang Jian asked, "What counts as a special circumstance?"

Cao Yanhua explained, "A-level and S-level supernatural incidents are special circumstances."

"All right, but I won't be the first to get involved," Yang Jian said casually.

"Now you're being unreasonable," said Cao Yanhua.

Yang Jian argued, "If I get involved first in every incident, then how long do you think I'll survive?"

"Fine, I agree," Cao Yanhua conceded.

Yang Jian shrugged, "Since that's settled then let's write up a contract. It's no good without proof; I'll be at too great a loss if later on you don't honor it."

Cao Yanhua didn't speak but just stared at him.

Yang Jian remained unfazed, his expression calm.

He knew that his ability to make these demands was not due to the captaincy, but because of his conflict with the circle of friends. Cao Yanhua did not want him to continue his strife with the circle.

The best outcome would be for Yang Jian to give up the captaincy in exchange for some compensation, with the circle providing reparations and certain assurances.

This way, both parties could be satisfied.

Nonetheless, Yang Jian couldn't help but feel like he was taking advantage of the situation.

But as circumstances demanded, Cao Yanhua had no choice but to grudgingly agree.

He believed that once this contract was signed, Yang Jian would truly become uncontrollable.

"Let's deal with the present situation first. Yang Jian's problems are not that serious after all; at least he's somewhat reasonable," Cao Yanhua thought to himself.

Compared with the current state of affairs, Yang Jian's personal issues were hardly worth mentioning.

Chapter 575 Decision

By noon, Yang Jian had already left the headquarters and returned to Ping'an Hotel.

In the hotel lobby, Zhang Lei, Huang Ziya, Wang Jiang, and even Feng Quan were already waiting there, and Xiong Wenwen was squatting in an inconspicuous corner playing a mobile game, seemingly determined to hang onto their coattails.

"Brother Tui, you're back so soon. How did it go?" Feng Quan asked directly.

Yang Jian had just walked into the lobby. "How could it go? Just as I thought, Cao Yanhua stepped in to mediate. If the circle of friends really agreed to my terms, then this matter can only come to an end. I gave them half a day out of respect for Cao Yanhua's face. Anyway, let's not talk about this now. I have something else to tell you. I turned down the position of captain."

"What?"

Not only Feng Quan, but Zhang Lei and Huang Ziya were also shocked. Xiong Wenwen even looked at Yang Jian with an idiotic gaze.

"Why would you turn it down? It's not easy to become the captain, and now you're saying you don't want it just like that? I was thinking we could all form a team together. We've discussed it and even almost settled on a team name," Feng Quan said in surprise.

Yang Jian said, "Being captain isn't all that great. I have other things to do and don't want to get involved in such troubling matters. However, forming a team is still possible. I've retained that right. The headquarters has given me six slots, which means I can recruit up to six people from the headquarters to form a team."

"There's no such limit for the captain. You can recruit as many people as you want."

"Only six? Cao Yanhua is really stingy," Xiong Wenwen hurried over with a look of disdain.

"Having six is not bad. At least we can barely form a small team, which is good for mutual support in the future," Huang Ziya's eyes rested on Yang Jian.

In her view, the number of people was not the key point. The important thing was whether Yang Jian was in the team or not. As long as Yang Jian was there, even with fewer people, they could survive. At least no one she had met could do better than Yang Jian.

"Six is definitely not enough. I want to recruit some followers in the future. Now, with only these few people, wouldn't I become the smallest? What do I do if you guys bully me?" Xiong Wenwen protested.

Yang Jian said, "I haven't even agreed to let you join yet, and for such an important decision, shouldn't you ask your parents first? If your parents don't agree, it's pointless to talk about it now."

"My mom will definitely agree. You don't need to worry about that," Xiong Wenwen said.

Yang Jian continued, "It's still better to ask, to avoid misunderstandings later, accusations that I'm tricking a child, and to save you from a beating."

"Fine, I'll call them right now." Xiong Wenwen huffed, took out her phone, hesitated for a moment, and then with a determined bite of her lip, she dialed the number.

While Xiong Wenwen was on the phone asking her parents, Yang Jian added, "Besides, let's put the team formation on hold for now. Let's discuss it slowly after I've dealt with what I have at hand. Anyway, we all stay at Ping'an Hotel, so it will be easy to schedule a time to get together and have a meeting."

"No problem, you handle your things first. There's no rush with the team formation," Zhang Lei nodded and said.

"So, are we supposed to start calling you 'captain' from now on?" Huang Ziya said with a smile, seemingly having already accepted Yang Jian as the captain.

Yang Jian commented, "The title of captain doesn't matter; what's most important is figuring out how to survive."

"Have you asked about Tong Qian? If we find her, inviting her to join our team would be a great choice," Feng Quan said.

"I asked, and Cao Yanhua gave me an address." After finishing his statement, Yang Jian handed over a business card with an address written on it. "He said Tong Qian is there. It looks like she hasn't gone missing or had any accident. Like I said, how could a living person just disappear? It seems like she's just hiding because of some issue. If you're free lately, take some time to visit her and tell her about today's event, to see if she agrees."

"Okay, I'll go there this afternoon," Feng Quan took the business card.

At that moment, Xiong Wenwen put down her phone, looking uneasy. "Yang Jian, I talked to my mom about the team, and she said she wants to meet you and talk."

"Meet me?"

Yang Jian was taken aback for a moment, and then remarked, "That's pretty normal. After all, no parent would willingly hand over their child to someone unclear and dubious."

He glanced at the time.

"When do you want to meet?" he asked.

Xiong Wenwen was a very special child, and indeed important if they were really going to form a team, so Yang Jian felt it necessary to seek his parents' consent.

"Let's do it today then, I need to go home for dinner anyway," he said smugly, "Don't say I don't take care of you. If you escort me home, I can treat you to a meal."

"The more you talk about it, the less I feel like going," Yang Jian replied.

"Hurry up, I don't want to be late and get scolded again," Xiong Wenwen said as he dragged Yang Jian toward the door.

Yang Jian thought for a moment, accompanying Xiong Wenwen wouldn't delay anything; he had no tasks for the afternoon and didn't want to get involved in the Ghost Drawing incident. It would be good to kill some time and avoid the possibility of being dragged into the situation at the last minute.

While Yang Jian was accompanying Xiong Wenwen to meet his parents.

At the top floor of Ping'an Tower.

Jang Shangbai had returned and immediately called an urgent meeting.

However, due to the absence of a few individuals and some on leave, the meeting was sparsely attended.

"The situation is roughly like this," Jang Shangbai revealed after going over the events of the previous night and this morning in the headquarters' meeting room, "Cao Yanhua wants to mediate. Yang Jian's condition is Ghost Scissors. Although I don't know where he got his information from, his intel is indeed correct. Otherwise, he couldn't possibly have produced this photo in front of me."

After finishing his explanation, he placed a photo on the table and added another comment.

"Cao Yanhua has agreed to the demand. He's now pressuring us. If we don't accept Yang Jian's terms, then all industries in our circle of friends will be blacklisted."

The atmosphere around the meeting table was tense.

They were in a bad mood upon hearing about He Tianxiong's disappearance, and the troubles of Zhang Jian, President Fei, and Li Yao. Some had even got a hint and requested leave in advance to avoid showing up.

They feared Yang Jian's methods and dared not show themselves for the time being.

Sitting in the seat of honor was a twenty-something-year-old man in a suit, his complexion pale, emanating an air of sickness. He appeared calm, seemingly unsurprised by Jang Shangbai's words.

His name was Fang Shiming, the president of Ping'an Tower in the circle of friends.

"Yang Jian is indeed a problem," Fang Shiming said as he slightly lifted his eyes, "But is Cao Yanhua expecting us to just compromise? What is he, just an ordinary person who can be crushed at any time, thinking he can still play those outdated tactics."

"Pressure? He's not qualified. Without our funding, he couldn't even have built headquarters. Now he wants to use Yang Jian to pressure us?"

"So what are you suggesting?" Jang Shangbai asked, raising an eyebrow, uneasy about Fang Shiming's aggressive stance.

Fang Shiming let out a cold laugh, "Yang Jian wants your reply by six o'clock, so be it, six o'clock it is. The moment it strikes six, I'll deal with him personally. No need for any cover-up, no need for pretense. Let Cao Yanhua understand that if Ghost Eye Yang Jian is to be killed, we are the ones to do it. If he objects, he can send someone to try."

"I never took Yang Jian too seriously, planning to deal with him slowly, there's no rush in these few days. Since the guy was so lively last night, let's make him disappear ahead of schedule. If he's dead, the issue resolves itself. I don't believe Cao Yanhua would really do anything for a dead man. Doesn't he love to compromise? Then he can compromise once more."

"Although Yang Jian is troublesome, I do admire his style of doing what he wants without worrying too much. You should know, we are Ghost Masters."

Jang Shangbai felt a chill in his heart. There would be no resolution; only one could exist between the circle of friends and Yang Jian.

"Stay here until six o'clock. I don't want Yang Jian to receive any news and make preparations in advance. To deal with this kind of person, we can't reveal any flaws. It was your carelessness that led to this mess in the first place," Fang Shiming said, his gaze sweeping coldly over the few people at the meeting table.

No one dared to speak.