

The Interstellar Queen of Scavengers

Chapter 26: Chapter 26: Professional Treasure Hunter

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It all started three days ago.

Rewinding the clock back three days, Ji You had just hung 9 necklaces on the shelf, thinking they wouldn't sell right away, so she didn't pay much attention to it.

Afterwards, Ji You went offline and joined Ryan, Sister Liya, and others to collect Iron Pear Wood in the West District wilderness.

About half an hour after Ji You went offline, a handsome man with black hair and eyes unwittingly entered Ji You's shop with his camera. He was actually in the wrong shop and noticed that the shop only had a few little accessories that girls would like. There seemed to be a very low chance of bargain hunting, so he was ready to leave. As he was about to depart, the viewers on his large screen began to make a fuss, clamoring, "Tao Xiaobao, don't go! Check out what they're selling here!"

"Yeah! Yeah!"

"Don't go! Don't go!"

"What if there's a treasure?"

The 'Tao Xiaobao' everyone was talking about doesn't actually go by that name, his full nickname on the Star Network is 'Ah Da Takes You Treasure Hunting'. Judging by his actions and demeanor, you can tell he's a professional Star Network live streamer. His usual content involves wandering around the endless shops of the Star Sea with a camera, aiming to find items whose prices are far below their true value due to the owners not recognizing their worth.

To put it simply, he's a professional treasure hunter.

His favorite catchphrase, that you'd often hear him say, is "When it comes to bargain hunting, I'm a pro!" Because of his novelty content, he has attracted a large fan following. His name is Ah Da, but the fans like to tease him by calling him Ah Xiao, which eventually evolved into 'Tao Xiaobao'.

He quickly adapted to the name Tao Xiaobao.

Tao Xiaobao indeed has the ability to attract so many fans. For starters, he is knowledgeable in a wide array of subjects from ancient to modern times, especially in the interstellar era where all sorts of weird and diverse items exist, he can speak eloquently about them all.

Another equally well-known trait of his is his sharp tongue. The man is particularly venomous and cheeky. When he comes across a shop selling goods under false pretenses, bullying customers, or overpriced items that are disadvantageous to consumers, he immediately transforms into a crusader for justice. He goes off on them like a machine gun, 'tat-tat-tat' with his words! When he verbally attacks, it's not random, but aimed precisely at the crux, often leaving the deceitful merchants insulted and guilty, unable to talk back - much to the delight of the audience!

Of course, not only does Ah Da love to lambast people, but his treasure appraisal and bargain-hunting abilities are elite as well. His eye for detail is incredibly sharp, often finding treasures that others have overlooked and then snatching them up at a very favorable price!

Fans who camp out in his live streaming room every day and follow him shop-hopping for treasures feel an irresistible rush when Ah Da finds a gem, as if they themselves have stumbled upon a great find.

It's utterly exhilarating!

It's incredibly satisfying!

So, this 'Ah Da Takes You Treasure Hunting' has a huge fan base on the Star Network!

Daily, tens of millions of people flock to his live stream room.

Ah Da's entry into Ji You's shop was an accident. He was actually responding to a private invitation from a fan to appraise a Soul Device in the shop next to Ji You's to see if it was worth buying.

'Soul Devices' refer to any item in the Universe that can enhance one's spiritual power value.

These items might be a type of Material from the natural world, such as plants, trees, animal fur, shells, bones, etc.

Or perhaps an ore, sand, rare spring water from a particular planet...

Or maybe it's a tool related to spiritual power personally made by a Master with significant spiritual power...

In short— they encompass everything.

The main reason they're called 'Soul Devices' is because wearing or carrying these items can effectively boost a person's spiritual power. For example, for someone with a Spiritual Level of E or F who wants to advance to D, C, B or even A or S, besides regularly eating natural food, another way is by wearing a 'Soul Device'.

However—

The reason Soul Devices are so named is because they are so rare.

There's a saying in the interstellar realm that goes, 'natural food is plentiful, but Soul Devices are scarce.'

Any Soul Device is generally very expensive! As such, Soul Devices aren't something the average person can afford.

But Soul Devices also vary in quality and effectiveness. Low-Level Soul Devices can only nourish a person's spiritual power for a short period, such as certain Jade based Soul Devices which can warm and nurture someone's spiritual power, but only for a transient period. After about one to two years, the Jade will dull and lose its luster, eventually becoming an ordinary stone with no further use...

Such Soul Devices are priced a bit lower.

Then there are High-Level Soul Devices, which are quite magical. Not only can they nurture one's spiritual power, but their effects can last for many years, a decade, or even several decades to a hundred years.

These High-Level Soul Devices are priceless! Whenever one surfaces, it causes a huge sensation.

The fan who commissioned Ah Da for the appraisal is also not short on cash. They spent a lot of money asking Ah Da to help appraise a Low-Level Soul Device that the shopkeeper claimed could last at least three years with a selling price of 1 million credit points.

The fan, not feeling reassured, wanted Ah Da to take a look first. If even Ah Da couldn't find any issues, only then would they consider making the purchase.

It's worth mentioning that Ah Da doesn't just hunt for bargains or appraise treasures for himself; he also does it for his fans. However, he's very popular, and his appearance fee is quite steep, so ordinary people can't afford to hire him.

Today, Ah Da was not in a good mood and wanted to quickly complete the commission and sign off.

However—

"Ah Da! Don't go!"

"Ah Da! There's a treasure!"

"Ah Da! If you leave now, you'll miss out on a billion!"

"Tao Xiaobao—"

"Tao Xiaobao, if you leave today, you'll surely regret it for the rest of your life!"

Unable to resist the viewers' demands, Ah Da stopped in his tracks. Instead of checking the shelf, he responded to the fans with a grin, saying, "How could I lose a billion just by leaving this shabby little store?"

Hearing this, the fans chimed in teasingly:

"Why couldn't it be?"

"Don't underestimate the shabby little store."

"Right! Even a shabby little store has its pride!"

"Hey~" Ah Da, being a cheeky person at heart, joined in with the banter: "This little shabby store, with just these few things! It's absolutely impossible to find any amazing treasures!"

"If there really is a treasure, I, Ah Da, will live stream eating shit today!"

Upon hearing that, the fans reacted—

Ah Da really meant it this time.

What an animal!

Who would utter such words!

""

Chapter 27: Chapter 27: Master of Carving

Suddenly—

These fans, idle and restless, joined in the excitement, saying, "Not just eat shit, but also cross-dressing!"

"Right!"

"Right!"

"Right!"

"Cross-dressing!"

"Cross-dressing!"

"Cross-dressing!"

Ah Da looked at everyone's comments, thinking to himself that these jokers didn't realize what this store had. He had already quickly glanced around; there was nothing special, just some worthless grass seed fruit polished into jewelry.

Grass seed fruit, how could it be worth any money?

Eat shit?

Cross-dressing?

All a piece of cake!

These oaths were nothing to Ah Da, just words that rolled off his tongue effortlessly. He wasn't worried at all! He cheerfully said: "Cross-dressing it is! But if there really is no treasure, what will you guys do?"

"We'll eat shit too!"

"We'll cross-dress too!"

"We'll all do a striptease!"

Listening to this, Ah Da smiled and said, "Alright! It's a bet! Let's do this!"

The decision was made!

Ah Da immediately turned around and headed back to Ji You's little shop. As he re-entered, the camera once again focused on the less than ten square meters of the shop, and the viewers in front of their screens stared intently at the simple shelves.

They saw——

A few necklaces were sparsely placed on the shelves.

necklace.

necklaces.

necklaces.

...

Pitiful, only 9 necklaces!

The entire shop had just a mere 9 items for sale. Was the shopkeeper so poor that there was nothing to sell, or was it like a child playing house?

Then——

Ah Da laughed and said, "Let me show you a close-up of this necklace. After following me and seeing so many treasures, you must have some experience, right? Let's discuss, what material is this necklace made of?"

Upon hearing this, the viewers looked closely.

Many had already recognized the material—it was just ordinary grass seed fruit, the kind that grows in the wild, indifferent to the growing environment, a seed of a common weed——

This thing——

It's practically as common as dirt, nobody wants it!

The viewers instantly fell silent.

Ah Da didn't wait for anyone to answer, already chuckling as he said: "Grass seed fruit!"

"That's right!"

"The material is indeed grass seed fruit!"

"Everyone knows what grass seed fruit is, right? I believe the viewers in front of the screen don't need me to elaborate." As Ah Da spoke, he appeared very serious, but inside, he was already bursting with joy. Especially seeing the viewers suddenly speechless, and thinking about the sight of a crowd of people doing a striptease... oh, such a beautiful scene, too enchanting to watch——

Ah Da was even more delighted. Keeping a serious face, he said: "Apart from its nice shape, grass seed fruit itself has no value. Now, isn't everyone thinking that this seller is scamming people? You must be wanting to say this kind of blackhearted merchant can just go to hell! Go as far away as possible, right?"

"Indeed!"

Ah Da first affirmed with a phrase, saying, "Daring to sell grass seed fruit! It's a complete embarrassment! Even blackhearted cotton sellers wouldn't dare to do this!"

"Hahaha..."

"23333..."

"Lololol..."

On the screen, a flurry of danmaku comments expressed the viewers' feelings.

However——

Ah Da suddenly put on a serious face, and his tone shifted, "But you know what? I want to tell everyone something today. You see someone selling grass seed fruit, but please don't rush to curse at them! Actually——this store is not selling grass seed fruit, but craftsmanship!"

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

On the screen, a series of question marks.

Ah Da didn't play coy, as he aimed the camera at one of the beads, under the 360-degree, no-dead-angle high-definition camera's illumination, every detail within the bead was minutely displayed——

"Look at this——"

"Ssss——"

As Ah Da adjusted the camera, everyone involuntarily gasped!

What kind of skill is this!

This level!

Simply amazing!

Even those who were illiterate and had no appreciation abilities were forced to widen their eyes in disbelief at the sight of the engraving on the bead, scarcely believing that this scene was carved into such a tiny grass seed fruit!

You could see—

On the grass seed fruit, roughly 1.5 centimeters in diameter, the tender yellow stamens, qinglu leaves, and brightly blooming flowers—vivid as if they were right in front of you, and the audience could even feel the vigorous vitality of the flowers. It seemed to contain a seed that appeared to be on the verge of breaking through the soil and sprouting soon!

This—

Simply amazing!

"This level of carving! It's definitely master level!" said Ah Da with a face full of admiration. He had merely intended to casually showcase it to the audience, but as he scrutinized it more closely with the camera's aid, he discovered that the carving on the grass seed fruit was even more incredible than he initially thought!

This level! Could it be the work of an art master who was just messing around in their free time?

But—

Who could it be?

Ah Da stroked his chin, pondering hard to determine which master this work might belong to.

This brushwork—

This force—

These lines—

This coloring technique...

After looking it over, Ah Da honestly couldn't tell!

By now, plenty of the audience began to ask: "Ah Da! Tell us, which master made this?"

"Tao Xiaobao, it's time for your test!"

"Ah Da! Quick, tell us!"

After much contemplation, a frustrated Ah Da shook his head and offered an apologetic smile to the audience on screen, saying, "Sorry, everyone, although I boast about having read widely, I really can't discern which master carved this!"

If even Ah Da can't tell, everyone listening couldn't help feeling disappointed.

Seeing that the atmosphere had gone quiet for a moment, Ah Da immediately whipped it back up, saying: "Do you all want to know how much I think this Grass Seed Fruit Pendant is worth?"

"Say it!"

"Say it!"

"Say it!"

"Less nonsense!"

Seeing this, Ah Da gave a slight smile, stroked his chin, and drew out his voice, slowly saying: "I think... the carving and artistic skills are unparalleled, and their level is comparable to that of contemporary Master Song Qingfeng!"

Ssss—

Ah Da, that's quite a statement!

Who is Song Qingfeng, you might ask?

He's a famous Mechanical Master in the interstellar community! Currently, in the entire interstellar space, only a few individuals are capable of manufacturing Five-star Mechas, and Song Qingfeng is one of them. Fifty years ago, Song Qingfeng crafted a Five-star Mecha called 'Caesar' especially for Five-star Admiral Luo Qi. Luo Qi piloted 'Caesar' to repeatedly defeat the enemy and Star Beast Group, earning great military honors.

The name of Song Qingfeng, along with the name of Admiral Luo and 'Caesar', resounded throughout the whole Alliance.

Such a figure—

How could ordinary people have the chance to meet him so easily?

Now, Ah Da actually dared to claim, saying that the carving skills of this unassuming grass seed fruit have reached the same level as Master Song Qingfeng!

This!

How is that possible!

"Ah Da, don't just blurt out nonsense!"

"Yeah, don't make wild guesses!"

"No matter how skilled this person is, could they be better than Master Song?"

"Ah Da, did you misjudge this time?"

Chapter 28: Chapter 28: Worth 1,000!

"You must have made a mistake!" everyone concluded unanimously.

"I really didn't make a mistake!" On this point, Ah Da was extremely confident; he felt his ability to recognize and appraise treasures had never failed him before. The level of carving and painting on the Grass Seed Fruit Pendant in front of him were in no way inferior to Master Song Qingfeng, perhaps even slightly better.

Here, a word must be said about Master Song Qingfeng. Song Qingfeng was a Mechanical Manufacturing Master, but his artistic skills were also extremely high. He was most famous for two things: first, the creation of the Five-star Mecha Caesar, and second, his attitude of pursuing perfection. When he made Caesar, he designed four forms for it: human, avian, beast, and aquatic. In order to achieve seamless switching between these forms, he secluded himself on a remote planet to observe the habits of various creatures for over a year.

After Caesar was completed, Song Qingfeng felt that its appearance was not as good as he had imagined, so he spent a few more years perfecting its appearance, never slacking off on even the unimportant carvings on the mecha's body, but meticulously designing each line and stitch to perfection. That's why Caesar caused such a sensation across the interstellar community when it was revealed.

Such a Master Song Qingfeng is worthy of respect.

But—

Because Master Song Qingfeng was so worthy of respect, how could these small Grass Seed Fruit Pendants be claimed to be on par with him?

Trying to mooch off his popularity like this?

No way~

Everyone absolutely refused to believe it.

At this moment, the viewers on screen began to polarize, some believing Ah Da's judgment, certain that he couldn't be wrong. The other group consisted of diehard fans of Master Song Qingfeng, who simply didn't want to believe what Ah Da said.

Could just anyone claim to be on the same level as Master Song? Did their Master Song have no stature at all?

As a result, in no time at all, people on both sides held firm to their views, sparking an argument.

Seeing the quarrel escalate, Ah Da wasn't the least bit daunted but said with a grin, "Why are you all so anxious? Let me analyze this one by one. First, take the carving of this form. Look at the color and fullness of this flower..."

"Second..."

"Third..."

"Based on the points above, this is why I made my judgment!" Originally, Ah Da had only intended to deal with the matter perfunctorily, but as the live stream deepened, and seeing that the level of this little broken shop was quite out of the ordinary, he started to take it seriously. Afterwards, he picked up each pendant to scrutinize carefully, and found the level of carving and painting to be truly astonishing!

Many viewers were gradually persuaded by Ah Da, but a stubborn few refused to take things at face value, directly challenging him: "Since you praise them to the skies, then tell us, how much is this pendant actually worth?"

"Yes! Curious about its value?"

"Hurry up and tell us!"

Ah Da stroked his chin, his eyes revealing a look of regret: "The level of carving and painting is extraordinary, however, it's truly a pity that they decided to choose grass seed, something of no value."

"What a pity~"

"What a pity~"

"What a pity indeed~"

Using 'pity' thrice to express his regret, Ah Da then said, "Personally, I think this Grass Seed Fruit Pendant is worth 1,000 credit points! The price is set solely based on the level of carving on it."

"Tch—"

"After all that, it's only worth 1,000?"

"Disappointing~"

The audience was genuinely disappointed. Every time Ah Da scouted shops for treasures, had he ever found anything worth less than ten thousand? You could say that this Grass Seed Fruit was the least valuable 'treasure' he had come across in his live streaming career. The viewers' expectations had been spoiled, and under their disappointment, their interest in the pendants greatly diminished.

"Ah Da, after all is said and done, are you willing to buy?"

"Yeah, since it's an art piece, can you only take it home for display and collection? Is it still worth buying?"

Hearing this, Ah Da smiled slightly, not only answering the question but also throwing out another, saying, "The shop has put up a total of nine pendants for sale. Out of appreciation for their carving skills, I am willing to offer a thousand each for two of the pendants. Are any of you present interested in joining me in this purchase?"

No sooner had he spoken than silence fell once again.

Seconds later, comments flooded in like snowflakes, fluttering down.

"Lifting something labeled at 20 to 1,000?"

"Is he an idiot?"

"Besides, 1,000 for a grass seed, am I possessed by a stupid pig?"

"Not buying!"

"Definitely not buying!"

For a moment, the barrage of comments was overwhelmingly unanimous in their unwillingness to spend money. In the interstellar era, practicality was key; no matter how ornate or eye-catching a pendant was crafted, it couldn't change the fact that it was just a grass seed.

What was there to buy?

Seeing this, Ah Da didn't insist, smiling and saying, "Different strokes for different folks. Choosing items is also about personal preference. To me, the price of this Grass Seed

Fruit completely surpasses its original label of 20; it's worth 1,000 credit points. I'm willing to buy, and I want to buy it for its craftsmanship."

"Those present who are willing to join me, please feel free. Those who are not interested, please also feel free. Let's all just have fun with this one. Hahaha..."

Moved by their affection for Ah Da, a few people made a move and purchased some pendants, 1, 2, 3... A few seconds later, the remaining seven necklaces were quickly sold out.

Ah Da laughed and said, "Alright, I need to get to business now, let's hurry to another shop and take a look at that Soul Device!"

People's eyes lit up: "Right, we almost forgot about the Soul Device."

The Soul Device was indeed more important than the Grass Seed Fruit.

Before long, the crowd in the shop followed Ah Da out, leaving it empty.

Because of Ah Da's unexpected live broadcast, Ji You's small shop was suddenly flooded with huge traffic, and her pendants, which she had struggled to sell, were sold out completely.

It was indeed a cause for celebration.

But Ji You had no idea. She had been busy gathering Iron Pear Wood in the wilds for several days and had no time to come online.

At this moment—just as Ah Da left, not considering the unexpected encounter a big deal, and neither did the audience who followed him. After all, the shop owner was only selling grass seeds.

As soon as Ah Da left, they completely forgot about the incident. The Soul Device sold by the shop next to Ji You, although a real Soul Device, was only a short-term one and, according to Ah Da's judgment, it was already damaged and could only be used for about half a year at most. Its price tag of 1.5 million was not justified, at most it was worth only a million. Hearing this, the fan was disappointed, but Soul Devices were hard to come by, so after bartering with the shop owner for a while, the fan finally got the Soul Device for a million.

Chapter 29: Chapter 29: Master Offline

In the interstellar era, logistics travel at the speed of light. As long as a planet is equipped and loaded with a Light-speed Belt, it can facilitate the rapid transfer of goods between planets. Before the items in Ji You's shop are listed on the shelf, she would specifically contact the robots from interstellar express to handle packaging and store

the items in the transfer station of Light Speed Express company. The transfer station is linked to the Star Network, and as soon as someone places an order, the station immediately dispatches the goods. The whole process is fully automated without any manual intervention, and there's no risk of loss.

On the other side, Ah Da and several of his fans, after purchasing the grass seed fruit necklace, didn't really think much of it until the Light Speed Express delivery network delivered the parcels into their hands, which suddenly reminded them of their purchase.

Ah Da's parcel was received by a home-use robot. After receiving it, the robot reminded him of the new parcel. He was busy at the moment and thought it was just a small grass seed fruit pendant, so he didn't pay much attention to it.

So, delaying like this, it wasn't until the evening that Ah Da finally took the time to open the parcel.

Upon opening it, what caught his eyes was a crystal-clear bead, obviously intricately crafted, polished to be very round and glossy. What surprised Ah Da repeatedly were the beautifully carved patterns on it.

Tender green branches and leaves, buds ready to bloom, if one didn't know it was fake, at first glance, one might really mistake it for a bead that actually contained a blooming fresh flower.

Such craftsmanship truly is astonishing.

Ah Da held it and admired it for a while before he could bear to put it down.

Then—

His gaze suddenly fixed, stopping on the cord used to hang the pendant. The cord was made of Iron Pear Wood fibers. Clearly, this wasn't top-quality Iron Pear Wood but discarded scraps. The person who made it had a clever idea; she recycled these scraps and wove them together. Upon closer inspection—

Is this woven pattern a flat knot?

A Vajra Knot?

A Skylark Knot?

...

No!

None of the above.

Most of the cord used a four-strand braid, with a mandala knot in the middle linking the bead, and then—

How marvelous!

The way this person thought about weaving is simply brilliant!

The beautifully made cord and the lovely bead cleverly combined turn this originally ordinary grass seed fruit pendant into something stylish, classy, and beautiful!

So beautiful!

Originally, Ah Da thought of putting it in the storage room as one of his own collections, but after receiving the actual item and because the pendant was too beautiful, he couldn't help but hang it around his neck to see—

And it actually looked pretty good.

Originally, as a big man, he thought wearing such a pendant would make him look effeminate, but it actually looked very harmonious. Not just harmonious, Ah Da felt that it made him seem a deeper person.

Hmm.

Since that's the case, he might as well keep wearing it.

Ah Da thought to himself.

So, Ah Da wore the pendant and directly went to bed. The next day when he woke up, he felt refreshed. Not only did he feel mentally good, but all the physical fatigue also seemed completely gone. As a Star Network host, his daily schedule was highly irregular—he often stayed up late and was always tired the next day, his body heavy like iron—he usually needed to eat several meals of natural food nutrition meals to recover.

But today, for some reason, he didn't feel tired at all.

At first, Ah Da couldn't figure out the reason and thought it was because of the expensive ginseng from Changbai Mountain on Blue Star he bought the day before yesterday, which is a very expensive natural food ingredient with great benefits for the body.

If it was the ginseng that caused this, that wouldn't be surprising.

After breakfast, Ah Da took a short rest and then went to the gym for physical training.

About two hours later, Ah Da came out of the gym dragging his exhausted body and immediately collapsed on the sofa, completely limp like a dead fish, not wanting to move at all.

One second.

Two seconds.

Three seconds.

...

Ten minutes later, Ah Da felt much more relaxed, stood up, and stretched his limbs. By now, he found it a bit odd; normally, after such intense training, he would need at least half an hour to recover.

But now?

Ten minutes?

Disbelieving, Ah Da took a special look at the vintage wall clock: it was indeed ten minutes.

Ah Da scratched his head, quite puzzled.

Then, he began to organize the content for today's live stream. Although it seems like he just casually walks around on Star Network during the stream, as if everything happens by coincidence, each step he takes is actually pre-planned and calculated.

Otherwise—

Where in the world would there be so many opportunities to find overlooked valuable items?

Of course—

Ah Da wasn't entirely faking it. The items he buys during his daily live streams are genuinely bought, these items aren't pre-arranged but are identified by sending out several assistants to scout the locations beforehand and confirm there is something valuable overlooked, only then does he proceed there.

With the advancement of the live streaming business today, if one's content has no unique features, it simply won't make a splash. Thus, Ah Da feels this is a necessary method.

However, stumbling into Ji You's shop and buying a few grass seed fruits was truly accidental.

Ah Da looked at the report sent by his assistant, his eyebrows increasingly furrowing: these items weren't rare or of any extra value, as content for today's stream, they simply had no appeal.

Ah Da propped his hands on his head, massaging his scalp.

One time.

Two times.

Three times.

...

The more he rubbed, the more comfortable he felt.

Not just his head relaxed, his whole being unwittingly became blank.

Time silently slipped away...

Ah Da withdrew his hands and glanced unintentionally:

Huh?

Why was he still wearing this Grass Seed Fruit Pendant?

Ah Da thought for a moment, remembering that he went to bed very late last night and forgot to take it off, so he ended up sleeping with the pendant on, and forgot to remove it upon waking. Considering he had a meeting with a famous Soul Artifact Master today, he definitely shouldn't wear this thing; it would seem very disrespectful! If he inadvertently made a bad impression on the Master, his request would be even more difficult.

Subsequently, Ah Da took off the necklace and placed it on the table.

After grooming, dressing up, and making some slight preparations, he then set off to the meeting location.

Dressed sharply in a suit and looking elegant, Ah Da arrived at Dodger Research Institute on Main Star. The main hall of Dodger Research Institute was very quiet. There was a reception desk upfront, and he walked towards it, greeting the reception staff with a smile, "Hello, I have an appointment with Master Mickey Dodge at 1:10 PM."

"Are you Mr. Cheng Yu? I am sorry, Master Dodge has some urgent matters and cannot keep the appointment," the reception staff said politely and kindly, but their words chilled Ah Da's heart.

Chapter 30: Chapter 30: Request Denied

"Yes."

"I am Cheng Yu." Ah Da nodded, cautiously probing, "May I ask if Master Dodger is unable to make the appointment at 1:10, or... is it that he can't meet at all today? I... I mean, if it's possible, I can wait for him to finish his work, and then meet with him."

The receptionist smiled yet ruthlessly refused, "I'm sorry, he does not have any time available all day."

Ah Da, who is Cheng Yu, felt a great disappointment, but still holding onto a glimmer of hope, said, "If Master Dodger is free tomorrow, I can come again then."

The receptionist smiled, saying, "Mr. Cheng, if you wish to continue to make an appointment with Master Dodger, please apply through the normal procedure. I can't directly decide for you here."

The so-called normal procedure means first sending an email to Master Dodger's assistant, waiting for approval, and after the assistant receives approval from Master Dodger – if Master Dodger finds the content of the email interesting – the assistant will reply to the applicant and arrange a meeting time.

...

This whole process typically takes about six months before one can get a chance to meet with Master Mickey Dodge.

Cheng Yu had previously followed the normal procedure to make an appointment with Master Mickey Dodge, but his luck was incredibly bad, just on this day, coincidentally encountering Master Dodge having an emergency and unable to meet.

Having missed this chance, to go through the process again... when would that be?

The disappointment in Cheng Yu's heart could no longer be concealed, and with a face full of dejection, he said, "Could... could you possibly make an exception?"

The receptionist shook her head and said, "No."

A fire suddenly ignited in Cheng Yu's heart, but—he simply could not vent it. Offending a rather famous Soul Artifact Maker was more severe than offending a world-renowned Mechanical Master.

He could not bear the consequences.

Unable—Cheng Yu could only leave the Dodger Research Institute with a heart full of loss and disappointment.

Mickey Dodge is a soul artifact maker, which as the name suggests, is a person who can make soul devices. As mentioned before, whether natural or artificial, soul devices are extremely rare, with difficult conditions for formation, making them elusive for humans to obtain easily. But there are individuals whose spiritual power magnetic field is highly compatible with soul devices, and with the right methods, they can use this advantage to artificially create soul devices.

As mentioned before, soul devices can effectively enhance human spiritual power, and even break through the barriers between levels, allowing someone with an E talent to have the chance to advance to F level, E level, D level, C level, B level... Therefore, even artificial, expendable soul devices are invaluable treasures.

In this world, not everyone is willing to become a combatant, piloting mechas into battle against Star Beasts and enemy forces... but certainly, everyone wants to be a person with high spiritual power and physical strength!

Because in life, there are simply too many things that require high spiritual power and physical strength—if you don't meet the threshold, you can only be stopped at the door...

So what?

A saying still circulates in interstellar space: "Mechanical Masters may be encountered, but Soul Artifact Makers are impossible to seek."

This also indirectly reflects the lofty status of soul artifact makers.

Mickey Dodge is such a highly esteemed, renowned soul artifact maker. There are too many, too many people willing to hold up wads of money in front of him, simply hoping for the honor of him crafting a suitable soul device for them.

Cheng Yu has very low talent. Although born into a wealthy family, his mother was from a local noble family on a remote planet, which in turn subtly lowered his social standing. Nonetheless, Cheng Yu isn't lacking in money. The main reason he has gone through the effort to meet with Master Mickey Dodge is to request a personalized soul device from the Master—

However—he lamented his lack of connections to directly reach Master Mickey Dodge, so he had to queue up and make an appointment in advance. This appointment took him over a year to secure.

But—

After waiting in line for so long, to only receive a flippant dismissal, not even getting a glimpse of Master Dodge's face. All the time, effort, and money invested upfront... all gone to waste in an instant.

Cheng Yu felt it impossible not to feel resentful.

The receptionist maintained a smile, continuing to say, "Mr. Cheng, if you have no other business, please leave now."

The reception hall is not a place for the idle masses to linger, so the receptionist had begun to politely issue a departure order.

"Alright." Cheng Yu replied with a smile, his heart as rigid as ice, though.

Just as he was about to turn around and leave, he caught a glimpse of Master Dodger's figure walking out of a rest room from the corner of his eye. He moved with a light step, a hint of a smile on his face, heading in a particular direction.

Following that direction, Cheng Yu's expression sank.

It turned out—

Master Dodger had cancelled the meeting with himself to personally receive a distinguished guest, none other than his own half-brother, Cheng Kun.

Cheng Yu's mother passed away when he was two years old, and his father remarried soon after to a woman of equal social standing. Subsequently, his stepmother gave birth to Cheng Kun. Unlike Cheng Yu, Cheng Kun had been a prodigy since childhood. Now just over twenty years old, he was a Double S talent in both spiritual power and physical strength—a well-known figure among the younger generation of the Alliance.

However—privately, Cheng Kun was someone petty and narrow-minded.

This—

Cheng Yu suddenly realized his meeting with Master Dodger had been sabotaged.

Not surprising.

Not surprising at all.

Although the two were brothers, they were not born of the same mother and with the father's favoritism, Cheng Yu faced an awkward situation within the Cheng Family.

Despite Cheng Kun outwardly showing great respect to his older brother, he was in fact constantly making things difficult for Cheng Yu.

Over the course of more than a decade as brothers under the same roof, Cheng Yu and Cheng Kun had countless small and large conflicts.

Cheng Kun kept a meticulous account in his mind, seizing every opportunity to torment Cheng Yu.

Cheng Yu had long lost interest in staying at the Cheng Family to be mistreated. After reaching adulthood, he took his own share of the family inheritance and left the clan to forge his own path.

Afterward, he had almost no contact with the Cheng Family, his father, stepmother, and Cheng Kun.

Cheng Yu had not expected that his brother would still have someone watching him, willfully ruining his potential to enhance his spiritual power and physical strength... because—Cheng Kun wanted him to remain a perpetual failure.

In the distance, was a harmonious scene of Master Dodger and Cheng Kun...

"Mr. Cheng, please leave quickly." Seeing that Cheng Yu was still not leaving, the receptionist directly ordered him out.

With a heavy heart, Cheng Yu left the Dodger Research Institute with a darkened expression.