

Scavengers 431

Chapter 431: Model Student

After fighting with Lord Mo, who is ranked tenth, and winning, Ji You's system rating jumped up significantly, boosting her from the original 14th position straight up to 11th.

The 11th position, just one step away from reaching the top 10 and entering the final round. Ji You felt thrilled, contemplating who her next opponent should be?

While she was hesitating, suddenly a new system announcement caught her eye: [King's Expedition has successfully challenged Xiaoqing. Those who are interested in watching, please enter the spectator seats...]

Eh?

King's Expedition?

Xiaoqing?

These two have actually clashed head-on?

One thing Ji You had to admit: even though the character of the person from King's Expedition wasn't great, his strength was indeed formidable, and Ji You definitely wouldn't dare take him lightly...

Ji You frowned, strangely worried. Worried about what? Could it be that Shen Changqing, that Iron Fool, chose to fight with an antique mech against King's Expedition?

With a hint of worry, Ji You didn't stop her movements at all, immediately starting to grab a spectator ticket. Luckily, her speed was outstanding, and she smoothly squeezed into a spectator seat.

At that moment, the arena showcased the silhouettes of the challengers.

The figure of King's Expedition was very tall and strong. At this moment, he looked like a robust and agile lion, his head held high, a hint of arrogance in his expression as he looked at Xiaoqing and said, "Xiaoqing, nice to meet you... Hope you don't die too soon."

With a tall and sturdy stature, like a pine or cypress, Shen Changqing, upon hearing these words, slightly lifted his dark eyes, looked towards King's Expedition with a calm and serene gaze, and simply said, "Nice to meet you too."

Watching this scene from below, Ji You felt disgusted seeing King's Expedition's smug face, as if he had already secured the win. She almost wanted to replace Shen Changqing and beat up the opponent herself.

For characters like King's Expedition, Hero King, communication is useless; just beat them several times, and once they feel the pain, they'll settle down.

Ah!

As Ji You's face filled with worry, the surrounding spectators, and everyone in the audience seats, began to discuss:

"Between King's Expedition and Xiaoqing, who will be the victor?"

"I guess Xiaoqing, Xiaoqing has a better overall victory rate than King's Expedition."

"That's not certain, Xiaoqing has now replaced Rag Queen as an ardent fan of antique mechs; if he uses an antique mech, it's really uncertain if he could win against King's Expedition."

"Xiaoqing... it's hard to say, he's suffered so much from those antique mechs, how is he still not giving up?"

"So, does that mean King's Expedition is more likely to win?"

...

The more Ji You listened, the heavier her heart felt.

On the field, King's Expedition had already revealed his regular mech, and soon, it was Xiaoqing's turn. Ji You's heart suddenly leapt...

Then—

Xiaoqing raised his hand, slowly retrieving his mech—

Seeing this, Ji You clutched her chest, almost spitting blood: "This Iron Fool, why is he so foolish and honest!!!"

Audience A: "Xiaoqing, don't be reckless, you aren't Rag Queen, who grows sneakily, this won't work for you in the long run."

Audience B: "A petition signed by ten thousand people, pleading for Xiaoqing to change his mech."

Audience C: "King's Expedition! Leave no blade of grass uncut!"

Audience D: "King's Expedition! Not a single blade of grass grows!"

...

Many audience members share the same thought as Ji You. Of course, there are also many fans of King's Expedition scattered among the seats, each holding a glow stick and shouting that ultra-cool slogan.

Ji You, listening as one shout overpowered another like tidal waves of voices shouting 'King's Expedition! Not a single blade of grass grows!', felt a throbbing pain in her molars... Such a cringe slogan, and yet the King's Expedition accepted it without any shame.

King's Expedition looked at Xiaoqing's antique mech and immediately smiled, his lips curling upwards as he said, "Your mech is very unique."

Xiaoqing, with his clear voice, as stable and polite as ever, responded, "Your mech is also very unique."

King's Expedition: "..."

Can't he sense the sarcasm in his own words?

Was that his way of subtly mocking me?

King's Expedition said, "The quality of a mech also depends on the user's abilities. Let's not waste words and show our true skills in action!"

Xiaoqing nodded and said, "Okay."

As soon as the words fell, King's Expedition took the initiative and immediately fired a shot from his mech at Xiaoqing's, and it was a Tracking Particle Cannon with an unmatched momentum...

Sitting inside the cabin of the antique mech, Xiaoqing still looked composed, seemingly not too tense. He stood firm, not moving an inch, his dark eyes firmly locked on the aggressively incoming particle cannon.

The Tracking Particle Cannon, from launch to its approach towards Xiaoqing, took less than 2 seconds. Just when everyone thought Xiaoqing had no escape and must brace himself to take the hit, the particle cannon all of a sudden paused mid-air, very briefly, so brief that everyone almost thought their eyes were playing tricks on them. Then, they saw the barrel of Little Qing Mecha aiming at the particle cannon—

Boom—

Two energy-packed particle cannons collided fiercely in the air, sparking flames everywhere, with dazzling and glaring light instantly filling half of the arena...

Xiaoqing and Honor of Kings were engulfed in light, creating a brief blind spot in vision. The current situation in the arena was momentarily obscured.

Audience: "Huh? I can't see??"

"Hmm?" Ji You's eyes brightened, she touched her chin and said, "Interesting."

What Shen Changqing did just now was to use his spiritual power to briefly interfere with the opponent's Tracking Particle Cannon, and then, seizing the moment, he fired his most powerful cannon, effectively intercepting the opponent's attack...

This—

Isn't it something he learned from me?

And, he mastered it well, innovatively adapting it... In normal times, having such a clever, progressive student, Ji You would certainly be very gratified.

However, she hoped that Shen Changqing could take advantage of the opportunity he created and take down King's Expedition in one go.

Just as the audience and Ji You were filled with anticipation, the light gradually dispersed, revealing the real situation inside the arena, only to see—Old Qing Mecha had used the perfect moment of the blind spot, moved next to King's Expedition Mecha and in a leap, grabbed hold of the opponent's mech. Then, in a moment when he temporarily opened the cockpit, he detonated the antique mech—

Rumbling...

After a series of roaring sounds, the audience's eagerly awaited outcome was revealed: King's Expedition Mech was destroyed, and Xiaoqing successfully escaped—

Audience: "..."

Ji You: "..."

Audience: "This scene, isn't it Rag Queen's signature move? Am I... am I going blind? Is this—this the gentle, kind, simple, and honest Xiaoqing?"

Ji You: "Good student."

Chapter 432: On Credit!

After the system allocated scores, King's Expedition glared at his low score, his face turning instantly dark.

As for Xiaoqing?

Xiaoqing's calm and gentle face still looked serene as he said to King's Expedition, "Thank you."

Thank what?

Thank you for handing over points to him? Hearing this, King's Expedition's face turned even uglier! This was mockery, definitely Xiaoqing's mockery towards him!

In a flash, King's Expedition pressed the exit button. As he left, his face looked terribly unsightly, he just snorted heavily through his nostrils.

Hmm?

He merely said thanks, why did King's Expedition look so upset, so angry?

Shen Changqing was a bit puzzled; his thanks carried not a trace of mockery or belittlement, it was just a polite remark from someone with good upbringing and proper manners.

In the spectator stands, the fans of King's Expedition also left after their idol, the remaining people looked at each other and began to buzz with discussions.

"What's up with King's Expedition? Since he encountered the Rag Queen, he seems to have been jinxed."

"Jinxed? He lost to the Rag Queen and to Xiaoqing because he was complacent, careless, and arrogant."

"I think so too. He really thought he was the king, expecting to sweep across the battlefield effortlessly? And his fans are so shameless, he should win against Little Shengsheng, Fu Feng, and Drunk Lying on the Beauty's Knee first before they talk big."

"Leaving King's Expedition aside, let's talk about Xiaoqing. In that battle just now, Xiaoqing really seemed to have mastered the essence of the Rag Queen. That interference particle cannon move initially was stunning, and then taking advantage of the blindspots to blow up two mechas, he was truly amazing..."

"If, I mean if, the Rag Queen and Xiaoqing were to fight now, both in antique mechs, who would win and who would lose?"

"Hard to say."

"I'm betting on Xiaoqing; his spiritual power seems higher than the Rag Queen's."

"I also favor Xiaoqing; his physical strength also seems better than the Rag Queen's."

"+1 for Xiaoqing..."

Ji You heard the discussions around her, especially when her classmates overwhelmingly supported Xiaoqing, the corners of her mouth twitched, and she suddenly shouted loudly, "I support the Rag Queen!"

A silence fell around her.

Ji You looked at the few girls beside her and said, "No offense! Xiaoqing is just an Iron Fool. If the Rag Queen really wanted to beat him, she'd have a hundred ways to do it."

Seatmate A: "Do you mean Xiaoqing is very naive?"

Seatmate B: "Are you saying the Rag Queen is very cunning?"

Audience C: "Indeed, the series of maneuvers by the Rag Queen were somewhat shameless and sleazy. Xiaoqing looks more honest and straightforward, he could be easily deceived."

Audience D: "In terms of sleazy tactics, the Rag Queen is unmatched."

Ji You: "..."

What kind of reasoning is this?

Ji You felt her heartbeat quicken, her fists itch, and she was on the verge of lashing out, but she held back.

Then—

Everyone was transported out of the arena, and Ji You checked the points ranking. She was still firmly within the top 11. Shen Changqing's name had moved up two places, now at the 13th position.

How about Yue Qiyuan?

Yue Qiyuan also performed very well tonight, advancing smoothly to the 15th position.

Overall, the people Ji You knew were all making progress...

Afterwards, Ji You fought two more challenging and twisting battles, but fortunately, she won both. Ji You's rating climbed smoothly into the top ten!

As long as she plays steadily and doesn't take unnecessary risks, she will definitely secure a spot in the finals.

Ji You finally logged off and went to sleep peacefully.

The next day.

After a busy day ended and Mr. Mu Jianling announced the end of class, students swarmed towards the cafeteria. However, unlike usual, Ji You cautiously observed Mr. Mu Jianling's expression and timidly stepped forward.

Mr. Mu Jianling was about to board the Floating Car to go back to the staff dormitory when he noticed Ji You standing beside him, hesitating and stuttering, seemingly constipated and unable to speak. He couldn't help but twitch his eyelid and immediately scolded, "If you have something to say, say it; if you have to fart, then fart! What kind of ghostly dithering is this?"

Upon hearing that, Ji You squeezed out a smile and said, "With those words from you, teacher, I feel relieved to speak."

Mr. Mu Jianling glared, "Speak!"

Ji You, with a flattering smile, said, "Teacher—I've been a bit tight on money recently, could I possibly owe you 10 Candy Beans?"

Mr. Mu Jianling's eyelid twitched again, "10 beans?"

Ji You, steeling herself, said, "Yes!"

Mr. Mu Jianling raised his hand and firmly smacked the back of her head, scolding, "Do you think I run a Candy Bean factory?"

"Ow..."

"Hiss... it hurts..."

It really hurt.

That smack from Mr. Mu Jianling made Ji You feel like her head was about to crack open. Rubbing the back of her head, she hesitantly said, "Or—maybe 9 would do..."

Hearing that, Ji You quickly noticed the dangerous look in Mr. Mu Jianling's eyes. She quickly changed her tone, probing, "Eight then! Or else, seven, six is also okay..."

Mr. Mu Jianling just glanced sideways at Ji You without a word.

Ji You gritted her teeth, said in pain, "Five! My absolute lower limit is five."

Mr. Mu Jianling snorted and scolded, "With such thick skin, why don't you become a Protective Shield? And you dare to be so cheeky about owing?"

Ji You laughed sheepishly, looking at Mr. Mu Jianling, her face all smiles, "Teacher... who are we kidding? I speak so casually only because you are kind and generous, gentle and amiable, beautiful and kind... Surely you won't nitpick with someone like me, a mere child." Anyway, she laid it on thick as if it was completely free.

"A mere child?"

"You little dwarf." Mr. Mu Jianling gave her a cool glance and said, "Ignoring actual age, your stature really does make you look like a middle school student."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You took a deep breath and quietly retorted, "Teacher, let's keep issues separate, don't bring up height."

Mr. Mu Jianling said, "10 is impossible! I'll give you at most 2."

Upon hearing this, Ji You's face fell instantly, "2 is too few, teacher... couldn't you give two more?"

Mr. Mu Jianling humphed, "No."

Ji You bit her lip, quietly, "Three?"

Mr. Mu Jianling eyed her, asking, "How many days for the debt? When will you repay?"

Ji You, looking troubled, in a negotiating tone, said, "In three months?"

Mr. Mu Jianling snorted softly, "No loan then."

Ji You bit her lip, "One month!"

Mr. Mu Jianling said, "That's more like it."

With that, he immediately threw three Candy Beans to Ji You. Ji You caught them, and the Six Strands in her Spiritual World burst into cheers. However, Ji You's heart was already beginning to feel the bitterness:

How am I going to repay this money?

Worrying!

Chapter 433: Seize

Although she got 3 Candy Beans on credit, Ji You was not happy. Why? It goes without saying—it was because of the debt. Three Candy Beans, each costing 50,000 credit points, totaling 150,000 credit points.

Thinking about this huge number, Ji You felt like a massive mountain was pressing down on her heart, heavy, naturally preventing her from feeling happy. However, she knew that being able to get three Candy Beans at this price was already a huge bargain. If it weren't for Teacher Mu Jianling taking care of her, such a good deal would definitely not have been possible. Of course, Ji You couldn't think of defaulting now.

As for repaying the debt?

The only thing Ji You could think of was crafting Soul Devices.

However, even though Ji You had a few successful experiences before, she still couldn't guarantee her success rate.

Of course, even knowing the low success rate, Ji You was still willing to try more. However, her daily classes were very tight, the learning tasks burdensome, and she also had to participate in the Network Competition every night, so recently she pushed back the crafting of Soul Devices. It wasn't that she'd forgotten, but because she knew there were priorities. Before, she had enough money, and her school expenses could be covered by points, so she wasn't in a rush to craft Soul Devices and instead focused all her energy on improving her personal strength...

Now, Teacher Mu Jianling only gave a month's grace period, so crafting Soul Devices must be moved up on the agenda.

...

After dinner, Ji You immediately returned to the dorm.

Nights on Lanyue Star arrived quickly. It was just seven o'clock, and a thin layer of fog-like darkness had already enveloped the outdoors. Ji You glanced out the window before returning to her workshop, finished the coursework from the Material Department, handled her homework, and was about to enter the Star Network to compete—

Suddenly—

A notification sound made Ji You stop her actions. She glanced casually, and a starlight suddenly brightened in her dark pupils...

The message was from Senior Shi Ya.

Ji You held her face and opened the message from Senior Shi Ya:

Senior Shi Ya: [Back to school after a month.]

After reading, Ji You smiled so broadly that her eyes squinted shut. The message from Senior Shi Ya obviously wasn't sent spontaneously; Ji You had previously boldly asked Senior Shi Ya about her approximate return date to school. After asking, she waited for a few days without any response and thought she wouldn't receive a reply, but unexpectedly...

It would take so long to see Senior Shi Ya again, Ji You was a bit disappointed. But after thinking about it, it was just a month, very soon, and she quickly cheered up, hurriedly asking: [Senior, can you give me an address? I have handcrafted a small gift and plan to send it to you.]

Elsewhere.

In the enclosed experiment lab, Shi Ya immediately opened the message upon hearing the notification.

A gift?

Shi Ya frowned, replied with two words: [No need.]

Just about to click send, somehow, Shi Ya's finger just couldn't press down, as if an invisible wall was blocking her hand from falling...

Handcrafted?

Was it handcrafted by that girl?

...

Shi Ya's fingers stiffened for a while, and as if possessed, she replied with one word: [Okay.]

This "okay", once sent, seemed magically aided and was delivered before Shi Ya could react.

Shi Ya was momentarily stunned, staring at the recall button, hesitating for a while—

Ji You's message came immediately: [Senior, the address the address the address... Hurry up~~~]

Shi Ya, looking at Ji You's message, her tightly furrowed brows gradually relaxed.

Let it be.

Every time she encountered this girl radiating light, her normally stern heart would unconsciously soften a bit.

Shi Ya no longer hesitated and immediately sent the current receiving address.

Just after sending it, the laboratory door was pushed open, and the person who entered wore a silver-white protective suit that was form fitting and sleek, outlining the graceful curves of the person...

The person who came in was a beautiful young woman, with stunning blue eyes, golden hair cascading like a waterfall, and skin white as porcelain...

Shi Ya stopped what she was doing and slightly furrowed her brows.

The beautiful woman, seeing the expression on Shi Ya's face, was not annoyed but instead smiled and said, "Assistant Shi, Professor McKin instructed me to take over your work."

Shi Ya sat stiffly, unflinching, and coldly said, "The professor did not notify me."

The beautiful woman's mouth twisted into a smirk, raising her eyebrows, "Are you questioning me, or are you questioning the professor's decision? This is about the progress of laboratory work; why would I lie?"

Shi Ya, hearing this, her expression slightly changed, only coldly said, "I don't care about the rest; I only recognize the official notification of job transition or a personal notification from the professor."

The beautiful woman's brow briefly showed a hint of irritation, but it quickly disappeared as she suppressed her displeasure and said with a smile, "Well then, why don't we contact the professor right now?"

Shi Ya neither agreed nor disagreed.

The beautiful woman did not delay and immediately dialed Professor McKin, the head of the laboratory.

The holographic video connected quickly.

The face of Professor McKin, who looked to be in his fifties, appeared; he was wearing a lab coat and was deeply engrossed in comparing several sets of data. Upon seeing the beautiful woman's face, his originally tense expression relaxed a bit and asked, "Dear Dina, what is it at this time? I am very busy now, I haven't..."

Dina, the beautiful woman, quickly interjected, "Professor McKin, it is like this today you instructed me to take over Assistant Shi's work, but she seems to disagree..."

"Oh—" Professor McKin suddenly realized, he put down the material in his hand, turning towards Shi Ya with a face that became extremely serious, and said, "Assistant Shi, I am very sorry, it was indeed my decision to let Dina take over your work, but I was busy today and forgot to notify you. Let's do this, now you hand over the work to Dina and clearly explain the precautions."

Shi Ya's face was composed, saying, "Professor, this is too abrupt."

Professor McKin said, "Indeed, it is a bit sudden, and this change is not what I wished for either, but for the better advancement of our experiments, I had to make this decision, I believe you can understand, Assistant Shi?"

Shi Ya remained silent, not making a sound.

Professor McKin sighed slightly, "Your ideas and creativity are very good, and they have offered a new direction for our laboratory's new Mecha research, which is very important, and this is something that everyone in the laboratory must acknowledge. Thus, I will provide you with a substantial reward, but, your spiritual power is too low, and limited by this, further research, you also know you cannot continue with your work... I am sorry, for the overall benefit of the laboratory, I must let someone with higher spiritual power and capacity take over."

Shi Ya remained silent.

Chapter 434: Compromise...

Shi Ya remained silent.

Seeing this, Professor McKin sighed and said, "I understand your desire to continue your research. Dina is just taking over your work; she still has much to learn and lacks in many areas. She really needs your help, so you can stay in the laboratory and assist her to complete it."

Shi Ya's face remained cold, and she scoffed internally. So, after seizing her ideas and creativity, they still wanted her to assist Dina? To squeeze out all her value?

Ridiculous.

However, Shi Ya knew well that behind this seemingly grandiose rhetoric lay nothing but these people's filthy selfish desires. But what could she do?

Being powerless, without influence or financial backing, she had no choice but to step aside.

It was Shi Ya's own decision to join this privately established mecha research laboratory led by Professor McKin because such private laboratories had strong autonomy. They weren't bound by many restrictions; as long as one had good ideas and creativity and could convince the person in charge of the laboratory, one could start experimenting...

Of course, there were rumours about such private laboratories—they were called illegal laboratories. Due to their strong autonomy, they often weren't subject to official constraints and would even occasionally conduct experiments explicitly forbidden by the Alliance... However, all these were done secretly; even Professor McKin would never openly defy the laws of the Alliance.

The headquarters of Macken Laboratory was located at Yunding Star, at the edge of the Sixth Star System, bordering the Seventh and Eighth Star Systems. Situated precisely at the triangle junction of the three Star Systems, the area was often plagued by pirates... which made it extremely dangerous, yet for a research institute like Macken Laboratory, the greater the danger, the safer it was.

...

After a few seconds of silence, instead of nodding in agreement, Shi Ya looked at Professor McKin and asked, "Professor, what if my spiritual power meets the requirements?"

Hearing this, Professor McKin's brow furrowed slightly. After a moment, he relaxed his expression and said, "It would be best if your spiritual power could meet the requirements of the experiment."

Shi Ya nodded and said, "I understand. I'll hand over my work to Dina."

Professor McKin was startled; he did not expect Shi Ya to agree so readily. To know that this decision meant she was personally handing over her fruitful research to someone else...

For a researcher, it was akin to giving away one's own nurtured 'child' to bear someone else's name, making the 'child' unrelated to oneself forever.

Shi Ya wasn't causing a fuss?

In the midst of guessing Shi Ya's thoughts—

Shi Ya, with cold eyes, said, "I'm willing to hand it over, but on one condition. I hope the laboratory can provide me a one-time compensation of 50 million credit points, and I will unconditionally transfer all current research data to the laboratory."

"50 million?" Before Professor McKin could speak, Dina couldn't help but exclaim aloud, "Why don't you just rob someone! You want so much for such a trivial idea?"

"Shut up!" Professor McKin glared at Dina and then turned to Shi Ya, saying, "50 million is indeed a bit much. Not to hide it from you, but the laboratory hasn't pulled in any sponsorship recently, and funds are a bit tight. I can give you at most 20 million."

million?

Dina's eyes widened, her face slightly anxious, but knowing it was not her place to speak, she just glared fiercely at Shi Ya and kept silent.

Hearing this, Shi Ya was silent for a few seconds, then nodded, "Alright."

Honestly, 20 million was just a small amount for Macken Laboratory. If the 'Biological Mecha' theory proposed by Shi Ya could yield results, its value would be immeasurable. Professor McKin looked at Shi Ya, a serious look on his face breaking into a slight smile, "It's good that you can come to terms with this. I'm very pleased and relieved."

Shi Ya, with her low spiritual power and physical strength, was initially not taken seriously by Professor McKin when she joined the laboratory. However, seeing her solid foundation and her creative ideas, and also that she didn't require a high salary, he recruited her to assist the researchers in the lab—it turned out to be a treasure find.

If Shi Ya could make peace with the situation and take a step back... she could still stay in the laboratory in the future. Although Professor McKin had his own motives, he did appreciate talent. Keeping someone like Shi Ya, who did not cost much, was naturally preferable to pushing her out. Thus, Professor McKin said, "Although the responsibility for the Biological Mecha research has been transferred to Dina, you were the one who originally proposed the concept. In the future, work together with Dina to turn your ideas into successful outcomes."

Shi Ya, with an icy expression and devoid of emotion, said, "Professor, I find it difficult to work with Dina due to incompatible temperaments, please forgive me for not being able to work with her. Thus, I am submitting my verbal resignation now, and a written resignation will follow shortly. Please approve it."

Dina's eyes flickered with a gleam at this news.

Professor McKin, however, furrowed his brow and did not immediately respond.

Shi Ya said, "After leaving the laboratory, I will sign an agreement with you, promising never to reveal any ideas or relevant data about the 'Biological' Mecha to any person or third party, please rest assured."

Hearing this, Professor McKin's deeply knitted brows relaxed, "This, I am not worried about. I am just very sorry that you have chosen to leave."

Shi Ya said, "I am also sorry, but in the future, my focus will be on enhancing my spiritual power, and I will not engage in mecha research for quite some time."

Hearing this, Professor McKin instantly understood.

This was—

Being stimulated.

Resolved to strive and enhance her spiritual power.

Young people, though they may appear indifferent on the surface, still have a bit of a competitive spirit. After some thought, his expression very solemn, Professor McKin nodded gravely, "Okay. I approve."

Shi Ya said, "Thank you."

...

After the communication was disconnected, and a triumphant Dina also left, Shi Ya sat with a stony face, silent.

Shi Ya understood very well that the main reason Professor McKin so readily agreed to her terms and to let her leave, was that he didn't find her so essential as to need to retain her by any means necessary...

The new type of mecha concept proposed by Shi Ya was just that—a concept, without any significant breakthrough... This was one reason. Another was that Professor McKin didn't think Shi Ya, with her mere Grade C spiritual power, could match the many high-spiritual-power talents in his laboratory, so it was more appropriate to leave the realization

Chapter 435: Gift

Shi Ya finished writing her resignation letter and without a second's delay, she sent it directly to Professor McKin.

Professor McKin replied promptly, attempting to retain her with a gesture of persuasion; however, when Shi Ya decisively indicated her intention to leave, he could only regretfully approve her resignation.

Of course, the compensation due to Shi Ya was not withheld. Out of the 20 million credit points, 10 million were immediately paid to Shi Ya. The remaining amount was to be transferred to her as soon as Shi Ya handed over the current research data to Dina without reservation and its accuracy was confirmed.

Shi Ya didn't entangle with the matter too much. She had a clear understanding of her current situation; since the matter was irrevocable, she might as well minimize her losses by demanding a sum of compensation.

Actually, the 20 million exceeded Shi Ya's expectations. She had initially asked for 50 million just as an ambitious start. If she hadn't brought it up proactively, the maximum compensation Professor McKin would have agreed to provide her was probably only 5 million credit points.

As for her concept of 'Biological' Mecha, selling it for a flat rate of 20 million credit points was a decision made without determining whether it was worth it or not. Shi Ya did not consider it and had no spare time to ponder the question.

Because— she had personally experimented and though there were slight results, they were merely scratching the surface. Shi Ya was very aware that from concept to implementation, the financial, spiritual, human, and temporal resources required were tremendously and indefinitely vast. Even if she were to conduct the experiment herself, Shi Ya could not guarantee its success. Therefore, she decided to sell the concept outright.

million credit points were indeed a substantial figure—a figure that some individuals or families could never hope to encounter in their lifetimes, much like her and her father in the past...

...

Even without selling the concept, relying solely on her meager monthly salary, it would take Shi Ya decades to earn 20 million credit points, and even then, if her work did not make any significant breakthroughs, she might not be able to earn that many credit points in several decades...

That's the harsh reality.

After receiving the approval for her resignation, Shi Ya remained utterly calm, both on her face and in her heart. In fact, nearly nothing and no one could provoke any emotional fluctuation in her anymore, except—

That girl, she wants to give me a gift?

What could it be?

A sense of anticipation inexplicably rose in Shi Ya's cold eyes.

On the other side, as soon as Ji You received the address sent over by Senior Shi Ya, she immediately beamed with joy, pondering what to gift Senior Shi Ya.

After much thought, Ji You decided to give a Soul Device. This was the most valuable thing she could offer, both in terms of cost and worth, and moreover, it was something she had crafted by hand, which Ji You found very meaningful.

And so, she made up her mind to do it.

Ji You decided to put everything else aside and concentrate on crafting the gift for Senior Shi Ya.

When it came to the choice of materials, Ji You had already had plans in mind. She knew Senior Shi Ya certainly wouldn't fancy flashy items, such as shiny pink jade, earrings, or ear drops; these were likely not Senior Shi Ya's style.

Therefore, Ji You intended to use a rather expensive metal for the creation. This metal, known interstellarly by the scientific name 'Mithril', needed to be extracted and then synthesized from various ores. After synthesis, its attributes and appearance were somewhat similar to platinum from Ji You's previous world, but it was more durable and lighter than platinum.

Coincidentally, her recent materials class involved the use of Mithril, and Ji You, though it was a pinch, had purchased some extra for class assignments.

After cleaning up the workstation and keeping only the necessary materials and tools, Ji You was ready to start crafting. However—just as she conveyed her plan to the Six Strands in her Spirit Space, in a blink, her Spirit Space turned upside down—

Before her eyes, crowded together, were the plump bodies of the Spiritual Silk, all of them lying down haphazardly.

Boss: [Master, my body is stuck, I can't move.]

Second: [Master, I can't move my body either, yingyingying.]

Third: [Master! Quick, help us, we can't move at all.]

Fourth: [Can't move the body, can't talk either! Ah! What to do? What to do?]

Old Five: [Master, no Candy Beans, don't wanna work anymore.]

Hearing this, Ji You's eyelids twitched, finally, Old Five blurted out the truth.

Sixth, as a tail-following thread, was listlessly flapping its tail, occasionally imitating Boss, Second, Third, Fourth, and at times mimicking Old Five...

Ji You thought about it and felt that it was not a long-term strategy to always trick these Spiritual Threads into working for her. To exploit them enduringly, she realized she needed to give them some benefits after all.

So, she didn't hesitate and immediately took out 3 Candy Beans she had bought on credit from Teacher Mu Jianling, saying, "When have I ever asked you to work without compensating you? Have I ever treated you unfairly? Look, what's this?"

[Candy Beans!!!] Inside the Spirit Space, the originally listless Six Spiritual Threads, like dead threads, suddenly boiled with excitement.

Ji You, with a smirk on her lips, said: "I prepared these for you early, what we're doing today is very important, so you must give it your all. I won't skimp on the 3 Candy Beans, I'll give them all to you."

[Wow!!!] Hearing Ji You say this, the Six Spiritual Threads became even more thrilled, each starting to circle around in the Spirit Space...

Watching this scene, Ji You secretly snickered, thinking to herself: No matter how clever or smart you threads are... what of it? As long as you can't kick this gluttonous habit, you'll always be exploited by me.

After that, Ji You gobbled up the 3 Candy Beans, watching the Iron Plate within the Spirit Space immediately emerge, contesting with the Spiritual Silk for the Candy Beans, and felt a wave of speechlessness...

The Six doltish threads were exploited by her, yet they still helped count the money.

But—

Looking at it from another angle, Ji You herself was actually the pitiful wretch repeatedly exploited by the Iron Plate, also counting money for it.

Look—

Any good stuff, whether it's Candy Beans, Butterfly Honey, Cloud Mist Tea... anything beneficial for spiritual power, the Iron Plate always wanted the lion's share.

To this day, not only can Ji You not exploit the Iron Plate, but she also has no way to deal with this Gold Swallowing Beast. Moreover, she still has to grit her teeth and support this glutton.

Ying~

How can the two words 'miserably pathetic' be sufficient to describe this?

After the Iron Plate and Spiritual Threads finished snatching away the 3 Candy Beans, Ji You watched the Iron Plate disappear with a dark expression, turned her head, and said to the Six Spiritual Threads: "Get to work! Get to work! If you don't start working, it'll be daylight soon!"

Reluctantly, the Six Threads understood that today they wouldn't get any more Candy Beans from their stingy Master, so they settled down and began working for Ji You.

Having said that, Ji You rolled up her sleeves, took out her tools, and determined to craft the best Soul Device for Senior Shi Ya that she possibly could.

Chapter 436: Making a Gift

As night fell, all around was quiet.

Ji You made up her mind to proceed and did not hesitate; she picked up her tools, first took out the materials needed, and then determined the proportions to use.

She had previously carved materials like grass seed and Companion Stone and had a decent success rate, so using 'Mithril', Ji You was filled with confidence.

She cut a palm-sized piece of Mithril into nine small pieces, each about the size of a fingernail, allowing for a certain failure rate.

Even if 4 or 5 of the 9 pieces of Mithril material failed, it wouldn't matter.

Ji You picked up a piece of Mithril, took out a small cutter, and carefully cut the four corners. After cutting, she used a polisher to gradually make the edges smooth and round...

This was a meticulous task requiring great care. Fortunately, the Six Stupid Strands in Ji You's Spiritual World were very compliant at this moment, doing exactly as told.

These Stupid Strands were lazy and gluttonous, each one with schemes that often gave Ji You a headache, and seemed to have nothing but flaws...

However— these Spiritual Threads showed great sense in major matters. For instance, during the battle with the Fourth-level Star Beast at Taoyuan Space Station, Ji You didn't have good things to feed them, but they still fought alongside her wholeheartedly.

And in the online competitions, during several crucial battles, Ji You won with the extraordinary performance of the Spiritual Threads.

And more...

There were many examples. These Spiritual Threads, though clever as if they were enchanted, were after all part of Ji You's body and depended on her existence. They understood the principle of shared fate, and although they often acted coquettishly or threw tantrums to gain various benefits, they were unequivocal when it came to their master's important matters.

Like now, Ji You wanted to give Senior Shi Ya the best gift she could, so before officially starting production, she sternly declared in the Spiritual World that they must work diligently without any negligence! The Six Strands chirped in protest, but they dared not slack off in action.

Polishing the Mithril, the first to act was Boss, robust in build and precise in work. Coordinating with Ji You's meticulous operation, it took about 30 minutes to smooth the four corners of the Mithril piece.

At this moment, the shape of the entire piece of Mithril had turned into a four-leaf clover.

Correct.

The gift Ji You wanted to give to Senior Shi Ya was a necklace in the shape of a four-leaf clover!

A four-leaf clover symbolizes luck. Before making it, Ji You had many ideas flashing through her mind—necklaces, bracelets, anklets, earrings, Mecha models...

In the end, thinking of Senior Shi Ya's personality, Ji You decided to make a simple, understated necklace. As for the design of the pendant, what exactly should it be?

After much deliberation, Ji You thought of the four-leaf clover. Although she hadn't known Senior Shi Ya for long, Ji You felt inexplicably close to her. From her first meeting, beneath her cold exterior, Ji You could feel her inner softness and kindness...

This girl, so wonderful, thus Ji You hoped the world would treat her kindly, and that luck would always envelop her...

This was Ji You's most beautiful and sincere blessing to Senior Shi Ya.

...

After finishing the pendant shape, looking at the exquisite four-leaf clover in her palm, Ji You was very satisfied. Next came the crucial step.

Engraving the Array Diagram.

From Teacher Cheng Yu's classes, Ji You knew that the patterns she used to carve on the Soul Devices were actually types of Array Diagrams, and Array Diagrams were critical to the formation of Soul Devices!

Otherwise, no matter how finely crafted the four-leaf clover pendant was, it would just be an ordinary pendant.

What to engrave?

Regarding the steps to engrave an Array Diagram, Ji You actually had no idea; each time, she relied on a burst of inspiration and completed it in one go.

This time, Ji You planned to do the same. Holding the engraving pen, she pondered for a moment and then began to carve...

The pendant's embryonic form had a very small surface area, giving Ji You limited space to work with. She decided to fill the entire pendant with the Array Diagram. Naturally, the Array Diagram would also be a four-leaf clover pattern, Ji You carefully carved along the four edges...

But as soon as Ji You picked up her engraving tool, she couldn't complete the task in one go; she paused several times along the way. It was the unfamiliar feeling of not having engraved for a long time. Ji You struggled through the discomfort and finally reached the last step...

Then—

Ji You shouted aloud: "Boss, Second, Third... all six of you team up!"

The final step required the embellishment of Spiritual Silk.

The Six Strands waved their tails, full of confidence: [Master, rest assured, we guarantee to complete the task!]

Ji You focused, her fingers tightly gripping the engraving pen, and made the final stroke...

Ding~

At the very moment Ji You made her stroke, led by Boss, the Six Strands swiftly darted into the clover pattern that Ji You had drawn. Their robust figures now moved like agile snakes...

In the blink of an eye, the Six Strands circled around, and the clover pattern they traveled through, originally dull and dim, suddenly started glowing brightly...

The lustrous gloss, so vivid, seemed like it was about to move the next second!

Ji You was overjoyed! She knew it was a success!

Just as Ji You was about to savor the accomplishment, suddenly—

The radiant clover pendant made a cracking sound, and the next second, it shattered into several pieces.

Ji You: "!!!"

Ji You was so shocked her eyes nearly popped out!

Damn!

What happened?

It was clearly successful on the last step!

She had already seen the formation of the Soul Device; why did it suddenly break?

Ji You was utterly baffled and immediately took out a sophisticated detector to carefully examine the shattered mithril...

Upon inspection, Ji You discovered that the original molecular density of the mithril had dropped by at least 30%!

What happened?

Ji You was sure she had done nothing but cut the mithril and carved an Array Diagram on it!

To think, it actually reduced the molecular density of the mithril!

...

After checking several times and finding nothing unusual, Ji You speculated that it might be a mismatch between the Array Diagram and the mithril material, or perhaps, the pauses she made while carving had caused the Array Diagram to be unstable...

In any case, there could be many reasons; it was just one failure, Ji You wasn't discouraged, and she started her second attempt.

This time, Ji You again carved the clover pattern, but she wasn't in too much of a hurry and was more careful and attentive. Perhaps because of her full concentration, this time Ji You completed the carving in one go.

Then, just the last step left, and the Six Spiritual Threads cooperated well, once again completing the task perfectly.

Ji You was full of anticipation—

Was it a success?

Or a failure?

Chapter 437: Never Admit Defeat!

Ji You's eyes widened with full anticipation—

A light like twinkling stars gradually emerged from the Clover pendant, then the light grew brighter and brighter...

second.

seconds.

seconds.

...

As time passed, Ji You's anxious heart was slowly relaxing!

It's done!

Definitely!

Ji You's furrowed brows relaxed, her lips curled upwards, just about to say something when suddenly—

Crack—

A crisp sound, and the Clover pendant shattered into pieces in an instant!

Ji You: "..."

Ji You felt nearly suffocated!

She simply couldn't believe her own eyes! She clutched at her chest, feeling her whole body on the verge of collapse!

How could this be!

How could this possibly happen!

It was clearly successful! It was successful! How could it have failed again?

What on earth is going on?

Ji You took out the detector again, meticulously testing the shattered Mithril, not missing a single detail...

This time, the molecular density of Mithril had dropped again, and even more than last time—a straight drop of 40%!

40%!

What's going on?

Was it the instability of the Array Diagram that caused the collapse?

Or was it the reduced molecular density of Mithril that caused the material to fail?

...

Ji You furrowed her brows, lost in thought, but still without a clue.

Helpless, Ji You decided to use the process of elimination, switching to another Array Diagram to see if it was the instability of the Clover pattern that led to the pendant's collapse.

Once more, Ji You took out the third piece of Mithril, polished it into a Clover-shaped pendant as usual, and then started to carve an Array Diagram on the pendant. This time, Ji You didn't stubbornly carve the Clover pattern again but switched to another shape, carving a triangle on the Mithril.

Worried about the stability of the figure's structure, Ji You drew a simple triangle, of course, utilizing the stability of a triangle!

This time, the Array Diagram shouldn't collapse, right?

The moment the pen touched, Six Spiritual Threads leaped from the ethereal Spirit Space, streaming into the pendant along the tip of Ji You's pen...

Whoosh~

Settled—

Ji You held her breath, nervously staring at the pendant on the workbench...

second.

seconds.

seconds.

...

A minute passed, and the pendant shimmered with a layer of lustrous light, appearing full of vitality.

Is—

Is it done?

Ji You still dared not relax her vigilance—

Her eyes, unblinking, didn't dare to move away one bit, and then—

Ji You watched as tiny cracks began to form on the Mithril, the cracks widening until finally with a snap—

It collapsed!

Ji You: "..."

Ji You raised her hand, rubbing her slightly sore and swollen eyes, then looked down to ponder:

Changing the Array Diagram, but it still failed, what does this mean?

Does the problem not lie in the Array Diagram?

Then, the results of the Mithril's molecular density check came out, this time showing a decrease of 45%!

Higher than the last time!

Although Ji You was very disappointed and regretful, she still didn't give up and started her fourth attempt...

This time, she changed materials, switching the main material to a type of Companion Stone left over from her last assignment.

The steps remained the same: she still polished the pink, almost rose quartz-like Companion Stone into the shape of a clover. The stone was crystal clear; although it didn't look as modest as Mithril, it was also exceptionally cute and beautiful...

Ji You was very satisfied.

Then, she began inscribing the Array Diagram, channeling the Spiritual Silk... a series of movements, executed in one go!

The moment the pink pendant was completed, Ji You was herself taken aback! So pretty! So girlish!

And then—

Crack—

It broke!

Not just broke! It turned to powder in less than a second...

This time, the pendant cracked before Ji You even had time to react!

Ji You: "..."

Ji You took a deep breath, checked with an expressionless face, and came to a conclusion, "This Companion Stone is even more fragile than Mithril!"

Mithril is not good, and this Companion Stone is even worse.

So—

Is the problem not with the materials?

Ji You was conflicted!

She grabbed her hair fiercely, unable to understand where the problem lay.

By now, Ji You also understood the reason mentioned on the Star Network why the success rate of Soul Artifact Makers was low!

Like this, with no clue of the reason, continuously failing, failing, failing... It was indeed both speechless and disheartening...

Ji You clutched her head, began recalling her previous successes; originally, she didn't even know what an Array Diagram was, yet she somehow managed to craft so many low-level soul artifacts, so blindly—bringing it up would make her luck seem astounding!!!

What was going on at that time?

Ji You couldn't quite figure it out; she only vaguely remembered that during the entire process of crafting the soul artifacts to their completion, she was in a very mystical atmosphere...

But, she also had a bit of that mystical feeling today, so why did it fail?

Ji You started the 5th attempt!

The 6th attempt!

The 7th attempt!

The 8th attempt!

...

While crafting, she summarized her failures, until finally, Ji You had completely thrown disappointment to the back of her mind, focusing solely on researching, analyzing, summarizing...

After using up the Mithril cut into nine pieces, Ji You took another palm-sized piece and cut it into nine!

Then, all nine of these attempts also ended in failure.

Ji You stopped her work, feeling a bit of heartache as she looked at the scattering Mithril fragments on the workbench!

This Mithril needed to be extracted from several rather precious ores, so it was quite expensive, charged by its weight in grams. Fifty credit points for each gram, a palm-sized piece approximately 200–300 grams, meaning one piece was about 10,000–15,000 credit points.

Now, Ji You had already wasted more than 30,000 credit points; the pain was almost leaving her breathless.

She knew that she had bought three palm-sized pieces of Mithril in one go. Buying in bulk could save a few hundred credit points. She intended to use them for this semester's Material Department assignments because there was a large demand for Mithril in this term's material class; Ji You originally thought that these pieces of Mithril would last her till the end of the semester...

Ah!

Gone!

Such agony!

Although it was painful! The repeated failures also ignited Ji You's unyielding spirit!

Failure—then continue!

Until—it doesn't fail!

Ji You took out the last piece of Mithril, cut it into nine, and once again immersed herself in crafting.

Suddenly—

In the Spiritual World, Sixth wobbled and cried out to its master: [Master! Master! Master! Sixth can't hold on any longer, I need to rest for a while...]

Old Five too, with head held high and tail wagging: [Master, Old Five also requests a rest!]

Fourth, the cunning one, seeing the situation, although still able, started to shirk: [Ouch! Ouch! Ouch! Fourth can't take it anymore!]

Old Two and Third looked at these three, then at Boss, somewhat undecided...

Boss, with a majestic flick of his tail: [Master! Don't worry, the three of us can still hold on!]

Ji You looked at the Six Spiritual Threads, and suddenly, a flash of inspiration struck her mind!

Chapter 438: Scared the Threads to Death

Hmm?

Looking at the Six Strands in the Spiritual Space, particularly the panting Old Five and Sixth, Ji You had a sudden realization, feeling like she had overlooked something...

What was it?

Could it be that her Spiritual Silks had been working too hard?

No—

Impossible, surely!

This guess shocked Ji You, making it almost unbelievable.

Why so? Because Ji You had also searched the Star Network for information about Soul Artifact Manufacturing, but the information on this topic was extremely scarce on the Star Network, mostly consisting of scattered phrases, and a lot of it was speculation by laymen...

In general, the art of Soul Artifact Manufacturing is very mysterious, and practical, reliable information can hardly be found on the Star Network. Also, this field has recently emerged only about two hundred years ago, so society hasn't formally established a systematic discipline for it. To learn, one must be attached to a Soul Artifact Master's laboratory. These laboratories are usually established by well-known personal Soul Artifact Masters, and the thresholds to get in are very high...

For example, Kong Zhe, a famous Soul Artifact Master of the Alliance, has established his own soul device laboratory, under which he has trained many students, among whom Lin Feng is the most talented. In less than 10 years, Lin Feng had become qualified.

The first low-level soul artifact that Ji You purchased on the Star Network for 1 million credit points was crafted by Lin Feng, a student of Master Kong Zhe.

Lin Feng himself has a high spiritual power, outstanding talent, and a strong understanding, which allowed him to become qualified in less than 10 years.

But—

Even someone as talented as Lin Feng has so far only managed to make low-level soul artifacts, and he hasn't even come close to touching upon the intermediate or high-level soul artifacts, let alone successfully create one.

Why is that?

Because, while low-level soul artifacts are common, high-level soul artifacts are hard to come by.

Moreover, the formation of intermediate and high-level soul artifacts requires very stringent conditions, and even Master Kong Zhe cannot guarantee success.

Why is that?

Ji You once found a piece of gossip on the Star Network that said a large part of the reason for the failure in soul artifact production was the insufficiency of the maker's spiritual power. Whether it is a low-level, intermediate, or high-level soul artifact, a sufficient amount of spiritual power is needed during its formation to turn the Array Diagram on the soul artifact into a complete, sustainable system, allowing the maker's spiritual power preserved in the Array Diagram to circulate independently, maintaining the stability of the soul artifact...

Thus, Ji You today had her Six Strands fully cooperate with herself in the manufacturing process.

Could it be—

That the gossip she saw on the Star Network was unreliable?

Could the repeated failures be because the engraved Array Diagram and the Mithril couldn't withstand so much spiritual power?

With this thought flashing through her mind, Ji You could no longer ignore it; after all, practice is the only way to reveal the truth!

Ji You decided to act immediately!

She turned her head to the enthusiastically tail-wagging Boss, Second, and Third, who were ready to get back to work: "I have a new idea, Second and Third, you two wait a moment, only Boss using a single strand."

Second and Third, upon hearing they could take a break, instantly had their lazy sides take over, they quickly nodded, and enthusiastically wagged their tails: [We'll listen to the Master!]

Ji You turned to Boss and encouraged: "Boss, it's all on you later, you must give it your all."

Previously all six strands were engaged together, but now it's only Boss alone. Ji You worried about not having enough spiritual power and also that Boss might slack off, so she gave a firm reminder.

Fortunately, Boss, after all, was the Boss, it had a bit of responsibility, and it wagged its tail indicating: [Master, rest assured! Guaranteed to complete the task!]

Ji You says do it and she does it. However, this time in order to save costs, she dared not use Mithril again. Instead, she decided to practice using some of the useless Companion Stones left from material class.

The batch of excess Companion Stones from material class were all pink, just like rose quartz, very beautiful, totaling 12 pieces. Ji You polished all 12 Companion Stones into the shape of clovers in one go.

Actually, just from their appearance alone, they were already pleasing to the eye, but in the interstellar era where people are pragmatic focussing solely on utility without an artistic bone in their bodies, they don't understand or appreciate such beauty.

Alas!

Don't mention it then!

Ji You picked up the engraving pen and started to draw the Array Diagram. With a complete clover pattern in her mind, she completed it in one go. The moment the pen touched the paper, Boss immediately sprung out, jumping into the Array Diagram through the tip of the pen...

Whoosh~

After making a smooth round inside, the Boss, who came out again, had its chubby body slightly reduced, and its glossy skin had also dimmed a bit...

Seeing this, Ji You knew that Boss had given it his all, and she felt very satisfied and relieved.

She dared not relax and immediately turned towards the pink clover stone on the workbench...

second!

Boom—

It cracked!

Ji You: "..."

Ji You was speechless!

Was the guess wrong? Or did Boss exert too much force just now?

Ji You, with a stern face, said, "Again! This time, Second, you go. And don't use full strength, use 90% of your power, got it?"

Second stood upright, looking blankly at Ji You.

Ji You: "..."

Taking a deep breath, Ji You held her head in frustration and had no choice but to turn to Fourth, the clever ghost, saying, "Fourth! Your turn!"

Fourth, who was hiding and afraid of being noticed by the Master, suddenly looked up: [Ah!!!]

Ji You, with a grave voice: "This task is best suited for you! Use only 90% of your strength, understand?"

Upon hearing this, Fourth knew he could not escape, and quickly started being clever: [Understood! Don't worry, Master! Fourth is the most obedient and clever, and will definitely try hard to complete the task without letting Master be disappointed or sad again!]

Oh~

What a thoughtful little clever ghost.

If Ji You didn't know Fourth's annoying habits, she would have been deeply moved.

Ji You continued to engrave the Array Diagram—

Fourth seized the opportunity and jumped in at the right time. Then, under Ji You's tense and anxious anticipation, suddenly heard Fourth say: [Master! Master! Should I really use 90% power? If I do... it will shatter!]

Ji You abruptly opened her eyes: "What did you say?"

Fourth screamed: [Ah! I couldn't hold back!]

Crack~

After a clear, crisp sound, the newly formed Companion Stone shattered.

But Ji You could not afford to be disappointed; she wished she could shake Fourth and interrogate: "What were you saying just now? Can you sense how much power is needed?"

This—

What a surprise discovery!!!

If it's really—Ji You was ecstatic in her heart, her eyes brimming with tender feelings as she looked at Fourth: "Fourth! Quickly tell me!"

Fourth, feeling like he was being devoured by his owner's intense gaze—no! Eaten alive, felt really scared inside, twisting his neck and turning his head, whispered timidly: [It... it's not really, it's just—]

Ji You loudly: "Just what! Speak up!"

Fourth: [...]

Scared... scared Sixth to death.

Chapter 439: Sly Fourth

Ji You stared at Fourth nervously. Fourth shrank its neck, scared to the point of nearly collapsing to the ground...

Ji You: "..."

Fourth: [So...so scared...]

Ji You lifted her hand to rub her brow and said irritably, "Hurry up and spill everything you know! Don't beat around the bush!"

Fourth, with its neck still shrunken, replied puzzledly: [But... but Fourth doesn't know what to say?]

Ji You took a deep breath. If she didn't know Fourth's true colors and traits, she might have actually been fooled by it.

This creature was definitely the most cunning, gluttonous, and sneaky among the Six Strands. When you ask it to work, unless you're forcing it, it will only do just enough to get by, never exerting more effort than necessary!

Yes, that's just how lazy and pragmatic this thing is!

Ji You glanced sideways at it and said, "You just tell me, with what percentage of power would you have been able to prevent it from cracking just now?"

Fourth replied: [Oh㊄㊄! That, eh, 20% would've sufficed.]

Ji You: "..."

Ji You couldn't believe her ears: "What? You only needed 20%?"

Fourth contracted its neck: [Wrong! Wrong! It's 80%!]

Ji You: "..."

Ji You gritted her teeth and said, "Answer honestly, and you won't miss out on benefits!"

It was then that Fourth perked up again, cheerfully responding: [Hmm, about 20-25% should be enough! Also—Master, I like Cloud Mist Milk Tea even better...]

Ji You's eyes twinkled with excitement, although she was somewhat speechless at Fourth's antics. It really never missed a chance to secure benefits for itself!

However, if it really worked out! Ji You wouldn't be stingy! Because the help offered by Fourth was too significant! It was huge! If she could predict and freely control the use of spiritual power for each Soul Device, she wouldn't worry about the success rate of creating them anymore!

This was a jackpot waiting to happen!

A grand windfall was coming!

Fourth, observing Ji You's expression and sensing that the Master must be very happy and easily swayed to hand out benefits at this moment, immediately seized the opportunity and wagged its tail: [Master! Master! Master! Fourth wants to enjoy the Cloud Mist Milk Tea alone! Not sharing with the others!]

Ji You: "..."

Ji You gave a sidelong glance and said, "Let's talk after you have completed the task!"

Fourth's tail stiffened in an instant, feeling deceived, and it stood there looking perplexed: [But Master only just asked Sisi to speak, not to do anything!]

Ji You: "..."

Alright then!

It's even catching my slip of the tongue now.

Fourth, noticing that Ji You looked displeased, immediately swung its tail and lashed out at Old Five, who was lounging comfortably on the side. Startled, Old Five shivered and woke up, looking around.

Pointing its tail at Old Five, Fourth earnestly looked at Ji You: [Master! Master! Master! Let Old Five do the work, Old Five can handle it!]

Ji You: "..."

Old Five shook its neck, not expecting to be singled out, but as this honest kid had just rested a bit and felt refreshed, it honestly nodded its head: [Master! Old Five can give it a try!]

Having closely observed Fourth slacking off and passing the task to another strand, Ji You then turned to the very picture of 'honesty' Old Five, who seemed to be wearing a sign that said 'easy to bully'. After thinking, she agreed, saying, "Alright then! Let's have Old Five do it!"

Old Five: [Master, I will work hard!]

Ji You said, "Do your best, and as for whether to use 20% or 25% power, that's for you to decide."

This time, Ji You didn't give a strict task, leaving it to Old Five to play it by ear.

Seeing Old Five take over the task, the other strands happily enjoyed their leisure, each of them wishing they could make themselves disappear, pretend they didn't exist, for fear of being pulled by the Master for labor.

Concentrating deeply, Ji You gathered her thoughts and carved the Array Diagram once more. Old Five kept an eye on the progress bar, and as soon as the time came, it leapt out...

This time, Ji You watched Old Five's every move intently. Old Five, diving into the Array Diagram, moved quickly, completing the circle in less than a second before returning to the Spirit Space.

But——

The Array Diagram adorned by Old Five's movements and the Companion Stone instantly lit up with a lustrous halo...

This halo, like a layer of thin fog shrouding it, was exceptionally beautiful.

second.

seconds.

seconds.

...

minute passed, the Companion Stone didn't shatter, and the Array Diagram didn't collapse...

Ji You was ecstatic beyond words!

She picked it up and gave it a close inspection, she could confirm that it was a success!

It really was a success!

The originally ordinary pink Companion Stone, after being polished and transformed, looked different on the outside, and if you looked closely, you could even sense an indescribable aura emanating from it.

This is——

A Soul Device!

Definitely a Soul Device!

The only question is, is it low-level? Or Intermediate-level? Or?

Regarding this, Ji You, as the creator, had a vague feeling that it should be low-level.

It definitely did not surpass the threshold of Intermediate-level.

Whether it's low-level or Intermediate-level, now that it's completed, it's absolutely cause for celebration!

Ji You smiled so broadly that her teeth showed but her eyes disappeared. When she looked at Old Five, her eyes were filled with affection: "Old Five, you are a good kid."

Old Five wagged its tail, with a light tone: [Master is also a good Master! Old Five likes Master the most!]

Such a good child! In a flash, Ji You's face beamed with a smile, "Old Five, tell me, how much effort did you just put in?"

Old Five tilted its head, pondering: [46%? 56%? Or 66%?] It said a string of numbers, then flicked its tail abruptly, looking a bit annoyed. [Ah! Old Five isn't clear anymore!]

Fourth stood with its head cocked, looking down on it: [Silly! You just used 39% just now!]

Huh?

Seeing Old Five's expression, Ji You believed that it was probably not deceiving her; after all, this silly kid was honest, and simple to the point of being a bit daft, probably couldn't even count 12345... let alone understand the concept of percentages.

But——

This remark from Fourth... Ji You's eyes flickered, "Fourth, are you sure?"

Fourth nodded, looking enthusiastically for recognition: [That's right! Fourth was watching the whole time!]

Ji You believed it!

Because although Fourth might lack scruples, there was no need for it to deceive her about such matters, moreover, it was clearly making an extra effort, it surely wanted something in return.

Sure enough——

Fourth wagged its tail, circled around Ji You with a flattering face: [Fourth just helped Old Five answer the question, I've helped out Master, doesn't Master want to reward Fourth? Fourth isn't greedy, just one Candy Bean would be satisfying!]

Ji You: "..."

Ji You's voice dragged on: "You really aren't greedy at all, huh!" Totally ungreedy to ask for a Candy Bean right away, which can be purchased at a discount from Teacher Mu Jianling for just 50,000 credit points, indeed not greedy.

Just——

It must've forgotten that its Master was a poor soul, and among the poor, a particularly stingy soul, right?

Seeing the situation turning sour, Fourth immediately changed its tone: [Ah—It doesn't matter if there's no Candy Bean, just remember not to forget the Cloud Mist Milk Tea that Master promised to give to Fourth.]

Ji You narrowed her eyes, her smile was full of charm: "The rewards for you all will not be shorted, now—work harder! Let's get rich together!"

Chapter 440: Ji You Is Heartbroken

Ji You gave the command, and the Six Strands simultaneously swished their tails in the Spiritual World: [Listening to the Master!]

Thinking of the greatly improved success rate of crafting Soul Devices, Ji You waved his hand magnanimously and declared, "Follow me for the good life of eating and drinking well."

The Six Strands shouted in unison: [Wow! Eating and drinking well!]

Ji You set aside the successfully crafted Companion Stone Soul Device, not touching the remaining pieces of mithril just yet, planning to continue practicing with the more common Companion Stones. So, she looked at her Six Strands with a smile and asked, "Who's taking this round?" This time, Ji You didn't intend to be autocratic; she planned to be a democratic Master, seeking public opinion before making decisions...

Fourth shrank back first.

Second and Third looked towards the Boss.

Old Five and Sixth glanced at Fourth and then at the Boss...

After pondering for a moment, the Boss raised his head, straightened his spine, and thumped his chest: [Master! Let me do it!]

Ji You observed the Six Strands' reactions—knowing exactly who was lazy, indecisive, or a follower... As long as they worked honestly without causing mischief, Ji You wouldn't fuss over these issues. Hearing the response, she smiled and said, "Boss goes first! There are still 10 pieces left, you will take turns one by one later. Old Five has already worked once, so he only needs to take one turn. The remaining 3 pieces, Boss, Second, and Third, you three are bigger and stronger, so you'll do one extra turn."

After saying this, Ji You looked at the Boss, Second, and Third with a smile and asked, "You guys don't have any objections, do you?"

Upon hearing this, how could the Boss, Second, and Third object? They couldn't outright refuse the Master and lose face in front of her, could they?

The Master certainly cares a lot about face...

So, the Boss, Second, and Third swayed their tails: [No objections, listening to the Master.]

Ji You was even happier.

She immediately took out her tools and started polishing a Companion Stone the size of a fingernail. The material of these stones, peeled from ores, was actually very fragile and prone to crack under little mishandling. Therefore, Ji You relied on meticulous handwork when polishing...

Perhaps due to the 100% purity of the Spiritual Silk, Ji You could quickly immerse herself in this kind of manual labor. During the process of polishing and engraving, her spiritual power was like a precise instrument, monitoring the Companion Stone from all angles. She could adjust in time before any deviations occurred, making every clover she engraved look lifelike.

Of course, such full immersion also consumed a great deal of spiritual power threshold. After finishing one piece, Ji You let out a heavy sigh, raising her hand to rub her eyebrows: "What's left now, is to engrave the Array Diagram."

What does an Array Diagram look like?

Does it have a basic template? A model? A fixed format?

Or—

Is it actually versatile, depending entirely on the crafter's spontaneous creativity?

...

What's the answer to all these questions? Ji You, as an outsider, had no clue, but she personally inclined toward the Array Diagram being flexible, without a fixed format or style, because—each time Ji You crafted a Soul Device, the pattern on the Array Diagram was different, all a result of happy accidents and random inspiration.

This time, Ji You still planned to engrave a clover-shaped Array Diagram, wanting to see if she could stick to a fixed format for mass production of Soul Devices.

After a short rest, Ji You picked up the engraving pen and began her work.

In the bright dormitory, Ji You quietly traced each line and stroke; her face was calm and composed, exuding an ultimate focus...

Suddenly—

Ji You looked at the pattern under her pen and said, "Boss, get ready to start—be mindful of your strength—"

The Boss nodded vigorously: [Okay!]

Just as Ji You's pen left the Array Diagram for an instant, the next second, the Boss leaped out and dived into the Array Diagram—

Whiz, whiz, whiz...

Despite the Boss's bulky appearance, he was truly agile. He made a quick loop inside the Array Diagram, and the traces he left behind gradually turned from an ashy dullness to a translucent luster... This was— a sign of imminent success!

Seeing this, Ji You was very comforted and said, "Boss, you've set a good example. If we succeed in crafting all of them today, I'll immediately treat you to the good life."

She was not joking.

These ten Companion Stones, if all turned into soul artifacts successfully, even as low-level ones, would be worth at least 2 to 3 million credit points each, that would be how much for ten? Thinking of this huge number, Ji You was already grinning so broadly that her teeth were showing but her eyes were not.

Then—

Boss had just leaped out from the Array Diagram, and Ji You was waiting to inspect the results when suddenly—

Boom—

With a crisp sound, this soul artifact that was just about to take shape disintegrated into dust...

Ji You: "..."

Ji You's face darkened: "Boss! What are you doing? Didn't I tell you to control your strength?"

Boss shrank its neck and tail, looking innocent: [Master, I did hold back. I only used less than 10% of my strength...]

Ji You: "..."

Ji You cursed: "Are you trying to fool a ghost! Do you think I'm a three-year-old child?"

The soul artifact that Old Five just made had used up to 39% of strength, yet Boss dared to say that it used less than 10%, wasn't this downright deceitful?

Boss shrank its neck: [Master! Boss isn't lying! This one you made is too fragile, I was trying my best to tuck in my tail and not damage it, but... but it just broke...]

Boss: [I also don't know why it broke.]

At this moment, Fourth lightly swished its tail, [Master! Boss isn't lying to you, it really only used 7% of its strength just now.]

Ji You: "..."

Boss vigorously wagged its tail: [That's right! That's right! I only used 7%!]

Ji You couldn't help but raise her hand and rubbed her forehead, her budding zeal for making a fortune had been thoroughly doused by Boss's act!

What the heck!

She had just thought that as soon as she started, she would surely be able to craft a soul artifact.

But now—

Ji You felt incredibly frustrated.

Why can Old Five do it?

But Boss can't?

Could it be—Boss is too powerful, causing the Array Diagram to collapse, or is the Companion Stone's material too fragile to hold up? Or perhaps, she hasn't mastered the specific method yet?

Or, should she let Old Five try again?

Ji You suddenly refused to accept defeat, gritted her teeth and tried her best to calm down, saying, "Boss, try again."

This time, Ji You switched to Mithril. Mithril was harder in material, certainly sturdier than Companion Stone. If Boss still shattered it, then maybe Boss just wasn't cut out for this job.

Upon hearing this, Boss quickly nodded: [Master, I will give it my all.]

Ji You quickly polished the Mithril, following the same steps, and just as she was about to stop writing, Boss timed it perfectly, coordinating with Ji You, making the Mithril shine resplendent with the radiance of a four-leaf clover...

Ji You stared with wide eyes, firmly fixed on the Mithril four-leaf clover on the workbench, not missing any slight change.

Just like Ji You, the Six Strands were also very tense.

Is it—

Success?

Or another failure?