

The Beauty 441

Chapter 441 Viral Infection (2)

In view of the arrangements made by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, Ling Chen and others all stayed in Qiu Yong's room, waiting for the test results.

Originally, there was to be a martial arts competition in the afternoon, but, with this incident occurring, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had no choice but to suspend all competitions and devote all efforts to the crisis.

Three hours passed, and daylight gradually faded.

Ling Chen leaned against the window, watching the people whose spirits were flagging and symptoms worsening, his brow deeply furrowed in worry.

He spent the whole day with people like Qiu Yong, and while others were infected, only he was unaffected—could it be that he had antibodies that made him immune to the disease?

While he was thinking, the room's telephone suddenly rang.

Ling Chen answered the call, greeted briefly, and after listening to the person on the other end, he replied, "Okay, I'll come over immediately."

After hanging up, Ling Chen turned to Qiu Yong and said, "Big Brother, I have to step out for a bit but will be back soon."

Leaving the room, Ling Chen took the elevator to the fifth floor of the luxury cruise ship. This area, usually an entertainment lounge and the liveliest part of the ship, was now eerily quiet. At the entrance, Zhong Yang was waiting for him.

"Mr. Ling, please come in." After speaking, Zhong Yang covered his mouth and coughed a few times.

Ling Chen nodded and walked through the door on his own. Immediately, he saw over twenty people in the large entertainment room, some sitting and some standing, all looking rather ill. Ling Chen scanned the room and recognized many familiar faces: Zhou Qi, Zhu Xiaozhu, Han Yu, Shi Su, Song Ge, as well as Zhou Qi's grandson Zhou Jun, along with over ten strangers likely skilled in the medical arts from the Martial Arts community, including a few doctors from the medical office.

"Mr. Ling," Zhou Qi came forward.

"Elder Zhou," Ling Chen greeted and asked, "Did you need me for something?"

"I heard from Miss Zhu that you are also skilled in medicine, so I hoped you could come and help. We need everyone's collective intelligence to see if we can resolve this crisis."

"Elder Zhou, I am merely an amateur, picking up bits and pieces along the way. When it comes to medical skills, there are several here far more proficient than me."

"I already said we had enough people, no need to call him. It's just causing unnecessary confusion," said Han Yu coldly.

Song Ge glanced at Han Yu and chuckled, "Ling, no need to be humble now. We are short-handed as it is, do your best."

"Now that everyone is here, let me brief you on the situation," Zhou Qi began: "According to the blood tests conducted on everyone aboard, over 90% have been infected. There were a total of three hundred and forty participants attending the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. Including the members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and the staff on board, we have over six hundred people here. I believe everyone understands what this means." He glanced at the people around, his expression grave, "Regardless of any past conflicts among us, I hope we can work together sincerely and cooperatively to overcome this crisis."

After speaking, Zhou Qi signaled to a medical staff member.

The latter took out a document, stating, "After preliminary confirmation, we are facing a severe contagious disease whose carriers are the more than ten crew members from the fishing boat earlier today. This disease is airborne, which is why so many have been infected."

Hearing this, everyone kept silent.

The sudden emergence of the infectious disease had already been suspected by everyone, and the medical staff member's words merely confirmed these suspicions.

"What is the condition of those crew members?" asked Shi Su.

"Dead. It was less than three hours after boarding when the crew began dying one by one. We've kept this news under wraps, so no one is aware. Initially, we thought that the crew members had fallen ill from being stranded at sea too long without proper food and water, but our investigations later revealed the presence of a severe infectious disease."

Elder Zhou said sternly, "I'll be frank: we believe this incident was a targeted attack against the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Before the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony began, we received intel that there were plans to disrupt this event. For this reason, our security measures were exceptionally thorough; apart from members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, almost no one knew the specific location of this cruise ship."

Han Yu indifferently added, "It seems your measures were still insufficient; our location has been exposed."

"In this matter, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will not shirk responsibility. However, regardless of who the mastermind is, the most important thing now is to find a way to resolve the crisis. Based on the examination of the dead crew's bodies, those infected will have a latent period of one to two days during which mild symptoms may appear. If we cannot find a solution within two days, I am not exaggerating when I say that the entire Martial Arts community will suffer a catastrophic blow."

Hearing Zhou Qi's words, Ling Chen silently furrowed his brows. Who would be so cruel to use such insidious means, completely indifferent to the lives of hundreds?

"Alright, now that everyone is briefed, please speak up if there is anything needed. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will mobilize all resources to assist."

"Elder Zhou, may I go see the bodies of those crew members?"

"No problem. You, you, and you, escort Ms. Shi to the morgue and fully cooperate with Ms. Shi's work."

"Xiaozhu, let's go."

"Yes, Master." Zhu Xiaozhu stole a quick look at Ling Chen and hurriedly followed Shi Su out of the entertainment room, with Han Yu following along.

Watching Shi Su leave, the remaining ten-plus people looked at each other and quickly followed. Soon, only Ling Chen, Zhou Jun, Song Ge, and a middle-aged man remained in the entertainment room.

"Song, aren't you going with them?"

Before Song Ge could speak, Zhou Jun waved dismissively and said, "Why bother with their pointless meddling? Those people are capable of treating a cold at best; they have no business dealing with this kind of contagious disease. They're following Shi Su hoping she can come up with a solution so they can share in the credit later."

Hearing this, Ling Chen chuckled. This guy really spoke bluntly, with not a care in the world. However, Zhou Jun's words did strike a chord with him.

"Let me introduce myself; my name is Ling Chen, I saw you at the arena a few days ago." Ling Chen extended his hand.

"I've seen you too; the old man hasn't stopped praising you in front of me," said Zhou Jun with a grin, politely shaking Ling Chen's hand.

Song Ge pointed to the middle-aged man and introduced, "Ling, Zhou Jun, this is He Yuan, our Song family's private doctor."

"If it were up to me, the few of us would form a team to try and find a solution before Shi Su does, then we all shine together. How about it?" Zhou Jun suggested.

"I have no objections. I don't know much about medicine anyway; I'm just here to look around with Uncle He," expressed Song Ge.

"What about you, Ling Chen?"

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"Me?" Ling Chen touched his nose and said with a bitter smile, "Don't hold too high hopes for me. I only know a superficial amount."

"No problem. Maybe a few of us half-baked experts combined will be able to fumble our way to a solution."

Ling Chen let out a wry laugh; Zhou Jun seemed to be relying entirely on luck.

"Alright, enough joking, let's talk seriously," Zhou Jun put on a grave face and said: "I've checked the conditions of those patients. Their vital signs appear normal, probably because the virus is still in the incubation period, making symptoms not very obvious. However, considering the speed of infection and the vectors, as well as the symptoms and lethality that have been observed, I suspect this virus may be derived from the plague or cholera."

After some thought, He Yuan said, "Based on the symptoms and signs of the patients, the likelihood of it being the plague virus seems higher."

"Right, that's what I think, too. However, with current medical technology, the plague has already been dealt with. Since someone wants to harm us, they certainly wouldn't use an ordinary strain of the plague virus. In my opinion, this is likely a new type of virus that is based on the plague but has been modified."

After hearing Zhou Jun's conjecture, He Yuan said with a troubled face, "If that's the case, it might be very difficult to find a solution within two days. Any contagious virus has to undergo repeated trials before we can draw a conclusion. We only have two days, and the medical equipment on board is limited, so we can't conduct overly complex experiments."

Zhou Jun scratched the back of his head and said with a headache, "This is indeed a problem." After saying that, he looked at the silent Ling Chen and asked, "Do you have any good suggestions?"

"Me..."

Ling Chen was about to speak when suddenly he heard the sound of helicopter rotors starting from outside.

The four men quickly walked to the window and looked out towards the deck, only to see that two helicopters had already started, and Shi Su was leading the others aboard the helicopters. Meanwhile, several crew members were carrying body bags, preparing to transport them to the helicopters.

He Yuan muttered to himself, "What are they trying to do?"

"I'll go ask Elder Ling," Zhou Jun said, and then ran out of the recreation room quickly.

As the two helicopters took off and disappeared from view, Zhou Jun returned despondently to the group and said helplessly, "Shi Su has thought of the same thing we did; she has already contacted the lab and is taking the bodies of several crew members there."

Ling Chen smiled indifferently, "Why worry about this? It concerns everyone's safety. If they can find a solution within two days, it would actually be good news."

He Yuan nodded and said, "I hope they succeed too, but truth be told, from my years of medical experience, solving a virus in a short time is not an easy task. Even with Shi Su's advanced medical skills, success isn't guaranteed." After saying this, He Yuan turned his head to look at Ling Chen and asked, "Mr. Ling, what were you about to say?"

Feeling everyone's gaze focused on him, Ling Chen hesitated for a moment before saying, "Just now Zhou Jun asked me for any suggestions. In fact, my consideration is different from yours. You're thinking about how to solve the virus problem, but I'm thinking about the mastermind behind the scenes. The person who modified the plague virus would certainly have a corresponding solution. If we can find the mastermind, perhaps we can find the way out."

"That's easy to say, but we're confined at sea now, where do we look for the mastermind? Besides, we don't have any clues at all, we don't even know where to start," Zhou Jun said.

"There are not zero clues."

Zhou Jun's eyes lit up, and he asked impatiently, "What clues?"

"That fishing boat," Ling Chen explained. "Whoever is targeting us must ensure their plan can be executed. To guarantee that, they would definitely keep watch over our movements."

Hearing this, Song Ge immediately expressed agreement with Ling Chen's deduction.

"Ling is right, there's no point in competing with Shi Su since she has already made her move. We might as well try something different; there could be unexpected gains."

"Okay then," Zhou Jun immediately agreed. "I'll go prepare the helicopter. Let's go have a look at that fishing boat together."

He Yuan said embarrassingly, "I better not go. I'm just a doctor with no self-defense capability. I don't want to drag you down."

"Then the three of us will go together."

However, although the three of them had a plan, implementing it was not smooth sailing. Zhou Jun tried to get Zhou Qi to arrange a helicopter, only to be rejected. There were three helicopters on board in total, two of which had been taken by Shi Su. Now only the last helicopter was left, which had to be ready on the ship at all times.

"What do we do now?" Zhou Jun spread his hands helplessly and said with a grimace, "Elder Ling doesn't agree with our action, saying that we are just causing trouble. He told us to stay put on the ship, and we can't go anywhere."

Ling Chen thought for a moment and asked, "Is there a way to distract the security around the helicopter?"

"That's not a problem. The problem is that there's no pilot, and I don't know how to fly a helicopter."

"You don't need to worry about that; it's enough if I know how," Ling Chen smiled with confidence.

"Really?" Zhou Jun said excitedly: "If you had said earlier that you could pilot a helicopter, I wouldn't have needed to plead with that old man. Alright, enough talk, I'll take care of the security. See you at the helipad in five minutes."

It must be said that Zhou Jun was very efficient. By the time Ling Chen and Song Ge arrived at the helipad, the area was deserted, all security personnel had been cleared out.

Sitting in the cockpit, Ling Chen expertly checked the helicopter's instruments and equipment, ensuring there was enough fuel to return to the luxury cruise liner.

"Where are you going?"

Just then, a familiar voice came from outside the helipad. Ling Chen turned his head to find that the person who arrived was Shi Yong. Moreover, his eyes were bloodshot, clearly showing that he was also infected by the virus.

"Of course, to find a way to save your life," Zhou Jun threw out a casual remark.

Hearing this, Shi Yong said, "I'll go with you."

"You?"

Zhou Jun and the others were startled; they did not expect Shi Yong to make such a request.

"I don't want to leave my fate in the hands of others. Instead of waiting to die here, I'd rather fight for a chance."

Zhou Jun looked at Ling Chen and Song Ge, asking, "What do you think?"

"Another pair of hands could be useful; we don't know what situations we might encounter." After speaking, Ling Chen smiled at Shi Yong, "You can go, but make sure to bring your tools."

Ling Chen was well aware of Shi Yong's abilities; having such a skilled ally would be reassuring even in the face of danger.

A few minutes later.

A helicopter carrying the four men slowly rose from the helipad and quickly disappeared into the night sky.

Chapter 443 Striking Directly at the Heart (1)

"These damn kids."

Zhou Qi hurried to the helipad and watched the helicopter disappear into the vast night, unable to stop cursing aloud. He had been keeping the helicopter for a purpose, but unexpectedly, these youngsters actually dared to hijack it. What's even worse, the mastermind turned out to be his own grandson.

Helplessly, Zhou Qi quickly approached a cabin door marked with a warning sign. Pushing the door open, a delicate woman immediately appeared before him.

"I need to see the Pavilion Master."

The delicate woman stepped aside, pointed to the room, and gestured for Zhou Qi to go in.

Entering the room and seeing the person seated behind the curtain, Zhou Qi hurried forward, kneeling respectfully on the floor.

"Did you need me for something?"

"Pavilion Master, Ms. Shi has taken people by helicopter to the nearest city; the disciples of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion have been ordered to start setting up the lab. As soon as Ms. Shi arrives, they can begin the experiment."

"I see, I hope she can help us resolve this crisis."

"Pavilion Master, there's another matter..." Zhou Qi opened his mouth, hesitating to continue.

"Go ahead."

"Zhou Jun, Ling Chen, Song Ge, and Shi Yong took advantage of our unpreparedness and stole the helicopter," Zhou Qi said, bowing his head guiltily. "Zhou Jun led it, all because I failed to guide him properly, allowing this situation to occur. Please, Pavilion Master, punish me."

"Is that so?" Instead of blaming him, Tea Girl asked interestedly, "What are they planning to do?"

"I heard Zhou Jun say they want to find out who is really behind this incident."

"Your grandson seems quite capable, managing to persuade Ling Chen and the others to help."

"Pavilion Master is joking. What capabilities could my grandson have that I don't know about? It was all Ling Chen's idea."

"Well, since they've already left, let them go; we can't catch up with them anytime soon anyway. Ling Chen, Song Ge, and that Shi Yong are not simple either; maybe they really will find something. Although we have Shi Su, we can't pin all our hopes on just her. Alright, you may go."

"Yes, Pavilion Master." Zhou Qi nodded and quickly left the room.

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At this moment, Ling Chen was piloting the helicopter through the night sky towards the direction of a fishing boat.

The fishing boat had been discovered this morning, almost ten hours ago. During this period, the luxury cruise ship maintained full-speed sailing. Through calculations of ship speed and wind power, plus the direction of ocean currents, Ling Chen locked down an approximate location.

After more than an hour of flying, Ling Chen and his companions finally reached their destination. As the searchlights turned on, a bright light immediately appeared on the pitch-black sea surface. Zhou Jun and the other two sat next to the cabin door, looking down, searching for the fishing boat.

"There it is!"

After circling in the air for about ten minutes, Song Ge, with his sharp eyes, finally spotted the fishing boat drifting on the sea.

Target locked, Ling Chen controlled the helicopter, slowly descending onto the undulating sea, less than twenty meters away from the boat. Fortunately, it was a water helicopter left by Shi Su; otherwise, finding a place to land would have been quite challenging.

Once the helicopter landed on the sea, Song Ge took a rope from the cabin and threw it onto the fishing boat. Then, he lightly tapped his toes and leaped onto the fishing boat along the rope.

On the fishing boat, facing the pitch-dark cabin, Ling Chen made a gesture to signal everyone to be as quiet as possible and wait. Then, he threw the backpack he was carrying on the ground, rummaged

through it to find a device the size of a mobile phone, and slowly moved it around the perimeter of the boat.

Soon, the green light on the device instantly turned to red and started flashing. Seeing this, Ling Chen's expression brightened, and he immediately walked towards the direction where the red light was shining. As he moved, the flashing of the red light became faster.

"This is the spot."

Following the red light's direction, Ling Chen came to a mast standing on the deck. Looking around the mast, he discovered a small hole in the middle.

Taking out a flashlight, Ling Chen moved close to the hole, only to see a pinhole camera installed inside.

Indeed!

Ling Chen smirked to himself, his guess was right – someone had installed surveillance equipment on this fishing boat, monitoring the situation onboard.

After the device confirmed that all surveillance equipment on the boat had been cut off, Ling Chen finally breathed a sigh of relief. Presumably, the other party had already achieved their goal, so they cut off the signal on the boat.

Within less than ten minutes, Ling Chen found eight pinhole cameras on the boat's deck and cabin, all placed in hidden spots.

These pinhole cameras all came with independent wireless transmitters, allowing for individual control.

"Ling Chen, what do we do now?" Zhou Jun asked, "These devices surely can't tell us who the mastermind is."

"Don't worry." Saying that, Ling Chen took out a satellite phone and dialed a number.

"Hello?"

Soon, a sleepy voice came from the other end.

"Fatty, it's me."

"Ling Chen? What do you want?"

"Stop sleeping, get up, I need your help. And yes, turn on your computer."

A minute later, Hu Fei's voice came again: "Okay, tell me, what's up?"

"It's like this..." Ling Chen briefly explained the situation but didn't mention anything about the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony.

"Hey, Ling Chen, are you messing with the God Organization again?"

"God Organization?"

"Based on what you just described, achieving remote control in the ocean requires using independent satellite signals, and not everyone can do that. Remember when we hacked into the servers of the God Organization and downloaded some data? Those files mentioned that the God Organization secretly acquired an outdated military satellite in another country – the kind of thing you just described would be a piece of cake for them." After a pause, Hu Fei continued, "By the way, what kind of devices did you find?"

"Wait, let me check."

Ling Chen picked up a set of wireless transmitters, took a closer look, and then reported the model to Hu Fei.

A few minutes later, Hu Fei's uniquely mischievous laughter came through the phone: "Ling Chen, congratulations, you've won the jackpot."

"What do you mean?"

"The wireless transmitter you found is the latest cutting-edge device, military-grade, and only one company in the world has the production rights for these products. According to the data we got from the God Organization, that company is actually one of the God Organization's hidden assets. What do you think, could it be a coincidence?"

Ling Chen frowned, not expecting that after all this detour, the mastermind behind this would actually be the God Organization.

Chapter 444 Striking Directly at the Heart (2)

Although he knew who the mastermind behind the scenes was, Ling Chen still felt some confusion in his heart.

Why is the God Organization targeting the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion? Could it be that the Pavilion is a stumbling block for them? However, as far as he knew, the Pavilion tended only to concern itself with matters within the Martial Arts world and never dealt with other forces, let alone an evil force like the God Organization.

What exactly is the God Organization's purpose in going after the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?

Thinking of this, Ling Chen put down the satellite phone and turned to Zhou Jun beside him, asking: "Have you heard of the God Organization?"

"The God Organization?" Zhou Jun shook his head and answered, "No impression."

After hearing his response, Ling Chen picked up the phone again, walked to the edge of the fishing boat, and spoke: "Fatty, is there a way to track those people's location?"

"It's not difficult to do, I can write a reverse-tracking program and implant it into the wireless transmitter. As long as the signal connects to their server, we can lock onto their location. Do you have a computer there?"

"Yes, wait for me."

Ling Chen gave Zhou Jun a look, and the latter immediately took out a laptop from his backpack. It must be said, while the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was a Martial Arts force, it kept up with the times and had many high-end devices, all of which Zhou Jun had secretly brought along from scavenging in the luxury liner's cargo hold.

Once Zhou Jun connected the laptop to the satellite signal, Ling Chen notified Hu Fei. In less than five minutes, Ling Chen logged onto Hu Fei's private server and began downloading the program.

"Fatty, let's stop here, I have work to do. I'll treat you to a good meal when I get back."

"Okay, take care of yourself."

After hanging up, Ling Chen implanted the reverse-tracking program written by Hu Fei into the wireless transmitter, and then reinstalled the pinhole camera to its original place. Next, he forced the wireless transmitter to start up through the computer.

Everything was set; now it was time to wait.

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At this moment, a staff member who was busy in front of a computer saw a flashing red light on a device nearby and a hint of perplexity appeared on his face.

"Mr. Qi."

Hearing the call of the staff member, a young man in a suit and leather shoes walked over quickly and asked, "What's the matter?"

The staff member pointed to the red light on the device and said, "This is a signal coming from that fishing boat. I remember I already turned off the signal source."

"All devices?"

"No, just one device sent a signal."

"Switch the video feed here."

"Yes." The staff member nodded, immediately connected the signal and displayed the video on the computer screen. However, through the night vision capability of the camera, the fishing boat was silent and empty, nothing to be seen.

"Connect the other signal sources and check."

In a while, eight small frames appeared on the screen, each showing a different scene.

"Mr. Qi, no suspicious individuals found."

"It's possible that the wireless transmitter had a malfunction. It's a new product that was just produced; it could have some issues. Alright, leave it be, cut the signal, and focus on your work."

"Understood."

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"Got it!"

On the fishing boat, Ling Chen looked at the red dot displayed on the laptop and the corners of his mouth instantly turned up.

Zhou Jun excitedly asked, "Did you really find it?"

Ling Chen nodded and swiftly tapped away at the keyboard. Before long, Ling Chen locked onto the exact location of the red dot through its latitude and longitude.

"The target is on a boat, approximately over two hundred nautical miles away from us."

"From here, even with the helicopter's spare fuel, I'm afraid we won't have enough to get back," Zhou Jun said with some concern.

Ling Chen put away his notebook and said, "Let's not worry about that for now. Once we get there, we'll see. Their ship might have spare fuel for the helicopter."

Back on the helicopter, Ling Chen started the engine, and with a buzzing sound, the helicopter slowly took off, disappearing into the vast night.

It was already past ten o'clock at night.

After more than two hours of flight, Ling Chen finally reached the pre-determined location.

Beep beep beep!

Hearing the alarm going off inside the helicopter, Ling Chen glanced at the fuel gauge—the needle was already in the red zone, with very little fuel left, barely enough for another half hour.

"Everyone, hold tight!"

With that, Ling Chen grasped the control stick tightly, lowering the helicopter, almost skimming the surface of the sea as it flew.

Feeling the violent shaking of the helicopter, Zhou Jun, sitting in the co-pilot's seat, clutched the handrail nervously, his back straight as he looked at the pitch-black sea and hurriedly reminded, "Take it easy, brother. I don't want to end up dead in the sea."

"Don't worry, nothing will happen," Ling Chen said with a reassuring smile.

Knowing that they were dealing with members of the God Organization, Ling Chen had to be cautious in his approach. Only by lowering the altitude could he avoid detection by their radar.

Ten minutes later, a large cargo ship slowly sailing came into view of the four.

"That's it." As he spoke, Ling Chen turned off all the lights on the helicopter to avoid being spotted.

Zhou Jun took out the binoculars and observed the situation on the ship, frowning as he said, "This doesn't look good, Ling Chen."

"What's wrong?"

"There are guards around the deck; we have no chance of landing. If we approach like this, we'll probably be treated as sitting ducks."

"Let me see."

Ling Chen took the binoculars from Zhou Jun and scanned from the bow to the stern before finally focusing on the deck of the cargo ship.

"To board the ship without alerting the guards is nearly impossible; we'll have to go in hard," Zhou Jun said.

"Song, Shi Yong, do you have any ideas?"

"Since we followed you out here, you tell us what to do. We will follow your lead," Song Ge and Shi Yong declared their position one after another.

Hearing this, the corners of Ling Chen's mouth lifted, and a sharp light shone in his eyes as he smiled and said, "Alright, then let's make a big move."

Having said that, Ling Chen piloted the helicopter, quickly gaining altitude, no longer concerned about being discovered as he dove straight toward the cargo ship.

Two hundred meters... one hundred meters...

At this moment, the guards patrolling the ship received orders from the control station and immediately rushed to the stern, aiming their guns at the helicopter in the night sky that was getting closer and closer.

However, just when everyone was ready to pull the trigger, the helicopter, which had been flying in a straight line, suddenly changed direction, bypassing the stern and flying toward the bow from the side.

"Quick, follow it!"

At the command, dozens of guards hurriedly sped up their pace, carrying guns from the stern towards the bow.

At this time, the helicopter had already successfully reached the bow, less than four meters above the deck. As the cabin door opened, Song Ge, Shi Yong, and Zhou Jun jumped down one after the other, quickly finding cover and protecting themselves behind it.

Ratatata! Ratatata!

A series of gunshots rang out, and more than a dozen bullet holes appeared instantly on the front windshield of the helicopter.

Seeing dozens of guards with guns rushing over, Ling Chen, sitting in the cockpit, sneered and gently pushed the control stick forward with his arm.

Suddenly, the helicopter, hovering at a low altitude, tilted forward and dove straight at the group of guards.

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As the helicopter's nose was about to crash into the ground, Ling Chen quickly pushed open the cabin door, jumped out of the cockpit, rolled on the spot, and hid in a nearby shelter.

Bang!

Accompanied by a loud explosion, the helicopter slammed violently into the ground, sliding forward as the high-speed spinning rotors instantly minced the guards who couldn't escape in time, their blood mingling with severed limbs flying through the air.

Unfortunately, the helicopter's fuel had been exhausted, and though it sparked from the friction, it didn't ignite the fuel tank. Otherwise, the destruction would have been much greater.

However, eliminating half of the guards was a very satisfying outcome.

"Go, quick battle and quick decision!"

With a light shout, Ling Chen reached for his waist, flipped over from behind the shelter, and threw several daggers from his fingertips, knocking down several guards rushing towards him.

At the same time, Shi Yong, holding a shield clad in armor and wielding a broad Horse-slaying Saber, charged boldly towards the guards, undeterred by the weapons in their hands.

With Shi Yong's shield blocking the bullets, Song Ge and Zhou Jun closely followed behind, looking for opportunities to strike.

Under the fierce overpowering force of Ling Chen and his team, it took less than two minutes to wipe out all the guards on the deck.

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"Mr. Qi, all our men have been dealt with."

"What?" The young man's face changed, and he said sternly, "How many intruders are there?"

"Four, led by Ling Chen."

"Him again!" The young man's face turned livid, and he hurriedly pulled out a satellite phone, dialing a number.

"Mr. Yun, it's me. We are under attack by Ling Chen... Yes, I understand." After hanging up the phone, the young man looked at the cabin crew and ordered, "Immediately destroy the hard drives, clear all data, activate the self-destruct sequence in ten minutes, and head to the evacuation point after processing."

"Understood!"

After giving instructions to the personnel present, the young man walked out of the room alone, through a corridor, and entered a cargo hold secured with a fingerprint lock.

The spacious cargo hold, dimly lit, had rows of red indicator lights flashing continuously on the wall, conspicuously eye-catching.

As the main lights turned on, the cargo hold instantly became brighter.

Along the wall, more than ten individual cryogenic chambers were lined up, each with a transparent glass top. Through the glass, the faces inside the cryogenic chambers were clearly visible.

However, what was even more peculiar was that the faces all looked strikingly similar, as if they were cast from the same mold.

The young man walked straight to one of the cryogenic chambers and entered a long string of passwords on the digital keypad on the surface. When the confirm button was pressed, a stream of cold air immediately burst out from the chamber, and simultaneously, the red light at the bottom of the chamber instantly turned green.

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At this moment, on the deck of the cargo ship, Ling Chen walked up to a large tarpaulin, lifted it vigorously, and, looking at the helicopter hidden beneath, turned to Zhou Jun and said, "You stay here, don't let anyone get close to this helicopter, whether we can escape or not later depends on it."

Zhou Jun gave an 'OK' gesture and confidently said, "Don't worry, if I can't handle this little task, I'll cut off my head and kick it around like a ball for you."

"Song, Shi Yong, let's go."

As he spoke, Ling Chen, holding the Tianling Blade, took the lead and quickly headed into the hatch towards the bottom of the ship.

Descending the stairs to the mid-level of the ship, Ling Chen was about to speed up, but suddenly a huge force burst open a nearby cabin door. Luckily, Ling Chen reacted in time, quickly dodging backward to avoid being struck by the door.

After a second of daze, Ling Chen immediately saw more than a dozen people appear from the cabin door. Not only were these people tall and robust, but they all looked identical.

However, what truly shocked Ling Chen was that these people's faces were... Blood Wolf's!

How could it be him again?

Ling Chen frowned, his expression as dark as water. Back on that island, he had seen a man in the prison who resembled Blood Wolf, only to see Kaelina ruthlessly shoot him dead. Now, there were so many men who looked exactly like Blood Wolf on this cargo ship; even someone as experienced as Ling Chen couldn't keep calm in this situation.

As he saw a few men charging towards him, Ling Chen quickly cleared his mind, focusing solely on the crisis at hand.

"Brother Song, Shi Yong, be cautious; these are Enhanced People, both strong and highly defensive."

Hearing this, Shi Yong fearlessly lifted his shield and said indifferently, "Well, I want to test that." After speaking, he leaned forward and exploded with power from his feet, rushing towards the man in front of him.

Bang!

With a muffled sound from the shield, a man who tried to collide with Shi Yong was instantly sent flying, his arm hanging limply, clearly shattered by the impact of the shield.

"Strong?" Shi Yong shook his head dismissively: "Not even close."

Meanwhile, Song Ge had already effortlessly taken down two opponents.

Seeing this, Ling Chen was momentarily stunned. How had these Enhanced People become so weak? It was like bullying the weak; they had no power to fight back.

He didn't realize that it wasn't the Enhanced People who had become weaker; it was his standards that had risen. No matter how strong the Enhanced People were, they were ultimately forcibly enhanced through external means and couldn't compare to true Martial Artists.

"Ling, leave this to me. You go handle the important stuff."

"Alright, meet up on the deck later." As he finished speaking, Ling Chen immediately ran towards the bottom of the ship.

In no time, Ling Chen found the main control room of the cargo ship. The room was deserted, leaving only computers and equipment. Seeing the progress bar on the computer screen, Ling Chen's expression shifted as he cursed inwardly, those guys had deleted all the data before leaving.

Not wasting another thought, Ling Chen hurried to the computer, and while the data wasn't completely erased yet, he opened the file archive, rapidly browsing through the files.

"Virus... virus..."

Ling Chen murmured to himself, scanning multiple lines at a glance. Seconds passed, and he finally found a folder named 'plague'.

Opening the folder and seeing the data displayed on the screen, Ling Chen couldn't help but clench his fist.

Fortunately, this data hadn't been erased yet.

He plugged in his USB drive and copied all the data about the virus. Just as he finished copying, the computer screen went black, and all data was erased.

However, just a few seconds later, a box suddenly popped up on the screen, displaying the number 'thirty'.

As the number steadily decreased, Ling Chen immediately realized.

They had activated the self-destruct program!

With less than twenty-five seconds left, Ling Chen didn't dare to delay; he dashed out and sprinted towards the deck at full speed.

Chapter 446 A Desperate Situation

It took Ling Chen more than ten seconds to finally reach the deck. By then, Song Ge and Shi Yong had already met up with Zhou Jun, waiting for his arrival.

"Ling Chen." Zhou Jun smiled and waved, pointing to the young man on the ground, saying, "This guy wanted to escape by helicopter, but I took care of him."

Eleven... Ten... Nine...

At this moment, Ling Chen had no time to bother with that young man; he was silently counting down the self-destruct program in his head. With less than ten seconds left, starting the helicopter to escape was an impossible task.

Five seconds!

Without time to think further, Ling Chen shouted urgently to the three people with Song Ge: "Run!"

Hearing his roar, Song Ge and the others were stunned, not understanding his intent. However, seeing the anxious look on Ling Chen's face, Song Ge and the others didn't think twice. They immediately followed Ling Chen's lead and ran quickly toward the side of the ship.

Boom!

With a thunderous explosion, the cargo ship's hold burst into flames, and the powerful force of the explosion split the hull instantly. At that moment, under Ling Chen's lead, the four men jumped from the ship into the pitch-black sea.

The icy seawater surged from all directions. Ling Chen held his breath, dived into the sea, frantically paddling with his arms, swimming away from the cargo ship in the opposite direction, trying to avoid the explosion's reach as much as possible.

Though submerged underwater, the sounds of the sea surface's successive explosions still reached his ears; flames nearly covered the surrounding water, and heavy objects fell into the sea.

After swimming dozens of meters, Ling Chen emerged from the water, gasping for air. His gaze pierced through the layers of flames, searching for the whereabouts of the others.

"Zhou Jun, Shi Yong, Song!" Ling Chen shouted at the top of his lungs.

"I'm here." As Zhou Jun's voice sounded, Song Ge and Shi Yong also called out in response. Seeing the three of them were all right, Ling Chen breathed a sigh of relief. Looking at the slowly sinking cargo ship in the distance, Ling Chen couldn't help but let out a bitter smile.

Great, now the cargo ship had been blown up, the helicopter on board had sunk to the bottom of the sea, and not even a motorboat had been left behind. In this vast sea, where could they seek rescue?

While pondering, Zhou Jun and the others swam over one after another, gathering around Ling Chen. Watching the cargo ship gradually being engulfed by the sea, all four of them wore a somewhat difficult expression.

"Ling Chen, what do we do now?" Zhou Jun asked.

Ling Chen gave a wry smile and shook his head. He carried a satellite phone on him. But when he jumped into the sea just now, the phone got waterlogged, and it was no longer usable. Seeing his helpless expression, Song Ge and the others fell into silence.

At this moment, several oil barrels and broken planks floated over from not far away. With the joint efforts of the four men, they cobbled together a raft from oil barrels and planks, temporarily escaping the sea's chill.

Sitting on the raft, Ling Chen spread open his palm, looking at the USB drive in his hand with a sigh. He had been worried that the USB drive would get waterlogged and be ruined, keeping it clenched in his fist. Unfortunately, even though they had successfully obtained the data, the four of them were now trapped in the vast sea with no escape.

Calling to heaven without answer, calling to earth without response—these two phrases appropriately described their current situation.

"Everyone, I'm sorry, I did not plan thoroughly, making all of us end up in this situation," Ling Chen said with a look of guilt.

Shi Yong said in a deep voice, "I chose to follow you of my own free will; this has nothing to do with you."

"Ling, don't blame yourself for this; nobody expected those people to be so ruthless."

"Come on, let's not act like we're all doomed. Rather than wasting time here, we might as well pray to Buddha—maybe we'll get lucky and have a plane appear out of nowhere." Even in such a dire situation, Zhou Jun's easygoing nature didn't change, as he joked.

However, no one was in the mood to joke with him. With less than two days left, if they couldn't get back in time, it wouldn't just be the few of them at risk.

...

On the luxury liner.

Zhou Qi stood in the pilot house on the top level, anxiously asking, "Haven't made contact yet?"

"Elder Zhou, I've been calling all day, and they haven't responded," the staff member replied.

"Keep calling." After saying that, Zhou Qi looked at the time; it was already past three o'clock in the afternoon. Since Zhou Jun and the others had secretly flown off in the helicopter last night, there had been no news. Zhou Jun's parents died when he was young, and the two of them had relied on each other for many years; Zhou Qi certainly did not want any harm to come to his grandson.

"Elder Zhou."

At that moment, a staff member ran over in a hurry, barely containing his excitement as he spoke, "We just received news that Ms. Shi and the others are on their way back by helicopter, they will arrive in two hours."

"Good!" Zhou Qi's tightly furrowed brows relaxed slightly. After a tense day of waiting, there was finally some good news.

The return of Shi Su and her team at this time suggested they had found a way to crack the virus.

"Notify the medical team to be ready and stand by at all times."

"Yes, Elder Zhou."

In less than two hours, two helicopters flew in one after the other, appearing above the luxury liner. As the helicopters slowly landed, Zhou Qi, who had been waiting, immediately went to greet them with his team.

"Ms. Shi." Zhou Qi greeted her and asked eagerly, "How's the situation?"

Shi Su smiled confidently, "Elder Zhou, rest assured, I have found the solution. Moreover, I've brought two boxes of serum that were rushed out, enough to treat everyone on the ship."

Zhou Qi lavishly praised, "Ms. Shi's medical skills are truly unparalleled in the country."

"Elder Zhou is too kind. It's not just my own merit; thanks to everyone's strong support."

Hearing Shi Su's words, the people behind her all smiled, visibly overjoyed. They all knew the real effort came from Shi Su and her disciples; they did little more than assist, mostly just watching from the sidelines and not helping much. However, Shi Su's remark made everyone share in the glory, becoming saviors in everyone's eyes.

Given the generosity of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, a handsome reward was inevitable.

"Elder Zhou, we must not delay. Please arrange for the infected patients to be transferred to the deck immediately; I will arrange for my people to administer the serum," Shi Su instructed.

"No problem, everything's prepared; I'll have someone take care of it immediately."

While everyone was waiting for treatment, Ling Chen and his three companions were still floating at sea on a makeshift raft, being pushed forward by the waves.

Though they hadn't eaten for a day, all four had good physical endurance and could survive several days without food or water. However, for them now, food and water weren't the priorities—the key was hope.

Without the hope of survival, everything was empty talk; they could only quietly wait for death to come.

Chapter 447 Unexpected Rescue

At this moment, even Zhou Jun, who usually had plenty of spirit, became dispirited, sitting on the raft with his head down, not saying a word.

Just then, Ling Chen seemed to hear something, suddenly lifted his head, and looked up at the azure sky, searching for something.

Noticing his actions, Song Ge asked, "Ling, what's up?"

Hush!

Ling Chen made a quieting gesture, stood up from the raft, and shaped his hands into a horizontal line to shield his eyes from the sun, scanning the sky.

Following his gaze, Song Ge and the others lifted their heads and saw a black dot appear in the sky as blue as the sea. As the dot approached, a seaplane came into view.

"It's a plane!" Zhou Jun's face lit up with joy, and he excitedly yelled, "Haha! We're saved."

Before long, the seaplane seemed to notice them, descended gradually, and touched down on the surface of the sea.

As the raft approached the plane, someone pushed open the cabin door, and a round, chubby face poked out, looking at Ling Chen with a teasing smile, "Is drifting at sea fun?"

Seeing the person, Ling Chen was taken aback and exclaimed in surprise, "Fatty?"

He had never expected the person inside the plane would be Hu Fei.

"Surprised?" Hu Fei laughed and said, "Alright, stop gawking and get on board."

After getting on the plane, Ling Chen gave everyone a quick introduction and curiously asked, "Fatty, how did you know where we were?"

Hu Fei replied, "Once the reverse tracking program I gave you establishes a connection, I get a signal too, so I know where you are. I figured you were going to scrap with the God Organization, so I waited at home all night, called at least ten times to ask about your situation, but your satellite phone was unreachable. I got worried you'd been caught by the God Organization, so I chartered a plane over here. Luckily, my luck wasn't too bad, and I stumbled upon the wreckage of that cargo ship. I figured with your skills, you wouldn't have been blown to bits, so I looked around the area, and would you believe it—I actually found you."

Ling Chen was moved by these words and firmly patted Hu Fei's shoulder in gratitude, saying, "You truly are a good brother; I wasn't mistaken about you."

"Oh, cut it out, you're trying to butter me up," Hu Fei said with an expression of disgust, brushing away Ling Chen's hand, and grumbled, "You think I want to save you? You still owe me millions, who am I supposed to get my money back from if you die?"

Ling Chen knew his friend was saying one thing and meaning another, and replied with a laugh, "Alright, I'll double repay you when we get back."

Then, Ling Chen changed the subject and asked, "Fatty, do you have a computer with you?"

"Yeah. What do you need it for?"

Ling Chen threw a USB drive into Hu Fei's hand, "Help me check out the data inside."

Without a word, Hu Fei immediately took out his laptop, inserted the USB drive, and started carefully browsing the files.

"Zhou Jun, contact your grandfather and see how things are going on the ship."

"Okay." Zhou Jun nodded, took the satellite phone from Hu Fei, and dialed the number.

...

"Elder Zhou."

A staff member ran up to Zhou Qi, panting, and handed over a satellite phone, saying breathlessly, "It's Zhou Jun's call."

Without a word, Zhou Qi snatched the satellite phone and immediately started scolding, "You little punk, where did you run off to? Get your butt back here right now!"

"Old man, we are on a plane right now, will be back soon. By the way, how are things on the ship?"

"Ms. Shi has found a solution and is preparing to inject everyone with the serum; none of you cause any more trouble."

Zhou Jun covered the phone with his hand, turned to Ling Chen, and said, "The old man says Shi Su has found a solution."

"Tell Elder Zhou that we've acquired data related to the virus and we're sending it over now, have Ms. Shi verify it to make sure her solution is flawless."

"You got it!"

After hanging up the phone, Zhou Qi's face lost its anger, and he mumbled to himself with a smile, "Didn't expect these brats to have some ability." Saying this, he waved at Shi Su, who was giving out serums nearby, calling her over.

"Elder Zhou, is there something you need?"

"It's like this, Ling Chen and the others found the mastermind behind all this and obtained some viral data; they hope you can check it to ensure there are no mistakes."

"Is that so?" Interest sparkled in Shi Su's eyes as she nodded, "Alright then, have someone send over the data, and I'll make sure to compare it carefully."

Soon, a staff member brought the printed data to Shi Su.

In front of Zhou Qi, Shi Su flipped through the pages, skimming through the information quickly. A few minutes later, she handed the data to Zhou Qi and said with a smile, "Elder Zhou, no need to worry, my solution is perfect."

"That's great."

"If there's nothing else, I'll get back to work."

"Please do."

Seeing Shi Su return, Zhu Xiaozhu asked, "Master, did Elder Zhou want something?"

"It's nothing. Xiaozhu, run to the infirmary and grab some medicine for me." After giving her instruction, Shi Su stopped Han Yu, who was about to leave with Zhu Xiaozhu, and said, "Wait, don't go. I have another task for you."

Watching Zhu Xiaozhu's elegant departure, Han Yu reluctantly withdrew his gaze and asked, "Mrs. Su, what do you need?"

Shi Su leaned in and whispered a few words into his ear, instructing him meaningfully, "Remember, find a few reliable people to do this, and make sure no one else finds out... including Xiaozhu."

Han Yu looked around to make sure no one was paying attention to them before asking quietly, "Mrs. Su, are there issues with those serums?"

"There's no issue, just a few missing components. Add those and there will be no problems. Hurry along, don't waste any more time."

"Understood."

...

Two hours later, the plane carrying Ling Chen and his companions finally arrived near the luxury liner.

As the plane landed on the sea, a motorboat from the luxury liner came out to pick them up. Initially, Ling Chen wanted Hu Fei to head back, but during those short two hours, the foul-smell-compatible, similarly natured Hu Fei and Zhou Jun hit it off as if they were long-lost brothers. Zhou Jun insisted on not letting Hu Fei leave, and so took it upon himself to invite him aboard the ship.

Given his status, even if Zhou Qi found out, at most, he would get a scolding.

"Elder."

Seeing the approaching Zhou Qi, Zhou Jun greeted with a smile.

Zhou Qi glared at him, snorted coldly, and gave them a merciless reprimand, "You youngsters have no discipline at all. If anything happened, how am I supposed to explain to your families, especially you mischief-maker, only knowing how to cause me trouble."

Chapter 448 The Motive of the God Organization

Zhou Jun said with a grin, "Old man, stop schooling us for a moment. At least we've done some good and rescued everyone."

"Pfft, what accomplishment?" Zhou Qi said disdainfully, "You were just stirring up trouble unnecessarily."

Hearing this, Ling Chen asked, "Elder Zhou, are you suggesting that the serum developed by Ms. Shi has no issues?"

"Of course, there are no issues. Everyone has been injected with the serum, and all symptoms have disappeared. Apart from some physical weakness, there's nothing major."

Zhou Jun was dumbfounded, "Really? Old man, don't fool me. Shi Su's medical skills are decent, but are they that incredible? I've studied medicine too, albeit half-baked. But to repeatedly experiment in such a short time and then find the correct solution, that seems impossible."

"Shut your mouth!" Zhou Qi sharply rebuked, "You should be aware of Ms. Shi's relationship with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Don't talk nonsense in the future. If the Pavilion Master hears of this, neither you nor I will have an easy time. Besides, I'm an old man; I have no reason to lie to you kids. Seeing is believing. If you don't trust it, you can go and see for yourself."

Considering the condition of Qiu Yong and others, Ling Chen didn't bother to probe further. After a brief greeting, he immediately rushed to Qiu Yong's residence.

Upon entering the room, he saw Qiu Yong and others there. Except for looking somewhat exhausted, all previous symptoms had vanished. It seemed Zhou Qi was right; Shi Su's serum had worked against the virus.

"Big brother, second brother... are you all alright?"

Yuan Yun replied with a smile, "Better than ever. Eh, Sixth Brother, where have you been? Haven't seen you all day."

"Just out handling some things."

Ling Chen intended to stay and spend time with everyone, but then there was a knock at the door. Turning around, Ling Chen opened the door to see a man in a suit, checking, "May I help you?"

The man politely said, "Mr. Ling, Elder Zhou would like you to come over."

"Alright, I'll be right there."

After saying goodbye to Qiu Yong, Ling Chen left the room with the man in the suit.

Shortly after, under the guidance of the man in the suit, Ling Chen arrived at a conference room. There were not many people inside. Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun were present, and there were also two unfamiliar women, around their thirties to forties, appearing graceful and still charming.

"Mr. Ling, please take a seat!"

"Elder Zhou, what did you need to see me for?"

"Zhou Jun told me about your trip, mentioning you brought up the God Organization. Therefore, I would like to understand more and hope you can cooperate with us."

"That's no problem," Ling Chen nodded. He had expected the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to inquire eventually but hadn't anticipated it so soon, indicating the importance they placed on this matter.

"Mr. Ling, do you believe that the God Organization was behind the scenes targeting the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?"

"It's not a belief, but a certainty. I won't hide from you that I've dealt with the God Organization numerous times, so I can say with one hundred percent certainty." Ling Chen shifted his tone, asking, "Elder Zhou, if I may ask, how much does the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion know about the God Organization?"

Hearing this, Zhou Qi glanced at Zhou Jun beside him and signaled, "You go outside first."

"But old man, I..."

"Less talk, get out now!"

Seeing Zhou Qi's tone become stern, Zhou Jun immediately shut his mouth and obediently left the conference room. Once he was gone, Zhou Qi turned his gaze back to Ling Chen, saying, "Mr. Ling, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion isn't unfamiliar with the God Organization. Furthermore, members of the God Organization have sought us out, hoping to collaborate and use our influence to control the Asian region. However, our Pavilion never allies with evil forces or lends a hand to tyranny, hence we rejected their proposal."

Ling Chen smiled slightly, "That means the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion knows quite a bit about the God Organization."

"Somewhat," Zhou Qi openly replied, "Mr. Ling, you should be aware of our Pavilion's capability in gathering intelligence. When the God Organization approached us, we had investigated this force secretly. However, the deeper we investigated, the more shocking it became. Eventually, the Pavilion Master ordered an end to the inquiry, sealing all information about the God Organization."

"Why?"

"Firstly, we prefer not to clash with the God Organization. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has its principles and codes. Martial Arts are treasures culminating from thousands of years of Huaxia's legacy, and it's our duty to ensure its continuous propagation. Thus, we don't want to provoke too many issues. Secondly, it's for our own protection."

"Protection?" Ling Chen was taken aback. He might believe this from someone else, but Zhou Qi represented the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the most secretive force in Huaxia with great power. Could they still be afraid of the God Organization?

"Mr. Ling, I've reviewed your background. You were a soldier, so you must understand that no matter how times change or how fierce your fighting skills are, there are limits. They can't match modern cutting-edge weapons. Unless you are ranking high on the Heavenly List, but such individuals are extremely rare across Huaxia. In other words, the technology of the God Organization is at the forefront of the era. For us, standing as an enemy against them would place the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion in an extremely precarious situation."

After thinking for a moment, Ling Chen said, "Elder Zhou, not to conceal from you, the organization I previously worked for was committed to countering the God Organization, but due to limited intelligence, our efforts were minimal. Since the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion holds so much information about the God Organization, could you..."

"Sorry!" Before Ling Chen could finish, Zhou Qi had already responded, "I have no authority on this matter; only the Pavilion Master can decide. I can bring it up to him and see what he thinks. But I advise you not to hold too much hope. Regardless of the extent of your struggle with the God Organization, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion prefers to stay neutral."

"Elder Zhou, you want to remain neutral, but the God Organization might not think the same. They've already come knocking. Aren't you planning to just stand by and watch?"

"This... I trust the Pavilion Master will consider it," Zhou Qi replied, standing up and extending his hand, "Mr. Ling, thank you for providing us so much information and for what you've done for the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. As long as you have no objections, we are pleased to consider you as a friend."

"Don't mention it." Ling Chen smiled lightly and turned to leave the conference room.

On the way back, Ling Chen was still puzzled, not understanding why the God Organization would suddenly target the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. The Pavilion had declared its stance of neutrality. By acting in this way, wasn't the God Organization just causing trouble for nothing?

Chapter 449 Appreciation Banquet

Returning to his room and resting for a while, Ling Chen received a notice: the competition for newcomers would continue in two days. Despite a crisis arising, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had no intention of ceasing the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony.

In addition, Ling Chen got an unexpected piece of news: he had been directly promoted, avoiding the match with Lin Dong.

Upon inquiry, he learned that Lin Dong, his opponent, had developed complications due to an infectious disease, leading to health issues. Although the virus had been cleared, his body had not yet recovered and required a period of rest. Therefore, he unilaterally gave up his qualification.

Regardless, this was an unexpected joy for Ling Chen. Not only was he spared a fight, but he also smoothly advanced and got the opportunity to compete with the top five newcomers.

Upon hearing this news, Qiu Yong and the others were very happy.

"Ling Cheng, with two days left, you should take good care of your body. The top five on the Newcomer List are nothing like your previous opponents; they are all true masters, so you must be cautious," Zhang Zhongfeng advised.

"Zhang Zhongfeng, I know."

...

In the blink of an eye, a day passed.

The next afternoon, in his room, Ling Chen sat on the couch with his legs crossed, casually chatting with Hu Fei.

After Zhou Jun's earnest pleading, and considering Hu Fei once saved his grandson's life, Zhou Qi reluctantly agreed to let him remain on the ship.

"Fatty, fatty!"

Ling Chen called out several times before Hu Fei, who was engrossed in his laptop, looked up and asked, "What's up?"

"What are you up to? You didn't hear me calling you," Ling Chen said, approaching Hu Fei's computer, curious about the content on the screen. However, the vigilant Hu Fei quickly closed the laptop and clutched it to his chest as if he was afraid Ling Chen would snatch it away.

"You, this guy..." Ling Chen shook his head helplessly and grumbled discontentedly, "Fine, I won't look. Are you under the impression I'm dying to?"

Hu Fei let out a sly laugh and said mysteriously, "Don't be angry, I'll let you know once I'm done with it."

"Hey! You can connect to the internet?" Ling Chen remembered that signals were blocked on the ship.

Hu Fei scoffed and said, "With my skills, their firewall is no obstacle to me. I hacked into their server as soon as I boarded the ship."

"Okay, you're amazing."

"I'll stop yapping now. Zhou Jun invited me to the entertainment room to relax this afternoon, gotta go!" Hu Fei said, then stood up holding his laptop and walked out.

Opening the room door and just about to leave, Hu Fei saw a young man in a suit approaching politely, handing over an invitation with a smile, "Please hand this to Mr. Ling. Tonight, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will host a banquet in the banquet hall on the fifth floor. We would be honored if Mr. Ling would grace us with his presence."

Holding the invitation from Hu Fei, Ling Chen couldn't help but laugh. People from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion sure had a generous tolerance, still thinking of organizing a banquet at a time like this.

Night fell.

Darkness enveloped, the sea became tranquil, and it seemed like the sound of the rolling waves was the only thing left in the world.

The banquet hall located on the fifth floor of the luxury cruise ship, accompanied by elegant light music, Ling Chen, Qiu Yong, and others arrived at the dinner event. In contrast to the grand attire of everyone present, the "Eight Eccentrics" appeared quite casual and were particularly noticeable among the crowd dressed in suits and leather shoes.

Ling Chen wasn't interested in the banquet, but considering the invitation from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, he couldn't just skip it; that would be disrespectful. Therefore, he decided to show his face and as soon as the banquet officially started, he planned to slip away quietly.

The banquet hosted by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion wasn't much different from the ones Ling Chen had attended before: an elegant and luxurious setting with fine wines and dishes, where every gentleman was dressed to the nines, sauntering among the crowd with a glass in hand.

Ling Chen truly felt that such banquets were a waste of life.

Just then, a wave of gasps sounded at the entrance of the banquet hall. Subsequently, everyone's gaze converged on two individuals.

Han Yu, Zhu Xiaozhu.

Han Yu, dressed in a tailcoat, wore shoes that reflected the feigned smiles of people. However, it had to be admitted that this attire, paired with Han Yu's handsome appearance, did indeed possess a certain charm.

Yet, because of Zhu Xiaozhu's presence, Han Yu was naturally overlooked. The woman who instantly became the focus of the event was like a delicate and vibrant flower, with every gesture and smile radiating her stunning beauty, captivating and enthralling onlookers.

Whether they were in their twenties or in their thirties and forties, almost everyone's gaze was drawn to Zhu Xiaozhu.

Ling Chen stood amid the crowd, gazing infatuatedly at Zhu Xiaozhu, who was wearing an elegant evening gown with a hint of her shoulders exposed, white and smooth. The hem of her skirt flared out slightly, like a blooming peony, refined and noble. Aside from appreciation, no impure thoughts arose in his mind.

Especially those eyes, tender like water, seemingly like a babbling brook, clear and flawless.

However, seeing Zhu Xiaozhu gently leaning on Han Yu's arm, a surge of sourness welled up in Ling Chen's heart, as if a bottle of mixed emotions had been overturned, indescribably uncomfortable.

Sighing, he withdrew his gaze, turned, and found an unnoticed corner to sit down in.

Some things are better left unseen.

7:30 in the evening.

The three hundred-plus guests were now all gathered in the banquet hall. It was at this time that Zhou Qi, dressed in traditional attire, took the stage accompanied by several disciples of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

"Ladies and gentlemen..." As Zhou Qi's voice rang out, everyone immediately quieted down and listened attentively to his opening remarks.

"Due to the unexpected incident two days ago, which caused great inconvenience to everyone and even endangered your lives, I, on behalf of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, would like to extend my apologies. The incident was entirely due to the Pavilion's negligence. As a gesture of our apology, the

Pavilion has prepared a small gift for everyone. Furthermore, please be assured that the Pavilion guarantees that such incidents will not occur again."

At this point, Zhou Qi paused and looked at the audience with a smile, saying, "This time we were able to safely get through the crisis, all thanks to the selfless assistance of a single individual. Even if I don't mention it, I believe everyone knows who that person is. Tonight, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is holding this banquet not only to celebrate our collective survival but also to express our gratitude to Ms. Shi. Now, please welcome Ms. Shi Su to the stage."

As Zhou Qi finished speaking, Shi Su, wearing a black evening gown, looking noble and graceful, with a delicate smile on the corner of her mouth, gracefully stepped onto the stage.

"The Shi Family is blessed indeed."

Qiu Yong glanced at Shi Su on the stage, commenting lightly.

Yuan Yun joined the conversation, saying, "Not just blessed, but after saving so many people on the ship, that act of grace is laid out there. Who would dare to oppose the Shi Family now? With this foundation, the Shi Family can rise anytime within the Martial Arts world."

"Regardless of anything else, we owe her our lives. Gratitude is gratitude and grievances are grievances. We, the 'Eight Eccentrics,' have always been clear about debts of gratitude and revenge. Ling Cheng, do you understand what I mean?"

Ling Chen nodded and said, "Elder Brother, don't worry, I'm not someone who forgets favors and violates righteousness."

Chapter 450 Arrogant Love Rival

"Ms. Shi, do you have anything you'd like to say?" Zhou Qi asked with a smile on stage.

Surveying the crowd below the stage, Shi Su said with a light smile, "The Shi Family has been in the medical profession for generations. As a doctor, healing the sick and saving lives is my duty, and I'm just doing what I should do. Moreover, in resolving this crisis smoothly, I cannot take all the credit alone. First of all, I would like to thank everyone for their great support, especially my apprentice Xiaozhu and Han Yu. As an up-and-coming talent, Han Yu is truly a remarkable individual, not only ranking second on

the Newcomer List but also exemplary in the medical arts. I'm pleased as a Master that Xiaozhu has found such a lifelong partner."

Lifelong partner?

Upon hearing this, the crowd gasped in surprise, their gazes filled with a mix of envy and jealousy toward Han Yu.

With the audience's attention on him, Han Yu held his head high, his face brimming with a proud smile, his eyes roaming through the crowd as if looking for something. Suddenly, his lips curled up in arrogance as he stared disdainfully at a corner of the banquet hall.

Facing Han Yu's gaze, Ling Chen, who had been sitting on the couch, stood up and walked over without any expression. Seeing his action, Qiu Yong hurriedly held onto his shoulder and whispered, "Ling Cheng, don't be impulsive."

"Big brother, I know what I'm doing."

With that, Ling Chen brushed off Qiu Yong's hand and made his way through the crowd towards Han Yu.

Seeing Ling Chen approach, Han Yu's smile grew even brighter. A fool who doesn't know any better; this was the perfect opportunity to put him in his place in front of everyone.

However, the arrival of Ling Chen made Zhu Xiaozhu feel uneasy, her palms sweating. Yet, deep down, there was a small sense of anticipation. As for what she was anticipating, she couldn't quite articulate it herself.

As Ling Chen neared, Han Yu coldly smirked, ready to utter a few words of mockery, but then he saw the other man walk straight past him, approaching Zhu Xiaozhu instead.

Feeling Ling Chen's complex gaze, Zhu Xiaozhu bit her thin lips and couldn't help but lower her head to stare at her toes, feeling extremely nervous.

At this moment, everyone's attention was captivated by Ling Chen's sudden arrival, their faces showing expressions that were keen to watch the drama unfold.

Shi Su had just announced Han Yu and Zhu Xiaozhu's affair, and Ling Chen's sudden appearance clearly indicated that it wasn't as simple as giving blessings by looking at the expressions on their faces.

For a while, everyone was waiting for Ling Chen to speak.

"Why?" After a long pause, Ling Chen finally spoke the three words slowly.

"Ling Chen..." Zhu Xiaozhu opened her mouth but was at a loss for words. After hesitating, she said softly with her head down, "There's no reason, you've heard everything my Master said."

"I understand you, you're not that kind of person. I just want to know, is this your own decision, or did your Master make it for you?"

"I..."

"Xiaozhu!"

Just as Zhu Xiaozhu spoke out, she heard Shi Su's voice coming from the stage. Her pretty face suddenly turned pale.

"Xiaozhu..."

"Don't ask anymore." Zhu Xiaozhu closed her eyes, holding back the tears, and said word by word, "It's my own decision." After saying these words, Zhu Xiaozhu felt her inner strength collapse in an instant, all her feigned bravery dissolving into nothingness.

Hearing her response, Ling Chen shook his head lightly and said, "I don't believe it. If it were truly your own decision, then why wouldn't you dare look me in the eye?"

"Ling Chen, enough!" Before Zhu Xiaozhu could say anything else, Han Yu, who was standing nearby, couldn't hold back his fury and rebuked, "What is the meaning of these questions? Do you think I am not worthy of Xiaozhu?"

"You are indeed not worthy," said Ling Chen, bluntly.

Han Yu scoffed and replied, "Not worthy, you say? And you think you are? Why don't you take a look in the mirror to see who you really are, and what right do you have to compare with me? In terms of martial prowess, you have no standing to compare with me. In terms of ability, even less so. Not to mention afar, just take the crisis that happened on this ship, what did I do, and what did you do? Compare with me, hmmph! Get lost, save yourself from further embarrassment."

"It's important to know oneself, too bad, some people just don't understand this."

"I for one think Han Yu and Miss Zhu are a perfect match, a union of talent and beauty, made by heaven and earth."

"That's true. Han Yu, so young with such high martial arts and excellent medical skills, is a rare gem among the younger generation, and his future is boundless. What could that Ling fellow have to compete with him?"

"He's probably just trying to get attention and boost his reputation. But I couldn't do such a shameless thing."

Hearing the crowd's mockery and ridicule of Ling Chen, the faces of Qiu Yong and others immediately turned exceedingly ugly. Xia Yue, unable to contain her anger, was about to step forward to stand up for Ling Chen, but Qiu Yong pulled her back.

"Shi Su and Han Yu just saved everyone, naturally they would side with them. We owe them a favor, now is not the time to go against them."

Xia Yue said furiously, "So we just let them bully Ling Cheng?"

"Enough, don't say any more, I'll go get Ling Cheng back." With that, Yuan Yun quickly walked to Ling Chen's side, grabbed his arm, and whispered, "Ling Cheng, don't look for trouble, we can talk about it when we get back."

Seeing Zhu Xiaozhu, who still didn't dare to lift her head, Ling Chen sighed quietly and nodded slightly. He knew when to exercise restraint. Now was not the time to act rashly. He had to consider Qiu Yong and others and not be willful.

Seeing Ling Chen turn and leave, Han Yu smirked triumphantly, with a disdainful sneer on his face, "What a joke."

"Ling Chen."

Ling Chen stopped in his tracks and turned to look at Shi Su on the stage, "Is there anything else?"

Shi Su spoke with a cold demeanor, "Xiaozhu is now with Han Yu, regardless of what you're thinking, I hope you'll behave yourself and not bother them again. Otherwise, don't blame me for not warning you in advance."

A threat!

An undisguised threat.

Saying something like this in front of so many people, Shi Su clearly had no intention of saving Ling Chen's face. On the contrary, she intended to trample viciously on Ling Chen's dignity.

Ling Chen frowned and stared at Shi Su with cold eyes as a flicker of concealed anger passed through his Mo Che-like pupils.

"Ling Cheng," Yuan Yun, worried that Ling Chen wouldn't be able to keep his temper in check, looked at him apprehensively.

Feeling the concern in Yuan Yun's gaze, Ling Chen took a deep breath, suppressing the anger in his heart, and said indifferently, "Ms. Shi, everyone here is indebted to you, so they can only follow your lead. However, I do not need to show such consideration. Xiaozhu is a good girl; it's a pity that she has chosen the wrong master. If you expect me not to intervene in Xiaozhu's affairs, then I'm sorry, but I cannot do that. I will not just stand by and watch Xiaozhu be with someone she doesn't like, nor will I let her life be ruined by her conceited master."