

Information

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Synopsis

People laughed at him for being afraid of death, mocked him for wasting his time.
Clearly, he had the top-tier profession of a Card Crafter, yet he drifted through each day like a zombie.
Even the only chance to take the entrance exam for the Advanced Academy for Professionals—he kept putting it off again and again.
He ended up delaying it for five whole years...
And with every year of delay, the difficulty doubled. Now, his exam difficulty is thirty-two times higher than that of an average person!

But only Lin Yu knows...
It was all worth it!

Just one month before the fifth-year exam, he finally found it—
The key card he had dreamed of for so long!

Chapter 1: Debt Collectors

The air in the rented room was stale, permeated with the sour, musty smell of cheap instant noodle seasoning packets mixed with dust.

Lin Yu sat at the table, his spine slightly hunched.

The dim yellow light cast two heavy shadows in his sunken eye sockets.

He extended his right hand, his bony, distinct fingers picking up a small, dusty gray pebble.

As his fingertip made contact with the rough stone surface, a faint gray light emanated from his palm, gently enveloping the pebble.

The light persisted for three seconds, then abruptly retracted.

He opened his palm.

The pebble was gone.

In its place was an entirely gray card.

On the card's front was drawn an utterly ordinary small pebble.

[A Small Pebble]

Lin Yu's face remained expressionless as he tossed this newly made card into the corner of the table.

There, a small mountain of gray cards had already piled up.

He reached out again to grab the next pebble, his movements mechanical, repeated thousands upon thousands of times.

On the other side of the table, his phone screen suddenly lit up, the light shining through the cracks glaringly bright in the gloomy room.

The caller ID showed "Brother Wang (Debt Collector)".

Lin Yu ignored it.

The phone rang stubbornly, the vibration making the damaged back cover emit a mournful "buzzing" sound.

The ringing stopped.

A text message notification popped up.

[Lin Yu, if you don't pay back the money today, I'll break one of your legs.]

The screen went dark.

Looking around the cramped room, it resembled residue chewed up and spat out repeatedly by a giant beast.

The walls were marked with glaring red spray paint: "Pay back debts."

The wardrobe door hung open, clothes inside roughly pulled out and scattered all over the floor.

Clearly, this place had been ransacked more than once.

Lin Yu's gaze never left the pile of cheap raw materials in front of him.

His world seemed to have shrunk to just this table, this chair, and this pile of pebbles.

This was his only way of fighting against the entire world.

"Bang!"

"Bang! Bang!"

The old security door emitted agonizingly loud noises, the door frame trembling.

A rough male voice came from outside the door, carrying unconcealed anger.

"Lin Yu!"

"Open the door!"

"I know you're in there, stop fucking playing dead!"

Lin Yu's hand, holding the pebble, paused mid-air for a moment.

He didn't turn around.

But in his deeply sunken, bloodshot eyes, something stubborn was gradually hardening.

He slowly put down the pebble, braced his hands on the table, and slowly stood up.

His body swayed slightly due to long-term malnutrition.

But he stood very straight.

Each tremor of the door panel caused dust to fall rustling from the walls.

Lin Yu turned around to face the door that seemed ready to fall apart at any moment. He walked over step by step, his movements slow, each step seeming like a struggle against his body's weakness.

Years of desk work and malnutrition had left him with little strength to do anything.

Even his sole [Card Creation] was only sustained by sheer willpower holding up his spine.

The cursing outside the door didn't cease.

"Fuck your mother, Lin Yu, you owe money and won't pay, how long are you going to hide!"

"If you don't open this door, I'll tear this fucking door down today!"

Lin Yu's hand rested on the cold door handle. Without the slightest hesitation, he turned it and pulled inward.

The door opened.

Three men stood outside. The leader was a bald man with a thick gold chain around his neck that gleamed in the dim corridor. This was Brother Wang. Behind him were two underlings - one tall and thin, the other short and stout, both with brutish faces and cheap, ferocious-looking tattoos on their arms.

The three had been posturing fiercely, ready to charge in the moment the door opened.

But when they saw Lin Yu's appearance, they all froze.

The stream of prepared curses got stuck in their throats.

The Lin Yu before them resembled a skeleton draped in human skin more than a person. His cheeks were deeply hollowed, his skin a pale gray from long lack of sunlight, his lips dry and peeling. His faded old clothes hung loosely on his frame, as if a gust of wind could blow him over.

Brother Wang instinctively took half a step back.

He wasn't afraid of Lin Yu. He was afraid Lin Yu would die here.

In this condition, forget breaking a leg - even a slight push might make him fall apart. If the man really died by his hand, not only would the money be gone, but he'd also invite enormous trouble.

The two underlings behind him exchanged glances, their fierce expressions turning to bewilderment and a hint of apprehension.

The air fell into an eerie silence.

Lin Yu paid no attention to the dramatic changes on their faces. He simply pulled the door open, then turned and walked back, sitting down again at the shabby table.

He reached out once more to pick up a pebble.

Throughout the entire process, he didn't even spare the three debt collectors a glance.

This complete disregard infuriated Brother Wang more than any fierce resistance. But he didn't dare actually lay hands on him. This feeling of frustration made his chest tighten.

"Hey!" the tall, thin underling finally couldn't bear it and stepped forward. "What the hell are you pretending for? Brother Wang is talking to you!"

Lin Yu's hand didn't stop.

Gray light once again shone from his palm, enveloping the new pebble.

The light retracted, and another [A Small Pebble] card appeared in his hand.

He casually tossed the card into the small mountain, producing a soft "pat" sound. This sound was particularly clear in the deathly quiet room.

Brother Wang's temples throbbed.

In all his years of debt collection, he had seen people throwing tantrums, crying poverty and playing the victim, and even those pulling knives for a fight.

But someone like Lin Yu, who treated him as air and played with pebbles on his own, was a first.

"Lin Yu." Brother Wang suppressed his anger, trying to keep his voice as steady as possible, but the gritted-teeth tone was unmistakable. "I don't want to waste words with you. Today, you must pay back this money."

Lin Yu finally reacted.

He didn't turn around, but simply put down his hand that was about to reach for the next pebble.

"The money, I will pay back."

His voice was hoarse, like two pieces of sandpaper rubbing together.

Hearing this, Brother Wang's expression softened slightly. Willing to pay back was good.

"Know what's good for you. You know the card number, transfer it now."

"But not today. You know I have no money now." Lin Yu added.

Brother Wang's face, which had just softened, instantly darkened again. "Are you fucking messing with me?"

"Not messing with you." Lin Yu's back remained turned to them, like a stubborn statue. "What I owe you, including principal, interest, overdue fees, penalties - not a single cent will be missing."

The short, stout underling sneered: "Nice words! If not today, then when? Next year? The year after?"

Lin Yu was silent for a moment.

Then, he said something that left all three men baffled.

"Don't worry."

"When that day comes, you'll know."

Having said this, he seemed unwilling to continue the topic, bracing his hands on the table as if to stand up and close the door.

This was a blatant dismissal.

Brother Wang was thoroughly enraged.

Messing with me? Messing with me, Wang?

He rushed forward in one swift step, grabbed Lin Yu's shoulder, and pressed him firmly back into the chair.

"If you don't give a definite answer today, don't even think about standing up for the rest of your life!"

Chapter 2: The Beginnings of a Child Prodigy

Lin Yu's gaunt frame seemed incredibly fragile under Brother Wang's large hand.

"I told you, when the day comes..."

"Screw your 'when the day comes!'" The tall, skinny guy behind Brother Wang charged forward, grabbing Lin Yu by the collar, "Brothers, enough talk! Let's teach him a lesson first!"

Just as he raised his hand, a clear, angry female voice came from the stairwell entrance.

"What are you doing!"

Brother Wang and his men froze mid-action, turning toward the sound.

They saw a girl wearing a clean school uniform and carrying a backpack standing not far away, holding up a phone with its camera pointed directly at them.

"Which company are you from? Does your company know you're using violence for debt collection here?"

The girl's voice trembled with anger, but her words were clear and logically structured.

"I've recorded everything you've done! I'm calling the police right now!"

Brother Wang's expression changed.

In their gray-area business, what they feared most was encountering tough opponents who gathered evidence. Especially when the opponent was clearly a model high school student.

He spat on the ground, glaring fiercely at Lin Yu's back.

"Damn it, you got lucky this time!"

He released his grip, giving his two underlings a meaningful look.

"Let's go!"

The three of them turned around, cursing under their breath as they quickly left the dim passageway.

Only when their footsteps completely faded away did the surroundings return to deathly silence.

This wasn't any residential building at all.

It was an abandoned old factory area. What Lin Yu called his "rental room" was actually just a row of discarded shipping containers in a corner of the factory grounds.

The rusted metal exterior of the containers was spray-painted with red slogans like "Pay Your Debts" and "Shameless Deadbeat." The area was piled high with foul-smelling construction waste and household garbage that had clearly been deliberately collected and dumped there. On the nearby walls were several patches of long-dried, blackened fecal stains.

These were all trophies from the debt collection efforts.

A gust of wind blew through, stirring up dust from the ground along with a nauseating stench.

The girl quickly ran to the container entrance. When she saw the scene inside and that emaciated, skeletal figure sitting at the table with his back to her, tears instantly welled up in her eyes.

She stood at the doorway, lips trembling, unable to utter a single word.

Lin Yu slowly turned around and saw her.

The detached, numb expression on his face that kept everyone at a distance melted away like ice upon seeing the girl.

He cracked a pale smile, fine wrinkles forming at the corners of his eyes.

"Whose good little girl is this, coming to visit her brother."

The visitor was his younger sister, Lin Yao.

Lin Yao's voice carried a sob, like a kitten drenched in rain.

"Brother..."

She rushed into the foul-smelling metal box, tears now completely uncontrollable as they rolled down her clean cheeks in large drops.

This was no place for humans to live.

This was clearly a garbage dump.

The smile on Lin Yu's face stiffened for a moment before softening again. He reached out to wipe his sister's tears, but halfway there, seeing the grime between his fingers, he silently withdrew his hand.

He just said softly, "Why are you crying? Your brother's doing just fine."

"Just fine?"

Lin Yao's emotions instantly shattered. She pointed at this destitute shack of a room, at the glaring red spray paint on the walls, at the pile of useless gray cards on the table corner.

"This is what you call 'just fine'?"

"Brother, please stop this. Come home with me, okay?"

"The money you owe—we'll figure it out together. With Mom and Dad... I'll talk to them! They'll help. Our family's savings should be enough to cover it!"

She choked up, almost unable to continue.

"As long as you... as long as you stop this madness, we'll go home. Everything will get better..."

Home.

Such a warm, yet distant word.

The smile slowly faded from Lin Yu's face, replaced by a calmness that Lin Yao couldn't comprehend at all—a stubborn, almost obstinate serenity.

He shook his head.

"Xiao Yao, you don't understand."

"I don't understand? What exactly don't I understand?" Lin Yao's emotions surged. "All I know is my brother is dying! Look at what you've become! Have you even looked in a mirror lately?"

Lin Yu didn't answer her question. He just turned around and sat back down in that chair, his back facing her.

That familiar, isolated back.

"I'm playing a grand strategy game."

His voice was soft, yet carried an undeniable certainty.

Grand strategy game?

Lin Yao froze.

She stared at that gaunt back that seemed like it could extinguish at any moment, crying silently.

Tears blurred her vision, and time seemed to blur along with it.

She didn't know when her brother Lin Yu had started becoming like this.

In her memories, her brother Lin Yu had always been light.

Since childhood, he was that "other people's child" adults always talked about.

No, "child prodigy" might be more accurate.

Whatever he learned, he was always one step ahead of his peers—no, ten steps ahead.

He was always so mature, so steady, so brilliant.

Elementary school math Olympiads, middle school physics modeling, high school dominance across all subjects. His life resume was paved with glittering awards and certificates. Being provincial champion in comprehensive scores wasn't a goal for him, but a fixed, unchanging position.

Lin Yao still remembered when she was in elementary school and some older boys bullied her, stealing her pocket money. She ran home crying, and it was her brother who found those boys.

He just stood there, calmly reasoning with them, analyzing the pros and cons, moving from school regulations to societal laws.

Of course, the prerequisite for this lecture was that those guys combined couldn't beat her brother either.

Those boys who stood a head taller than him ended up not only returning the money but also stammering out apologies.

They even became Lin Yu's followers, almost to the point of being... indoctrinated!

From that day on, Lin Yao's eyes always sparkled with admiration when she looked at her brother.

Her brother could do anything.

Five years ago, on Career Awakening Day before the college entrance exams, was both the pinnacle of Lin Yu's life and the most glorious day for the entire Lin family.

Across the entire Ninghai Province, among millions of graduating students, only one person awakened a Golden Epic-level profession.

[Myriad Forms Card Crafter]

This name spread through news and internet to every corner of the city.

Everyone thought the Lin family was about to produce a dragon. With this unique epic profession, the Lin family might even achieve class mobility, joining Ninghai City's upper society.

The school principal personally visited their home. Admissions offices from top universities flooded their phone lines. Countless corporations and financial groups extended olive branches, offering unimaginably favorable conditions.

That day, the Lin household was bustling with visitors, packed with well-wishers.

That day, Lin Yao watched her brother surrounded by the crowd, proudly puffing out her small chest.

Chapter 3: The Fallen Genius

That day, her brother wore a brand new white shirt, his hair meticulously combed, with a confident and bright smile on his face. He stood at the center of the crowd, calmly handling everyone's flattery and questions, full of ambition and radiating brilliance.

Lin Yao's memory had a fracture here.

Because right after that, the next day, everything changed.

Without any warning.

Lin Yu, who had been praised as "Ninghai's Light" and "Future Titan" just the day before, locked himself in his room.

At first, their parents thought he was tired from dealing with various people for days and needed rest.

They considerately didn't disturb him, just leaving meals by the door.

But one day, two days, three days.

The door remained tightly shut.

Inside the room, Lin Yu didn't read books, didn't meditate, nor did he perform any basic training that a professional should do.

He just kept pacing back and forth in the room, muttering to himself.

"Not right... still not enough..."

"Core components... key cards..."

"Deck logic... closed loop..."

Their parents pressed against the door, only catching these inexplicable words intermittently. They looked at each other, seeing deep confusion and a trace of unease on each other's faces.

On the fourth day, Lin Yu finally opened the door.

His eyes were bloodshot, his hair disheveled, but he was in an extremely excited state.

He handed a list to his father.

"Dad, help me buy these things."

His father took the list, glanced at it, and froze.

What was written weren't rare magical materials or expensive enchanted items.

But a bunch of... trash.

Pebbles, sand, dried grass, scrap metal pieces.

All were common waste materials that you might even need to pay someone to clean up.

"Xiao Yu, what do you need these things for?" his mother asked worriedly.

"Card Creation." Lin Yu's answer was simple and clear.

"Card Creation? Using these?" His father frowned. "Didn't the school apply for the beginner Card Creation material package for you? Those are the standard materials."

"Those are useless." Lin Yu shook his head, pointing at the list. "I only want these."

Seeing their son's stubbornness, although puzzled, his parents complied. They thought this might be the unique thinking of a genius.

Soon, a truckload of "raw materials" was delivered to their home, filling the entire backyard.

Then, Lin Yu began his crazy behavior.

He locked himself in the backyard warehouse, making cards day and night.

One after another.

[A Small Pebble]

[A Handful of Sand]

[A Dried Grass Blade]

All were worthless gray cards like these.

The strangest thing was that these cards created through his Epic-level profession all had a peculiar characteristic.

They would turn to ashes precisely at midnight, disappearing without a trace.

Day after day.

He was like a Sisyphus-style madman, repeating this meaningless task every day.

The whole family watched anxiously, worried in their hearts.

Finally, the college entrance exam day arrived.

The whole family, even the entire Ninghai City media, were waiting for this Epic-level professional to soar to great heights.

But Lin Yu never showed up at the exam venue.

He chose to defer the exam.

When the news broke, public opinion erupted.

The professional college entrance exam allowed deferral. This was to give candidates who awakened powerful but rare professions more preparation time, allowing them to achieve better results, enter better institutions, and not waste their talent.

But the cost of deferral was enormous.

For every year deferred, the comprehensive difficulty of the exam doubled!

This punitive mechanism was designed to urge most candidates to embark on their professional paths quickly and contribute to society.

For ordinary professionals, deferring for one year was equivalent to seeking death.

But Lin Yu was different.

He was a [Myriad Forms Card Crafter], Golden Epic-level.

Although people were shocked, they could still understand. Perhaps he wanted to use one year to build an earth-shattering deck and crush the competition to take the top position.

The media and public held such expectations.

However, the second year, on exam day.

Lin Yu was absent again.

He chose to defer the exam once more.

This time, public opinion shifted from expectation to doubt.

Two years of deferral meant the difficulty in the third year would be four times the normal difficulty!

This was no longer a gap that could be easily bridged by an Epic-level profession alone.

Unless he had some incredible encounter.

Everyone held onto their last bit of hope until the third year.

Lin Yu still didn't go.

He deferred for the third time.

This time, the entire Ninghai Province exploded.

Madness!

Lin Yu had gone completely mad!

This former prodigy had turned into a complete madman!

An eight-times difficulty college entrance exam—even if a legendary Divine-level profession came, they would have to think twice.

His life was completely ruined.

The principals who once visited, the admissions offices that bombarded with calls, the consortiums that extended olive branches—all disappeared without a trace.

Replacing them were neighbors pointing fingers, endless mockery and abuse online.

The Lin family fell from the clouds to the abyss.

To force him to turn back, to make him come to his senses, his father finally hardened his heart and cut off all his financial support.

"If you don't give up on these useless things for one day, don't think about getting a single cent from me!"

"You think you're so capable? Then go earn money to support yourself!"

His father's out-of-control roar echoed throughout the house.

Everyone thought Lin Yu would resist, would argue.

But he didn't.

He just looked calmly at his father, then nodded.

"Okay."

After speaking, he packed a small bundle and silently moved out.

He had no complaints, no anger, so calm it was unsettling.

He first lived in a tent, later slept under bridges, and finally ended up in this container in the abandoned factory area.

Only two things remained unchanged.

The first was his daily, unwavering use of his forgotten Epic-level talent to create a pile of [A Small Pebble].

The second was continuously buying a cheap potion called [Mental Stabilizer] and drinking it bottle after bottle.

He had no income, yet needed to buy medicine and eat.

Soon, he became entangled with loans.

The snowball kept growing larger.

Debt collection companies came knocking, causing chaos in the family home.

His parents softened and helped him repay twice.

But what they saw wasn't their son's repentance, but his increasing madness.

He used the money his parents gave him to repay debts to buy more [Mental Stabilizer] and a new pile of "raw materials."

At that moment, his parents completely despaired.

When the debt collection company came for the third time, threatening to break one of Lin Yu's legs if he didn't repay, Lin Yu returned home.

That was the last time he came home.

He stood at the doorway, not entering.

Separated by a door, he said to his parents inside.

"Dad, Mom, don't help me repay debts anymore."

"I will sever all relations with you, so they won't harass you anymore."

"I'll repay your parenting kindness another day."

Chapter 4: Lin Family and Su Family

After speaking, Lin Yu bowed deeply toward that tightly closed door.

Inside the door, his mother's heart-wrenching sobs echoed, along with his father's barely suppressed choking sounds.

Lin Yao was also crying, pounding on the door panel, begging her brother not to leave.

Lin Yu stood outside the door, listening to his family's weeping, his face completely expressionless.

He wanted to cry too.

But he couldn't.

To avoid being controlled by others, relying solely on an epic-level profession... wasn't enough!

From that day on, the Lin family acted as if they no longer had this son. They believed he had gone irredeemably mad, even considering forcibly bringing him back for treatment.

But Lin Yu's refusal was absolutely resolute, and since they had already severed ties, there was nothing they could do.

Now, five years had passed.

Only Lin Yao stubbornly, secretly, occasionally came to visit him.

This family had been utterly heartbroken by him.

"Brother..."

Lin Yao's crying pulled Lin Yu out of the bottomless depths of his memories.

She grabbed Lin Yu's arm, her fingernails digging into his thin clothing.

"Five years!"

"A full five years! What exactly have you been doing!"

Lin Yao's voice was sharp, filled with despair.

Seeing her brother in this wretched state, seeing this "home" worse than a garbage dump, her heart contracted with wave after wave of pain.

"You weren't like this before! You're my brother, you're Lin Yu! You're that omnipotent Brother Lin Yu!"

"Look at yourself now! Look around you!"

She pointed at the stinking garbage, at the insulting graffiti on the walls.

"For these worthless stones, is it worth it? Torturing yourself into this state, is it worth it?"

Her tears fell like broken strings of pearls, completely unstoppable.

"Please, brother, let's go home. Throw all this stuff away, let's start over."

"I beg the heavens, I beg the gods, please give my brother back to me..."

She collapsed crying, squatting on the ground like a helpless child.

Lin Yu watched her quietly.

Every single tear from his sister felt like a searing branding iron, burning into his heart.

Mad?

In everyone's eyes, he had long been mad.

A madman who abandoned the limitless future of an epic-level profession to hide in a garbage dump playing with stones.

But he knew clearly that he was more lucid than ever before.

He was utterly rational, utterly determined.

He knew with absolute clarity what he wanted, and he walked this singular path with absolute certainty.

Lin Yu slowly squatted down, reached out his hand, hovering above Lin Yao's trembling shoulder without touching it.

He feared the filth on his hands would stain his sister's clean school uniform.

"Xiao Yao."

His movements were gentle, afraid of startling this wounded little creature.

"I'm not mad."

Lin Yao suddenly lifted her head, her tear-streaked face filled with disbelief.

"You're not mad? Then tell me, what exactly have you been doing these five years!"

"Everything you've done, what meaning does it have? These cards, besides turning to dust at midnight, what other use do they have!"

Lin Yu withdrew his hand, slowly standing up straight.

He didn't answer directly.

He had given this answer many times before, but...

To be honest, what he was doing wasn't much different from gambling.

But he was certain that one day, he would win this bet.

A Card Crafter's deck isn't infinite.

There would surely come a day when he could draw the right card.

Lin Yao and the others didn't understand.

They didn't know what kind of card could make Lin Yu pay such a tremendous price.

"Brother, stop deceiving yourself..."

"I'm not deceiving you, nor am I deceiving myself."

Lin Yu interrupted her.

He turned around, his sunken, bloodshot eyes containing a light that Lin Yao couldn't comprehend.

It was a burning, resolute flame that no one understood.

"This path is difficult, very difficult. But it will definitely lead somewhere."

"Everything I've done is part of the plan. Every step, every choice, is within my calculations."

He looked at his sister, a rare gentleness appearing on his face.

"Thank you for still being willing to visit me, Xiao Yao."

He stepped forward, this time without hesitation, extending his rough hand to gently wipe away a tear track from Lin Yao's cheek.

"But you should have your own life. Prepare well for the college entrance exam, don't distract yourself for me anymore."

College entrance exam.

These two words made Lin Yao's body stiffen slightly.

Lin Yu continued: "If I remember correctly, soon it will be the profession awakening ceremony for your year, right?"

Lin Yao nodded subconsciously, but avoided Lin Yu's gaze.

Inside, she was wrestling with conflicting emotions.

On one side was the brother she had once idolized but who now caused her immense heartache.

On the other side was her own upcoming life turning point.

She looked at her brother, at that nearly stubborn calmness on his face.

She suddenly understood.

She couldn't persuade him.

No one could persuade him.

Because in his world, everything he did was right.

An overwhelming sense of powerlessness and sorrow washed over her.

Biting her lip, she nodded firmly.

"I will."

She stood up from the ground, brushed the dust off her school uniform, her movements somewhat stiff.

She swore.

She absolutely would not become like her brother!

She would awaken a powerful profession, get into the best university, live a glamorous and brilliant life!

She would make everyone know that the Lin family didn't just have a fallen genius, but also a rising star!

"I'm leaving, brother."

Lin Yao took one last look at this dilapidated metal container, at that solitary figure.

Then, without looking back, she turned and ran out.

In the wind, only her gradually fading footsteps remained, along with a tear track that quickly evaporated in the sunlight.

At the end of the path where Lin Yao ran out, beside a withered tree, another girl stood waiting quietly.

She wore appropriate casual clothing that starkly contrasted with the decay of this abandoned factory area.

Seeing Lin Yao running over crying, she stepped forward to meet her, but her gaze went over Lin Yao's shoulder, looking far toward that rusted shipping container.

After just one glance, she withdrew her gaze and focused all her attention on Lin Yao before her.

"Xiao Yao."

"Qingxue Sister."

Lin Yao threw herself into her embrace, sobbing uncontrollably once more.

The newcomer was Su Qingxue.

The Su and Lin families were old friends.

Su's mother and Lin's mother were even closer—childhood handkerchief friends who had grown up together, as close as sisters.

Su Qingxue and Lin Yu were the same age. When the two families visited each other during childhood, Su's mother would often half-jokingly say that she wanted Qingxue to marry Lin Yu someday, strengthening the bond between the two families.

Regarding this joke, the former Su Qingxue hadn't been opposed.

Lin Yu, though somewhat boring because he was too outstanding, had genuine talent and future prospects.

Marrying him would be like obtaining a lifetime ticket to high society.

This deal, however calculated, wouldn't be a loss.

Later... Lin Yu fell from the clouds, shattering completely.

Su Qingxue wasn't a member of the Lin family, nor was she like the blindly worshipping Lin Yao.

She was merely a calm observer and interest calculator.

When Lin Yu's potential stock turned into junk stock, she naturally turned away without hesitation.

Chapter 5: Let me D again!

Now, five years had passed.

Su Qingxue had already graduated from the Support Department of Ninghai University, her profession level reaching Level 30. While not considered top-tier, she was absolutely outstanding among her peers.

Currently, she was studying intensively at home, aiming to secure a stable government position—an iron rice bowl guaranteed regardless of circumstances.

Preferably one that didn't involve going to the front lines to fight monsters.

And Lin Yu? He was still going crazy in that garbage dump.

She had already graduated from university, while he hadn't even stepped through the door of the College Entrance Exam.

They were already people from two completely different worlds.

Lin Yu had completely degenerated into the lowest shadow of this city, a failure who even struggled with basic survival. All he could probably do for the rest of his life was muddle along waiting for death.

She gently patted Lin Yao's back, her movements tender, but her heart remained exceptionally clear-headed.

The reason she still maintained this "best friend" and "good older sister" relationship with Lin Yao naturally had her considerations.

Lin Yu's talent was a fact.

This kind of gene might be hereditary.

As long as Lin Yao didn't contract that incurable madness like her brother, her future achievements would likely not be low.

Investing early in a future powerhouse was a guaranteed profitable venture.

At this moment, looking at that distant, blurry shipping container, all that remained in her heart was a helpless, light chuckle.

She took Lin Yao's hand and comforted her softly, "Alright, stop crying. Someone like him isn't worth it."

"But... he's my brother..." Lin Yao choked out between sobs.

"He's only your brother by blood." Su Qingxue's tone was calm, yet carried an undeniable sense of reality. "Look at the things he's doing now—does any of it resemble how a brother should act? He'll only drag you down, drag your parents down."

She took a tissue from her bag and handed it to Lin Yao.

"Wipe your face, it's all tear-stained."

"The most important thing for you right now isn't worrying about him, but taking care of yourself. The Profession Awakening Ceremony is coming up soon—this is what will determine your entire life."

Su Qingxue's words poured like a bucket of cold water over Lin Yao's chaotic heart.

Yes, her own future.

She couldn't continue like this anymore.

"Qingxue sister, I..."

"I know you're sad." Su Qingxue interrupted her. "But people need to look forward. You can't live in his shadow forever. You need your own path, your own life."

She took Lin Yao by the wrist.

"Let's go, I'll take you home. This place is dirty and smelly—it's not where you should be."

Su Qingxue led the despondent Lin Yao, walking toward the exit of the industrial area.

A white new energy sedan was parked by the roadside, its body washed clean, forming a stark contrast with the surrounding environment.

Su Qingxue pressed her key fob, and the car lights flashed.

She skillfully opened the passenger door, helped Lin Yao inside, and thoughtfully fastened her seatbelt.

Getting into the driver's seat, she started the car.

The warm air from the air conditioner dispersed the chill and foul odor from outside.

The car smoothly drove out of this abandoned area, leaving that rusted shipping container and the stubborn figure inside far behind.

Su Qingxue glanced at Lin Yao's pale profile in the rearview mirror, calculating in her heart.

After Lin Yao awakened her profession, if her talent was good, she could use her family connections to help her secure some good resources.

This favor would surely come in handy someday.

As for Lin Yu...

That name could be completely crossed out from her life plans.

The car merged into the city's traffic flow, neon lights flickering through the window across Lin Yao's face.

Leaning against the window, watching the street scenes rapidly receding outside, her tears once again silently fell.

Su Qingxue didn't offer further comfort.

Some things needed to be understood on one's own.

She believed Lin Yao was a smart girl who would eventually understand that abandoning a burden that had already lost its value was the wisest choice.

The sound of the car engine gradually faded into the distance, eventually disappearing completely amid the chaotic background noise of the industrial area. Lin Yu didn't look back, just stood quietly until the last trace of noise from the outside world fell silent.

He turned and walked back to that rusted shipping container.

Closing the iron door, he shut out everything from outside.

Wasted a few minutes?

He'd forgotten.

Perhaps these few minutes would cause him to miss something.

He walked to the simple worktable made of wooden planks in the corner and sat down.

The worktable was scattered with pebbles, sand, and scrap metal pieces. He casually picked up a pebble the size of a pigeon egg, holding it in his palm.

A faint but pure energy flowed from within his body, converging along his arm into his palm, enveloping that ordinary pebble.

Five seconds later, the pebble dissipated into particles of light, and a gray card quietly took form, falling before him.

[A Small Pebble]

Then, he picked up a second pebble.

Repeat.

Third pebble.

Repeat.

His movements were mechanical, precise, without any unnecessary steps. Like a production line programmed for stability, steadily outputting these worthless scraps.

One minute, twelve cards.

One hour, seven hundred twenty cards.

Time in his world was carved into increments measured in "cards."

After who knows how long, just as he was about to create the next card, the thousands of [A Small Pebble] cards in the cardboard box at his feet suddenly began to tremble faintly in unison.

A buzzing resonance echoed within the narrow container.

Today's quantity was far from reaching the limit.

The medicine's effective duration had ended.

Lin Yu stopped his actions, feeling under the worktable for a small brown medicine bottle. He unscrewed the cap and drank the last of the light blue liquid inside.

He casually tossed the empty bottle into the corner, where hundreds of identical empty bottles were already piled up.

This was the last bottle.

As the medicine went down his throat, a cool sensation spread from his esophagus to his limbs and finally converged in his brain. The dizziness and stinging pain caused by excessive mental energy consumption were quickly soothed.

The cards in the cardboard box at his feet also stopped trembling, returning to stability.

He picked up another pebble and continued Card Creation.

The rising and setting of the sun outside had nothing to do with him.

He only knew that he must prepare enough "fuel" for today before midnight.

When the numbers on the old electronic clock on the wall jumped from 23:59 to 00:00, a semi-transparent panel that only he could see appeared in the air before him.

[Profession Skills Refreshed]

Lin Yu stopped his actions.

On the panel, two skill icons lit up simultaneously.

[Card Innovation]: Delete X cards, choose one card from X+1 random cards to obtain. (Once per day)

[Mirror Copy]: Obtain a temporary copy of a card already owned. (Once per day)

This was the root of all his crazy behavior.

Possessing the [Card Innovation] skill.

He could create all cards theoretically existing in this world at the lowest cost.

Chapter 6: These are not what I want

Using massive quantities of the easiest-to-produce trash cards as offerings, to pry open that infinite card library, in exchange for one chance to glimpse the treasure.

One chance to choose.

One possibility of winning the bet.

To put it bluntly, it was cycling through cards.

Using quantities others couldn't even imagine to make one grand gamble.

He spent twenty unchangeable hours every day, creating fourteen thousand four hundred gray cards.

The remaining four hours were used for basic sleep to maintain bodily functions.

Occasionally, he compressed sleep time to go out and buy medicine.

Other physiological activities like eating and using the bathroom were all conducted without interrupting card creation.

One day, fourteen thousand four hundred cards.

Today marked exactly five years.

Total: twenty-six million two hundred eighty thousand cards.

Using this astronomical number of "fuel," he refreshed day after day.

Just to find that one card he needed... the key card!

His professional talent told him that card definitely existed.

His reason told him the probability of finding it this way was outrageously low.

But he had to gamble, and it was worth gambling.

The reason he needed to constantly drink Mental Stabilizer was because his mental energy simply couldn't support him simultaneously possessing over fourteen thousand gray cards every day.

Not to mention, in his deck, there was always one special dark blue card.

He carefully took out a card from his inner pocket.

This card's material was completely different from those gray cards - it was entirely deep blue, with a constantly rotating "X2" symbol glowing faintly at its center.

[Doubling Card]

[Effect: Your next card's effect activates twice.]

This card was his inner demon.

He obtained it the night he awakened his profession.

Then, he thought of a brilliant combination.

And began his five years of madness.

To maintain coexistence between it and tens of thousands of trash cards, as a Level 0 professional, his mental energy teetered on the brink of collapse every day, only sustained by cheap medicine.

Now, everything was ready except the final core card.

Once he obtained that card and combined it with this Doubling Card, his deck would be truly complete.

Lin Yu put away the Doubling Card and focused his mind on the Card Innovation skill.

Should he begin?

He glanced at the electronic clock on the wall: 00:01.

He decided tonight's sleep time would be compressed from four hours to three hours and forty-five minutes.

Just one day, it wouldn't kill him... probably.

He had been delayed a bit by Lin Yao and the others today.

He had to make up for it.

Lin Yu picked up another pebble, his eyes showing no ripple of emotion.

He immersed himself once more in that endless cycle.

One minute, twelve cards.

One hour, seven hundred twenty cards.

Lin Yu's movements didn't pause until a sliver of moonlight shone through the window, outlining the mountain of empty medicine bottles piled up in the shipping container.

He finally put down the pebble in his hand.

Today's production quota was completed.

He stood up, stretching his stiff limbs. His bones emitted cracking sounds under the strain.

Before him stood the fruits of today's twenty-plus hours of labor - fourteen thousand four hundred A Small Pebble cards, neatly piled into a new small mountain.

This was his daily routine for five years, and all of today's "gambling stakes."

Lin Yu focused his mind on the translucent panel, landing on the Card Innovation skill icon.

It was time.

He chose to activate.

[Consume 14,400 A Small Pebble cards to perform one Card Innovation?]

"Yes."

He mentally confirmed.

Hum—

No earth-shattering roar, only an extremely suppressed resonance.

The next second, the pile of freshly completed cards before him, still carrying residual warmth from their energy, seemed erased by an invisible hand. They simultaneously turned into the finest particles of light dust, not burning, not turning to ash, just silently dissipating into the air.

The entire process was eerily quiet.

The fresh card mountain disappeared, revealing the blackened ground beneath.

At the same time, before Lin Yu's eyes, an interface composed of countless cards unfolded.

Fourteen thousand four hundred and one cards.

One chance to choose.

Lin Yu's expression remained blank.

He reached out his finger and lightly swiped upward in the air.

The torrent of cards began scrolling upward at an astonishing speed.

His movements were so fast they left only afterimages, countless card information streams flashing before his eyes.

Most were gray trash cards.

Occasionally, a different color would flash by.

A touch of green.

[Blessing Card: Breeze's Comfort]

[Effect: Your movement speed permanently increases by 1%.]

Swipe away.

Lin Yu's finger didn't pause for even a moment.

This level of enhancement was meaningless to him.

The cards continued scrolling rapidly.

Another different card appeared.

[Blessing Card: Tardigrade's Tenacity]

[Effect: Grants you a talent [Basic Attack +1 Health].]

Swipe away.

Perhaps this was a decent sustainability and growth talent for a professional. But it wasn't what he wanted.

What he needed wasn't something that merely added icing on the cake.

What he needed was the core that could change everything.

Several thousand more gray cards scrolled past.

Suddenly, a brilliant golden flash appeared.

[Field Card: Sanctuary of Mercy]

[Effect: Creates a holy domain lasting 1 hour. Forcibly converts all creatures within the area, including monsters, into temporary friendly units.]

Golden legendary card.

A strategic-level card that would drive any guild or military force insane. During monster tide city sieges, this single card might save an entire city.

Lin Yu's movements paused for 0.1 seconds.

Then, he unhesitatingly swiped it away.

Very powerful.

But not what he wanted.

There was no place for this card in his plan.

Choosing it would increase his mental energy burden, affecting his card cycling quantity.

The card torrent continued.

Soon, another golden card appeared.

[Follower Card: Undying Wargod]

[Effect: When this follower is killed, all its attributes gain permanent +10 growth, and it returns to your hand.]

A follower card with infinite growth potential. Given enough time and resources to "cultivate" it, it could even evolve into a god-level existence.

This was the partner any summoning-focused professional dreamed of.

Swipe away.

Another purple flash appeared.

[Enchantment Card: Soul Mask]

[Effect: Choose one follower card, you can temporarily attach it to yourself for the next 10 minutes, gaining all its skills and 70% of its attributes.]

Swipe away.

The cards continued scrolling upward, faster and faster.

Lin Yu's eyes were now filled with more bloodshot veins, his mental energy rapidly depleting. Simultaneously processing such massive information was an enormous burden on his brain.

Yet he seemed tireless.

His willpower, tempered through five years of monotonous daily labor, had become as hard as the toughest diamond.

Another golden card.

Chapter 7: Jokers and Doubling

[Effect Card: World]

[Effect: Stops time for 9 seconds.]

Crossed out.

A trump card capable of reversing any battle situation. An assassin could use it to deliver a fatal blow, a mage could use it to chant forbidden spells, and even an ordinary person could use it to evade deadly danger.

Lin Yu didn't even spare it a second glance.

A golden Counter Card.

[Counter Card: Mirror of Causality]

[Effect: Remains hidden after use, triggered passively. When you suffer any form of attack, you can reflect it 100% back to the attacker.]

Crossed out.

A green Equipment Card.

[Equipment Card: Vampire's Fangs]

[Effect: All damage you deal restores 10% of your health.]

Crossed out.

One after another, rare cards, epic cards, even legendary cards that could stir up storms of bloodshed in the outside world were discarded by him one by one.

They might be powerful, even possessing the strength to change a professional's destiny.

But Lin Yu understood clearly, none of them were what he needed.

His goal, from that day five years ago, had only ever been one.

He knew with absolute clarity exactly which card he needed.

That theoretically existing, yet elusive and intangible card.

Everything he had done was to turn this theory into reality.

The torrent of cards continued.

One thousand...

Five thousand...

Ten thousand...

Lin Yu's fingers still moved steadily across the screen.

Just then, his fingers suddenly stopped.

His fingers paused mid-air, frozen in an absolutely motionless position.

The torrent of fourteen thousand four hundred and one cards also came to an abrupt halt at this moment.

On the interface, a single card floated quietly.

It lacked the dazzling brilliance of a golden legendary, the profound mystery of an epic purple card, not even the slightest energy fluctuation of a rare blue card.

It was just a card.

The most ordinary-looking, grayish-white card.

At the center of the card face was painted a crude jester mask. Beyond that, nothing else.

[Effect Card: Joker]

[Select a card you have used before, obtain one copy.]

Lin Yu looked at this simple description.

Five years.

One thousand eight hundred and twenty-six days and nights.

Twenty-six million two hundred and eighty thousand pieces of junk card accumulation.

He had dreamed of this card.

In the beginning, he would also exclaim loudly during card selection, feel disappointed by repeated refresh failures, waver at the occasional appearance of golden cards.

But now, only numbness remained.

A numbness so deep it penetrated his bones, almost swallowing his entire being.

He reached out, his movements slow and stiff, touching toward the card floating in the void.

What reached his fingertips was the texture of a solid card.

Not an illusion.

Really... found it.

The moment he took the card into his hand.

Lin Yu felt himself redeemed.

The string that had been stretched taut for five years finally loosened. His whole body swayed, almost losing his balance, quickly steadying himself by grabbing the cold corrugated iron of the nearby shipping container.

He felt no wild joy, no loud shouts.

He just pressed that [Joker] tightly against his chest, leaned his body against the wall, and slowly slid down to sit on the ground.

He curled up in the corner, like a lonely ghost that had finally found its home.

Time lost all meaning in this moment.

He didn't know how long he had been sitting there.

Maybe one minute, maybe ten minutes.

Only when his body began protesting from prolonged exhaustion and intense emotional fluctuations, sending waves of stinging pain, did he slowly lift his head.

Those bloodshot eyes once again gathered light.

A light brighter and more frenzied than at any time before.

Now, it was time to examine the harvest.

Lin Yu suppressed the excitement that threatened to burst from his chest, forcing himself to calm down.

He carefully placed that [Joker] into his pocket, then focused his consciousness on his profession panel.

That second skill he had never used since his awakening.

[Mirror Copy].

Activate.

[Please select the card to copy.]

Lin Yu's consciousness, without the slightest hesitation, landed on the brand new [Joker] in his pocket.

[Selected [Joker]. Proceed with Mirror Copy? Copy card is temporary and will disappear after 24 hours.]

"Yes."

A faint glow flashed, and an identical [Joker] appeared in his hand.

Only this copy's edges carried a barely perceptible sense of intangibility.

He didn't know if the next operation would succeed.

Theoretically, it should.

The root of his madness lay in this very theory.

He stood up, walked to the workbench, took out that [Doubling Card] he had carried close to his body for five years, and placed it side by side with the temporary [Joker] on the table.

The dark blue [Doubling Card].

The grayish-white temporary [Joker].

His life was about to face its final judgment on these two cards.

Lin Yu reached out, his fingertip tracing across the surface of the [Doubling Card].

Use.

Hum.

The dark blue light flashed briefly, then merged into his body.

[Your next card effect activates twice.]

It worked!

His heart leaped violently.

Now!

Lin Yu picked up that temporary [Joker], using almost all his strength to steady his hand.

Use!

[Please select the card to copy.]

The panel popped up.

Select, [Doubling Card].

[Please select the card to copy.]

Success! The [Joker]'s effect had been doubled by the [Doubling Card]'s effect!

The system panel popped up with another prompt.

Select, [Joker]!

[Copy completed.]

The light faded.

The temporary [Joker] in Lin Yu's hand turned into points of light and disappeared.

Before him, two brand new cards floated quietly.

One was the dark blue [Doubling Card].

The other was the grayish-white [Joker].

Both were permanent cards!

It worked! It really worked!

At this moment, Lin Yu had used one temporary [Joker] and consumed one permanent [Doubling Card].

In the end, he obtained one permanent [Doubling Card] and one permanent [Joker].

At first glance, the cards in his hand had changed from one [Doubling Card] and one [Joker] to one [Doubling Card] and one [Joker].

It seemed nothing had changed.

But...

Lin Yu's breathing became rapid. He forcibly suppressed his surging emotions and began the second operation.

He picked up the new [Joker].

Use!

[Please select the card to copy.]

Select, [Doubling Card]!

[Copy completed.]

He obtained another permanent [Doubling Card].

Now, the cards in his hand were: two [Doubling Cards], one [Joker].

Lin Yu picked up one [Doubling Card].

Use!

[Your next card effect activates twice.]

He then picked up the second [Doubling Card].

Use!

[Your next card effect activates twice.]

The effects of the two [Doubling Cards] had stacked!

No, not stacked.

The first [Doubling Card] had caused the second [Doubling Card]'s effect to activate twice!

The [Doubling Card] had been doubled!

On Lin Yu's profession panel, a status icon lit up.

[Doubling X4]!

[Your next card effect activates four times!]

Chapter 8: Permanent Doubling Effect

Lin Yu stared at the "X4" symbol, feeling his blood begin to boil through his veins.

He picked up the last Joker in his hand.

Use!

[Please select the card(s) to copy.]

The panel popped up.

This time, a near-mad smile spread across Lin Yu's face.

He selected four cards at once.

Joker.

Doubling Card.

[Copy complete.]

The moment the system prompt appeared, the last old Joker in Lin Yu's hand dissolved into points of light.

In its place, four brand-new, tangible permanent cards hovered silently before him.

One Joker and three Doubling Cards.

It worked!!

This insane, almost impossible theoretical closed loop he had been designing for five years was finally complete at this moment.

He had consumed one Joker and two Doubling Cards.

In return, he obtained four new cards.

His "capital" had not decreased — it had increased.

From this second on, he had access to nearly endless resources!!

Lin Yu had never smiled this brilliantly before.

He opened his mouth and laughed silently, his whole body trembling violently from restrained excitement, almost curling into a ball on the floor.

Five years.

He finally no longer had to live that pitch-black, endless life of drudgery.

He steadied himself against the wall and forced his body upright.

This was only the beginning.

He held the three newly acquired Doubling Cards in his hands.

Use them in succession!

First card—merge into the body.

Second card—merge into the body.

Third card—merge into the body.

The status icons on his profession panel frantically flickered as the numbers doubled one after another.

Doubling X2!

Doubling X4!

Doubling X8!

Eight times!

He grabbed the new Joker and activated it without hesitation.

[Please select the card(s) to copy.]

Lin Yu's mind raced across the panel.

He chose one Joker and seven Doubling Cards!

[Copy complete.]

A flash of light, and eight brand-new permanent cards appeared before him, neatly stacked into a small pile.

He now possessed one Joker and seven Doubling Cards.

He could...

Lin Yu did not pause for even a breath; he picked up all seven Doubling Cards.

Use!

...

Seven times in a row, the deep-blue light poured into his body.

Under the fabric covering his chest, it felt as though a blue sun was rising.

The status icons on his profession panel had become a horrifying tier.

Doubling X128!

One hundred twenty-eight times!

Lin Yu's breathing grew heavy; he could feel stabbing pains from his brain — a sign his mental energy was being rapidly drained.

His body began to protest as well...

A 128-times amplification was straining his already fragile body beyond its limits...

But he didn't care.

He picked up the last Joker in his hand.

Use!

[Please select the card(s) to copy.]

This time, he intended to copy one Joker and one hundred twenty-seven Doubling Cards!

If successful, he would possess hundreds of Doubling Cards!

Then, forget Doubling X128 — Doubling X1024 or Doubling X8192 would be just a finger snap away!

However, in the second after he made his choice—

Buzz!

A sharp ringing exploded deep inside his skull.

Lin Yu's vision went black, his whole body swayed, and he nearly collapsed.

His mental energy... began to collapse.

Over a hundred card silhouettes in the air before him were rapidly coalescing.

But these cards were no longer stable.

Dozens of deep-blue Doubling Cards had only just formed when they began to tremble violently; web-like cracks spread across their surfaces.

Crack!

The first Doubling Card shattered, turning into blue motes of light that dissipated.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A chain reaction began.

Card after card of Doubling Cards disintegrated before his eyes like a brief, brilliant blue fireworks display.

Lin Yu clenched his teeth through the needle-like agony in his head, staring fixedly at the cards that kept vanishing.

He did not try to stop it.

Because he couldn't stop it.

This was the limit his current mental energy vessel could bear.

The breaking continued for more than ten seconds.

In the end, out of one hundred twenty-seven Doubling Card specters, only ten remained, trembling as they stabilized into physical form.

Adding the Joker he had copied, he now had eleven new cards in total.

Lin Yu exhaled and slid down the cold container wall until he was sitting on the floor.

It's fine—these are all small problems.

Insufficient maximum mental energy was something he had expected.

As long as the core cycle engine remained, there were ways to raise mental energy.

What he held now was one Joker and ten Doubling Cards.

That was enough.

Lin Yu did not immediately start the next round of frenzied replication.

He did something very cautious.

He separated one Joker and two Doubling Cards from the pile and carefully put them into his inner pocket.

This was the "start-up capital."

He was terrified that, in the upcoming experiment, he might lose control and use up the very starter deck that enabled infinite looping.

Then his five years of suffering would truly have been for nothing.

He felt like swallowing those three cards to be at ease.

Only after doing this did Lin Yu finally relax.

He stood up and looked around the cramped space that had accompanied him for five years.

It was time to test the true power of this deck.

He walked to the corner and casually picked up a stone the size of a pigeon egg from the scrap heap.

Energy flowed.

A gray card formed in his palm.

Item Card: A Small Pebble

Holding this most basic, most garbage card, he returned to his workbench.

Then, he used the remaining eight Doubling Cards one by one.

Doubling X2!

Doubling X4!

Doubling X8!

...

Doubling X256!

A two hundred fifty-six times amplification!

Lin Yu placed the gray A Small Pebble card on the table.

He extended a finger and lightly touched the card.

Use.

Rumble—

In the next instant, a harsh grinding and crashing detonated throughout the container.

A flood of stones erupted from where the card had disappeared.

They did not appear one by one, but in heaps, in sheets, pouring forth!

In less than a second, countless pigeon-egg-sized stones filled the entire workbench and then tumbled down, quickly piling up on the floor.

Only when the Doubling X256 status icon on the profession panel extinguished did that terrifying stone deluge finally stop.

Lin Yu waved his hand aside, pushed the stones away, and trudged to his crude bed made of a few wooden planks.

Chapter 9: Card Selection for a New Day

Lin Yu didn't bother cleaning up these things.

He simply lay down on them and closed his eyes.

The excessive consumption of mental energy, combined with the sudden release of that tension that had been stretched taut for five long years, brought a wave of exhaustion that swallowed him like a tsunami.

He fell asleep.

This sleep was unprecedentedly peaceful.

No nightmares, no waking up at dawn from mental stabbing pains, and none of that numbness brought by endless cycle labor.

The accumulated sleep deprivation from a full five years seemed to be compensated for all at once in this moment.

...

When he woke again, light seeped through the gaps in the shipping container, shining on his face.

Lin Yu slowly opened his eyes, still somewhat dazed.

He sat up and glanced at the electronic clock on the wall.

00:01.

Midnight.

Achievement unlocked: slept from 00:05 to 00:01.

He had slept a full day and night.

Lin Yu stretched his body, his bones emitting a series of crisp cracks, but this time, it wasn't the mournful creak of being overburdened, but a long-lost feeling of relaxation.

His stomach growled with hunger.

From the storage box under his bed, he skillfully pulled out two palm-sized compressed ration bars.

These were regularly distributed by the relief center, tasting about as good as sawdust, but they could fill his stomach.

He then shook out two multivitamin tablets from a bottle - these he had "heavily invested" in using his limited savings.

To maintain the most basic bodily functions, he never dared to skimp on these.

He wasn't crazy; even during those five most desperate years, he understood that health is the foundation of revolution.

He twisted open a bottle of mineral water, preparing to swallow the ration bars and pills together.

His movements suddenly stopped.

He looked at the items in his hand.

Compressed ration bars.

Vitamin tablets.

Mineral water.

Then, his focus landed on his profession panel.

An absurd yet interesting idea popped into his head.

Lin Yu placed the items in his hand on the workbench, then picked up that compressed ration bar.

After a series of operations.

Use ■Compressed Ration Bar Card■ Multiplication*256!

Activate.

The next second, a small tower neatly stacked from compressed ration bars materialized out of thin air on the table before him.

No more, no less - two hundred fifty-six bars.

Lin Yu picked up one and put it in his mouth.

Still that familiar taste that could make your cheeks ache from chewing.

He smiled.

He picked up that bottle of mineral water.

Use ■Mineral Water■ Card Multiplication*256!

Whoosh.

Two hundred fifty-six identical bottles of mineral water filled half the workbench, with several even rolling off into the pile of stones on the ground.

He then looked at those two vitamin tablets.

Activate.

A small pile of white pills appeared on the table surface.

Lin Yu looked at the scene before him and smiled silently.

If the apocalypse broke out now and supplies needed hoarding.

He alone would be an entire logistics army.

Food, water, medicine - as long as he had samples, he could replicate them infinitely.

He could survive alone relying on these things until the world ended.

After eating and drinking his fill, Lin Yu's thoughts began to wander.

Food and water were just the basics.

Then... what about money?

Once this thought emerged, it could no longer be contained.

He rummaged through boxes and cabinets, finally finding all his cash in the inner pocket of his old jacket that he'd worn for three years.

A crumpled hundred-yuan bill.

This was his final asset.

Lin Yu carefully smoothed out this banknote on the table.

Use!

Hum—

A stack of brand-new banknotes, still carrying the scent of printing ink, materialized before him.

A thick wad.

Lin Yu picked up this stack of money, feeling its utterly real texture.

He had succeeded!

He would never have to worry about money again!

He could buy the best house in the city, eat at the finest restaurants, enjoy a life he hadn't even dared to imagine during the past five years!

However, as he began counting these banknotes, the smile on his face slowly froze.

He picked up the first one.

Serial number: QN88688688.

He picked up the second one.

Serial number: QN88688688.

The third, fourth, fifth...

He quickly flipped through the entire stack of money.

All the serial numbers were identical.

This money was perfect replicas.

So perfect that... they became the most clumsy counterfeits.

Using a little might be fine, but using more would definitely get you caught.

He couldn't conjure cash out of thin air this way.

One path to wealth was blocked.

Lin Yu didn't feel disappointed; instead, he found it quite interesting.

If he wanted to get rich now... he really could do it in minutes.

But...

His gaze swept over a corner of the shipping container.

There was a rusty metal bucket there containing some scrap he usually saved up.

He walked over, rummaged for a while, and pulled out a coin.

One yuan denomination.

Lin Yu held the coin in his palm.

This thing shouldn't have a serial number, right...

Take that for not letting me replicate!

Out of a revengeful, mischievous psychology.

He decided to go big.

Although he could only do 256x at once now, he could do many, many rounds of 256x!

It was just a bit more tedious operationally.

Use!

Clink-clank-clatter—

The next instant, crisp yet dense metal impact sounds erupted madly throughout the metal bucket!

It wasn't the sound of coins dropping one by one.

But a metal storm composed of coins!

Countless silver-glinting coins gushed forth from where his palm had been, transforming into a silver deluge that violently slammed into that huge metal bucket!

The bucket filled up at a visible rate.

Soon, coins overflowed from the bucket mouth, piling up into a new, shiny small mountain on the ground.

Lin Yu paid no attention to that small mountain made of coins.

These shiny things might have had fatal attraction for him five years ago.

But now, they were just byproducts of an experiment, proving the potential of the card deck in his hands.

True wealth wasn't these replicable metals, but the ability to create all this itself.

He shifted his gaze away from the money pile, becoming focused again.

Playtime was over.

It was time to begin real business.

Lin Yu walked to the corner scrap pile and once again picked up a pigeon-egg-sized pebble.

Energy flowed.

■A Small Pebble■

He began repeating this motion.

Create, complete.

This process was as familiar to him as breathing.

A full one hour.

His movements never paused, his spirit as stable as a precision machine.

When he stopped, seven hundred twenty gray cards were neatly arranged on the workbench before him.

All were ■A Small Pebble■.

A total of seven hundred twenty cards.

His focus concentrated on that cooled-down skill on his profession panel.

The daily card draw was still necessary, but dropping from twenty hours to one hour, let's see if anything good comes out.

■Card Innovation■.

Activate.

■Please select the cards to be deleted.■

Lin Yu's hand slowly passed over those seven hundred twenty cards.

Select all.

■720 cards selected. Proceed with innovation?■

"Yes."

Hum—

Seven hundred twenty cards simultaneously transformed into points of light, converging into a massive information torrent that spun and intertwined madly before him.

The next second, the torrent solidified.

Seven hundred twenty-one brand-new cards of various glowing colors, like dandelions blown by a breeze, floated and rotated slowly before him, awaiting his selection.

Chapter 10: One Year of Use

Lin Yu's gaze swept rapidly through them.

Gray, white, green, blue...

Occasionally, a flash of purple appeared, but he quickly skipped past it.

No gold.

He searched through them three full times, confirming that among these seven hundred plus cards, not a single one was a legendary golden card.

If this had happened in the past, it would have been enough to disappoint him for an entire day.

But now, he just calmly accepted this result.

What had supported him through those five years of darkness was his obsession with the [Joker].

Now that this core infinite engine was in his hands, that obsessive drive had dissipated.

He no longer needed to place all his hopes on the daily luck of [Card Innovation].

With this heaven-defying card deck, he had countless methods to rapidly grow stronger.

From today onward, luck would merely be the icing on the cake, not the only straw determining his fate.

His mindset had completely changed.

Lin Yu began carefully screening this batch of rewards.

Most were useless garbage cards, but with such large numbers, he could always find something valuable.

His fingers traced through the air, information from card after card flowing into his mind.

Finally, his selection stopped on a blue enchantment card.

[Enchantment Card: Eye of Analysis]

[Effect: After use, your eyes can see through the basic information of most things for 30 seconds.]

A scouting and identification type card.

Very useful.

Lin Yu took this card in hand, while the remaining seven hundred twenty cards dissolved into points of light.

Holding this [Eye of Analysis], he fell into thought.

Only thirty seconds.

Too short.

In many situations, thirty seconds was completely insufficient for analyzing complex information.

However...

He glanced at the [Joker] in his pocket that served as his "startup capital."

As long as it was a card, as long as he had used it.

He could copy it.

Even if each use only lasted thirty seconds... he could get infinite refills!

Lin Yu didn't hesitate, immediately beginning operations.

He picked up one [Eye of Analysis].

Use.

A stream of cool energy poured into his eyes.

Lin Yu looked at the container steel sheet before him.

[Ordinary Container Wall]

[Material: Q235 Steel]

[Thickness: 2.5mm]

[Condition: Lightly corroded, structural strength reduced by 15%]

Line after line of data clearly appeared in his vision.

He then looked at the [Doubling Card] in his hand.

[Equipment Card: Doubling Card]

[Rarity: Blue]

[Effect: Your next card's effect activates twice.]

[Composition Energy: Void Arcane Energy 72%, Mental Imprint 21%, Rule Fragment 7%]

Impressive, it could even analyze a card's composition.

But it still wasn't enough.

In rapidly changing battle situations, thirty seconds might determine life or death. But for targets requiring deep research and analysis, this amount of time seemed inadequate.

However, this problem wasn't actually a problem for him.

Use [Joker]!

[Please select the card to copy.]

Lin Yu's consciousness landed on that blue [Eye of Analysis].

"Yes."

[Copy completed.]

The grayish-white [Joker] dissolved into points of light.

A brand new, physically textured blue [Eye of Analysis] appeared before him.

Next came the [Joker Doubling Cycle].

Preparations complete.

Lin Yu picked up those eight [Doubling Cards].

Use!

[Doubling X256]!

Two hundred fifty-six times effect amplification!

Now.

Lin Yu picked up that brand new [Eye of Analysis] he had just copied.

Use!

A stream of cool energy hundreds of times more powerful than before instantly surged from the card, flooding into his eyes.

Before his eyes, a prompt from his Class Panel popped up.

[You have gained status: Eye of Analysis (Duration: 7680 seconds)]

Seven thousand six hundred eighty seconds!

Converted, that was one hundred twenty-eight minutes.

A full two hours plus!

What was originally a thirty-second scouting skill had been transformed through his operations into a long-lasting permanent status.

For these two plus hours, he could activate the analytical vision anytime, anywhere, seeing through the basic information of all things.

Success!

A smile appeared on Lin Yu's face.

But this still wasn't enough.

Two hours was long, but not long enough.

His ambitions extended far beyond this.

Lin Yu glanced at the timer, and after confirming the [Eye of Analysis] status duration, he began a second [Joker Doubling 256x Eye of Analysis] operation.

After a smooth, flowing set of operations, the status time on his panel successfully doubled.

[You have gained status: Eye of Analysis (Duration: 15360 seconds)]

Over four hours.

Lin Yu didn't stop, continuing to repeat the entire process from before.

His movements were precise and efficient, without the slightest waste.

Like a tireless machine, he performed an unbelievable miracle creation within the narrow container.

Time passed minute by minute.

On the table before him, the [Eye of Analysis] used for copying and the [Doubling Cards] used for amplification were constantly consumed, then constantly recreated.

The status time on his Class Panel was also madly stacking up at a terrifying speed.

Eight hours.

Sixteen hours.

One day.

Two days.

One week.

One month.

...

After who knows how long.

Lin Yu finally stopped his movements.

He let out a long breath, leaning back in his chair, feeling the waves of mental fatigue washing over him.

He glanced at his Class Panel.

That status which originally lasted only thirty seconds now had a duration that had become an astronomical number.

A full year.

He had successfully transformed a thirty-second enchantment effect into a year-long permanent status through infinite refills.

For the entire next year, he would possess the ability to see through the basic information of things.

He could continue.

If he wanted, he could even stack this time to ten years, one hundred years, until the end of his life.

But he stopped.

Not because his mental energy was exhausted, nor because he felt bored.

But because he clearly recognized one problem.

The efficiency of doing this was too low.

He had spent a very, very long time, repeating the tedious process over a hundred times, just to stack the time to one year.

The bottleneck in this process wasn't the cards, but himself.

[Doubling X256].

This effect stacked from eight [Doubling Cards] was his current limit.

It wasn't that he didn't want to use a ninth, tenth card.

But his current mental energy strength simply couldn't support the existence of an eleventh [Doubling Card].

Using a ninth was manageable—he'd still have one Doubling Card and one Joker left, allowing him to temporarily copy a skill and slowly rebuild the startup deck. But if he used a tenth, he'd be finished.

There was only one way to break through this limitation.

Increase his own mental energy capacity.

As long as his mental energy was strong enough to simultaneously maintain twelve, fifteen, or even more [Doubling Cards] in stable existence.

By that time, forget about extending a skill's duration for one year.

Even if he wanted to transform a pebble into a planet, it might just require a flick of his finger.

With the current Doubling Card count, each additional card meant doubling efficiency and power!

Solving the mental energy limitation problem was the truly urgent priority!

This was ten thousand times more important than simply stacking a skill's duration.

Lin Yu stood up, stretching his somewhat stiff body.

It was time for him to move.

Chapter 11: This punch, 256 times!

For five years, he had stayed inside this metal container, like an insect sealing itself in a cocoon. Now, the cocoon had broken. Staying here any longer, aside from endlessly repeating the tedious card stacking, held no meaning.

Increasing Mental Energy.

This was his most crucial goal right now.

Lin Yu pushed away the wobbly chair and walked to the container door. He reached out, placed his hand on the cold iron door, and pushed it outward with force.

Squeak—

The rusty door hinge let out a piercing protest.

A gust of night wind, mixed with the smell of industrial exhaust and damp earth, rushed in, stirring the overly long hair on his forehead.

It was late night outside.

The distant city lights were brilliant, outlining the silhouette of the steel jungle, but here, only a few dim street lamps illuminated the chaotic outlines and shadows within the abandoned storage yard.

Lin Yu stepped out.

Just as he had walked less than ten meters from the container and was about to turn onto the path leading out of the yard, three dark figures emerged from the shadows of a pile of discarded construction materials, blocking his way.

The leader was none other than that bald Brother Wang.

The two lackeys behind him, one tall and one short, looked just like before, wearing malicious smirks.

"Lin Yu."

Brother Wang had a cigarette dangling from his mouth, its crimson ember glowing and fading in the night.

"Where are you off to so late?"

The tall, thin one beside him took a step forward, cracking his knuckles with sharp "crack, crack" sounds.

"Running away? You owe Brother Wang money, and you still think you can run?"

The short, stocky one directly pulled a half-meter-long steel pipe from the back of his waist, tossing it up and down in his palm. The metal clunked dully against his hand.

Late night, abandoned storage yard, no one passing by.

It was a perfect place to have a "reasonable discussion."

Being scared off the day before yesterday by some blonde girl with a phone was a stain on Brother Wang's professional record. The more he thought about it, the angrier he got, the more humiliated he felt. Today, he absolutely had to reclaim his face.

Lin Yu stopped walking.

He looked at the three men in front of him, his face devoid of any extra expression.

"I wasn't planning to run."

"Weren't planning to run?" Brother Wang spat the cigarette butt onto the ground and crushed it fiercely under his toe. "So you're just planning to keep messing with us? Let me tell you, Lin Yu, my patience is limited. If you try feeding me that bullshit about 'you'll find out when the time comes' again today, just see if I don't tear you apart!"

"Yeah! Stop the fucking nonsense and pay up now!" the tall, thin one chimed in.

Lin Yu's reaction once again took them by surprise.

He was straightforward.

"Three days."

"Within three days, principal and interest, not a single cent less."

The air fell silent for a moment.

Brother Wang and his two lackeys were stunned. They had prepared a bellyful of threats and curses, ready with various plans for violence, and yet the other party had just given them a clear, definite answer so lightly.

It was too straightforward, so straightforward it felt like a trap.

Brother Wang narrowed his eyes, looking Lin Yu up and down.

Still the same malnourished, frail-looking figure, looking like a strong wind could blow him over. How dare he say he'd repay the money in three days? What would he use to repay it?

"Three days?" Brother Wang sneered. "Lin Yu, do you think I'm an easy mark? What are you going to use to pay? Selling your own bones?"

"You don't need to worry about how I'll repay it," Lin Yu's reply remained calm. "Three days from now, the money will be in your account."

"What if I fucking don't believe you?"

Brother Wang took a step forward, his tall frame almost completely enveloping Lin Yu.

"Why should I trust you? Just based on your word?"

He suddenly raised his hand and grabbed a nearby discarded scaffold steel pipe. The pipe was as thick as a man's forearm, covered in rust.

"Let me tell you, I, Wang Qiang, profession [Berserker], level seventeen!"

As his words fell, the muscles in his arms bulged violently, veins popping out.

"Ha!"

A explosive shout.

Crack!

Under his strength, that solid steel pipe, smashed against a nearby concrete block, was actually bent into an exaggerated ninety-degree angle!

A loud noise echoed through the empty yard.

The two lackeys watched with wide, shining eyes, faces full of admiration.

"See that!" Brother Wang threw aside the bent pipe and pointed at Lin Yu's nose. "Don't try any tricks with me. If I don't see the money in three days, your legs will end up just like this pipe."

This was the power of a professional.

Even a low-tier Berserker, reaching level seventeen, was far beyond what an ordinary person could contend with.

This was a blatant threat of force.

Yet, faced with this display, Lin Yu merely let out a soft laugh.

The laugh was light, but in the quiet of the night, it sounded exceptionally sharp.

Brother Wang's face darkened.

"What are you laughing at?"

Lin Yu didn't answer.

He just slowly raised his right arm, adopting a punching stance.

His movements were slow, his body even swaying slightly due to weakness.

Seeing this, the two lackeys were first stunned, then burst into roaring laughter.

"Holy shit? What does he think he's doing? Fighting Brother Wang?"

"With that puny body of his, a gust of wind could knock him over, and he wants to hit someone? I'm dying of laughter!"

Brother Wang also laughed in anger.

This was the greatest insult he had ever received in his career.

A piece of trash who owed money and didn't pay, a wasted weakling so thin he looked skeletal, after witnessing the power of a level seventeen Berserker, instead of kneeling and begging for mercy, actually wanted to fight him?

"Good, very good." Brother Wang, enraged to the point of laughter, said, "Today, I'll make you understand exactly what..."

His words were cut short.

Because Lin Yu threw his punch.

A straight punch.

The speed wasn't fast, the force looked weak and soft.

With his current drained body, a full-force punch would amount to forty kilograms at most.

Less than an average adult male.

But at the moment the punch was delivered, his entire aura changed.

An intangible ripple spread out from him as the center.

[Joker Doubling Cycle] (High-Speed Version)!

[Doubling X256]!

The effects of eight [Doubling Cards] instantly stacked!

The phantom image of a card flashed briefly across the surface of his fist.

Card Manifestation!

Attack Card [Straight Punch Impact]!

Activate!

[Straight Punch Impact]!

That seemingly weak and powerless punch, carrying a two-hundred-fifty-six-fold power amplification, did not strike Brother Wang, nor did it strike either of the lackeys.

Instead, it brushed past Brother Wang's body and slammed fiercely into the decorative granite block behind him.

The stone block was over a meter tall, thick and solid.

The moment the fist made contact with the stone, there was no loud crash as one might expect.

Only an extremely muffled "thump" sound.

As if it wasn't solid granite, but a block of tofu.

Time froze for a second.

The ferocious grin was still frozen on Brother Wang's face.

The mocking laughter of the two lackeys was still stuck in their throats.

The next second.

BOOM——!!!

Centered on Lin Yu's fist, spiderweb-like cracks instantly spread across the entire massive granite block!

Immediately after, under an irresistible, terrifying force, the solid stone exploded into pieces!

It didn't just crack; it pulverized!

Innumerable stone fragments of varying sizes, carrying terrifying kinetic energy, shot out in all directions!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The stone fragments struck the metal sheets of distant containers, denting them.

A powerful shockwave spread out from the center of the explosion, causing Brother Wang and the other two to stagger back, struggling to stay on their feet.

Dust filled the air.

The whole world fell silent.

Brother Wang stood dumbfounded in place, his body rigid. He could feel that just moments ago, a fist-sized stone fragment had flown past his cheek; the wind pressure it carried had scraped his face painfully.

He mechanically turned his head to look at the spot where the granite block had originally been.

Chapter 12: Let's talk about it in three days

Forty kilograms of force.

Multiplied by two hundred and fifty-six times.

That was... over ten thousand kilograms of impact force.

Ten thousand kilograms, ten tons.

Equivalent to a fully loaded small pickup truck concentrating all its kinetic energy onto a fist-sized point at extremely high speed.

Even if Lin Yu's punching power was weak, after a 256-fold amplification, it still had terrifying destructive force!

The dust slowly settled.

Lin Yu retracted his fist, his arm hanging naturally at his side.

He didn't even glance at the three debt collectors who were frozen in shock, simply stepping past their rigid bodies.

Only devastation remained behind.

The originally solid granite bollard had now become a shattered main fragment surrounded by scattered debris. The largest piece was no bigger than a palm, while the rest consisted of fine stone powder drifting in the night breeze.

Brother Wang stood frozen in place, completely motionless.

His two underlings behind him were in the same posture, as if someone had cast a paralysis spell on them.

Three people, three statues, together forming an absurd scene.

Lin Yu didn't look back.

Step by step, he walked along the uneven dirt road of the storage yard, his figure stretching long under the dim streetlights.

While he appeared calm on the surface, only he knew what he was truly feeling inside.

Damn! Holy shit, that hurts!!!

A burning, stinging pain spread across the surface of his fist.

Although it wasn't serious enough to cause bone or tendon damage, the recoil from the impact still made him grimace in pain.

This was the cost of Card Manifestation attacks.

Transforming his own attack motion into an instant-effect [Attack Card] was an advanced application of the Card Creation profession.

The benefit was that professional characteristics provided an energy protection layer that offset most of the recoil force and could trigger various card effects.

Otherwise, with his current physical condition, forget about shattering granite - the moment his fist made contact with the stone, the bones in his own arm would have shattered into pieces first.

Ten tons of impact force was no joke.

Even with professional protection, the residual vibrations still left his arm numb, with the surface of his fist rubbed raw and red.

It seemed improving his physical fitness needed to be put on the agenda too.

Having world-shattering power without a vessel capable of bearing that power was ultimately just a castle in the air.

Lin Yu shook his slightly numb right hand, pushing the discomfort aside as he continued walking forward.

Behind him, the deathly silence was finally broken.

"Brother... Brother Wang..."

The tall, thin underling stammered as he spoke, pointing with a trembling finger at Lin Yu's receding figure, then at the scattered rubble on the ground.

"Wh-what... what was that just now?"

Brother Wang didn't answer.

His mind was completely blank, his ears filled with nothing but buzzing noises.

That punch just now had been thrown almost right beside his body.

He had clearly felt the terrifying nature of that power.

As a Level Seventeen Berserker, when he activated his rage mode, he could also punch a hole in a concrete wall.

But compared to what he just witnessed, that was like child's play.

"Did... did he use some kind of movie prop?"

The short, stocky underling also regained his senses, his face pale but his mind working quickly.

Hearing this, the tall, thin one thought it made sense too, the fear on his face fading somewhat as it was replaced by an expression of sudden understanding.

"Right! That must be it! Damn, that scared me to death!"

"Exactly! Just putting on a show to scare us!"

The short, stocky underling, seemingly to bolster his own courage, walked over to the pile of rubble and looked at the only relatively intact part - what remained of the bollard's base.

He spat.

"What bullshit power, using props to scare me. Let me test it!"

Saying this, he imitated Lin Yu's earlier posture, setting his stance and concentrating all his strength into his right fist.

"Watch me smash this too!"

"Ha!"

With an explosive shout, he put all his strength into a fierce punch aimed directly at the remaining bollard fragment!

"CRACK!"

A sickening bone-cracking sound rang out.

But it didn't come from the stone.

"AHHH—!!!"

A piercing scream instantly tore through the night sky of the abandoned storage yard.

The short, stocky underling clutched his right hand, rolling on the ground in agony.

His entire fist was now twisted at an unnatural angle, blood gushing out from between his fingers, quickly staining his palm red.

There was also blood splattered on the bollard.

The air fell silent once again.

The tall, thin underling stared dumbfounded at his companion, then at the bollard remnant that hadn't gained even a single crack despite the full-force attack.

Brother Wang also regained his senses.

He looked at his rolling underling as if he were an idiot.

This idiot actually dared to try it!

Without holding back at all?

Really impressive!

With this, all their wishful thinking and speculation were completely shattered.

That wasn't a prop.

That was genuine power belonging to Lin Yu himself.

Brother Wang's heart was now filled with mixed emotions.

He recalled the past few years, how he had brought people to Lin Yu's door again and again.

They had smashed his belongings, spray-painted his walls, hurled the most vicious insults at him.

And Lin Yu had always maintained that submissive attitude, never resisting, never explaining.

Brother Wang had always thought that was the cowardice of a loser.

But now it seemed...

If Lin Yu had always possessed this kind of power...

Then his previous behavior, that attitude of letting them bully him... could it be that he was actually going easy on them?

Why? What was he trying to do?

Was he some kind of undercover agent, playing the long game?

Aiming to take down the people behind him??

He felt his back instantly become soaked with cold sweat.

A powerhouse capable of shattering granite with one punch had disguised himself as a helpless loser, silently enduring their harassment and humiliation for years.

What exactly was this person after?

What was he really planning?

Brother Wang didn't dare to think about it any further.

He only felt that he and his two underlings had been jumping around like clowns under a monster's watchful eye for all these years, completely unaware.

"Brother Wang! Brother Wang! My hand! My hand is broken!!"

On the ground, the short, stocky underling's cries pulled Brother Wang back from his fearful thoughts.

Looking at his incompetent subordinate, he felt a wave of irritation.

"Stop your fucking crying! Shut up!"

Brother Wang walked over and kicked him in the butt.

"Let's go! Let's go! To the hospital! Get you bandaged up!"

He didn't want to stay in this damned place for one second longer.

The tall, thin underling quickly stepped forward to help up his still-wailing companion.

"Brother Wang, what about... what about Lin Yu? Do we still deal with him?"

Brother Wang's footsteps paused.

Deal with him?

With what?

With our heads?

How many bollards is your head harder than?

"Didn't he say he'd pay within three days?"

Suppressing the fear in his heart, Brother Wang feigned calmness as he tossed out a sentence.

"Let's talk about it three days later..."

Chapter 13: Sister, this is all you have.

Night was fading away.

Lin Yao lay on her soft bed, tossing and turning, completely unable to sleep.

The city's neon lights outside cast mottled patterns on the ceiling.

Everything was quiet, but her mind was a chaotic mess.

Her brother's emaciated back, that foul-smelling shipping container, and those glaring crimson words on the wall kept replaying in her mind.

"I'm playing a grand strategy game."

Her brother's calm, confident words now sounded more like self-delusional madness.

What kind of grand strategy required torturing yourself into such a wretched state?

She couldn't accept it.

How had her once brilliant, capable brother become like this?

With the upcoming profession awakening and subsequent college entrance exams approaching.

Each matter piled up, weighing heavily on her heart.

Her chest felt suffocatingly tight.

Lin Yao abruptly sat up in bed.

Since she couldn't sleep, she might as well not bother.

She changed into athletic wear, put on running shoes, and quietly left home.

The morning air carried a slight chill.

She began jogging along familiar streets, trying to use physical exhaustion to drive away the troubles in her heart.

Her footsteps made rhythmic tapping sounds on the asphalt road.

Streetlights stretched and shortened her shadow.

As she ran, her steps uncontrollably turned toward the road leading to the abandoned industrial area on the city outskirts.

She knew she shouldn't come here again.

She should listen to her brother and Sister Qingxue, focus on her own life, and prepare for the upcoming profession awakening.

But she couldn't do it.

Her own brother was here—how could she truly let go?

When the familiar, dilapidated outline of the industrial area appeared in her vision, Lin Yao slowed her pace.

Dawn was breaking, casting a grayish-white light over the ruins.

From a distance, she could already see that rusted shipping container.

However, when she moved closer, her steps suddenly halted.

Not far from the container door, that granite stone block that had originally served as decoration...

Was shattered.

Not cracked, but completely pulverized.

Rubble of various sizes scattered everywhere, the scene in complete disarray as if plowed over by a bomb.

In the morning light, she clearly saw several dried, blackened stains on the largest fragment and the surrounding ground.

Blood!

Lin Yao's mind went blank with a buzzing sound.

The debt collectors!

Those debt collectors from yesterday had returned for revenge!

They had attacked her brother!

This thought struck her like lightning.

She could no longer remain calm, rushing madly toward the shipping container.

"Brother!"

"Brother! Are you okay?"

Her shouts echoed through the empty storage yard, carrying sobs and uncontrollable trembling.

The container door was tightly shut.

Lin Yao rushed to the door, pounding fiercely on the cold metal surface.

"Brother! Open the door! Say something!"

There was no response from inside.

Deathly silence.

Lin Yao's heart sank to the depths.

Trembling, she fumbled a key from her pocket.

She had secretly duplicated this—in the entire family, only she still had a key to this container.

The key wouldn't fit into the lock—her hands were shaking too badly.

"Don't let anything happen... please... please don't let anything happen..."

She prayed softly between sobs.

"Click."

The lock opened.

Lin Yao pushed the door open violently and rushed inside.

The room still held that familiar, nauseating sour odor.

But there was no one there.

The spot before the broken desk was empty, the chair knocked over.

Her brother's usual seat was vacant.

He wasn't here!

Lin Yao's last shred of hope shattered.

She looked around—the room appeared even more chaotic than yesterday, as if experiencing a violent struggle.

Combined with the shattered stone block and bloodstains outside...

A terrifying thought seized her heart.

Had her brother already been... by them?

She didn't dare continue the thought, taking out her phone and preparing to dial emergency services with trembling fingers.

Just then, her movements froze.

Something seemed off about the corner of the desk.

That spot had originally held a small mountain of gray cards.

But now, the card mountain was gone.

Replaced by... a pile of money.

Not just a stack, but a large heap, messy and disorganized.

Brand new, identically serial-numbered, red hundred-yuan bills were casually piled there, with a large handful of shiny coins scattered beside them.

The bills were excessively new, without even creases.

In the dim room, that splash of red appeared particularly glaring.

Lin Yao stood frozen.

She approached, reaching out as if guided by some unseen force, and picked up one bill.

The texture felt right.

The paper quality, ink smell—no different from real currency.

She picked up a coin.

The weight and luster also carried an indescribable strangeness.

But cash, completely identical serial numbers! How was this possible...

Counterfeit money?

This word emerged in her mind.

Then, all the inexplicable details from the past five years suddenly found answers in this moment.

Why had her brother abandoned the college entrance exams to lock himself away?

Why was he obsessed with creating those garbage cards that disappeared at midnight?

Why did he ignore their parents' advice, preferring to sever ties with his family to persist?

Why did he say "I'm playing a grand strategy game"?

Why did he accumulate so much debt, yet say "you'll understand when that day comes"?

So... that was it.

So that was it!

Lin Yao suddenly "understood" everything!

What creating garbage cards, what Sisyphus-like mad behavior...

That was all just camouflage!

He was using his epic-level profession talent, [Myriad Forms Card Crafter], to practice!

Those stones, sand, dried grass—they were all practice materials!

And his ultimate goal was to create currency!

Create counterfeit money!

Once this thought emerged, it became unstoppable.

It perfectly explained all of Lin Yu's abnormal behavior over the past five years.

He wasn't crazy—he was perfectly lucid!

He had been preparing for a massive, insane, illegal plan all along!

The bloodstains and shattered stone outside were probably from conflicts during transactions with some underground forces.

Brother...

My foolish brother!

The counterfeit bill in Lin Yao's hand fluttered to the ground.

Her legs weakened, and she collapsed sitting on the floor.

Tears surged forth once more.

But this time, not from heartache or fear.

But from a deeper, more thorough despair.

She had thought her brother had gone mad, developed mental problems.

But now she "understood"—her brother had actively chosen a path of no return.

He was a [Myriad Forms Card Crafter] after all!

A unique golden epic-level profession!

He should have had boundless bright prospects, should have become someone extraordinary, the pride of their entire family!

Yet he used this peerless talent for... for these petty, thieving activities!

This was even harder for Lin Yao to accept than if he had gone mad!

Was it worth it?

To abandon everything for these things—was it worth it?

Chapter 14: White Basic Consumables

Linzhou City, West District.

This was a scar on the city's body, with electrical wires hanging haphazardly like spider webs on the exteriors of old residential buildings. The ground was perpetually damp, carrying the sour smell of mixed food scraps and unidentified liquids.

Lin Yu walked through the narrow alleyways, keeping himself hidden in the shadows of buildings.

He didn't know that after he left, his younger sister had visited that shipping container again.

He was even more unaware that Lin Yao, facing a pile of toy banknotes he had casually replicated, had imagined an entire tragic drama about "a genius Card Creator falling into becoming a master counterfeiter."

If he had known, he would probably just shake his head and sigh, thinking his silly sister's perspective was just that limited.

Having acquired the [Joker Doubling Cycle], he essentially possessed theoretical infinity.

The world was his canvas.

Lin Yu was being very careful now; he valued his life immensely.

For the past five years, he had lived like a dog, not caring how he mistreated himself, because back then he was merely accumulating fuel for a distant goal.

But now things were different.

His infinitely wonderful life had just begun.

It was no exaggeration to say...

His potential was limitless!

But he truly wasn't that strong yet—the recoil from that punch that shattered granite still made his arm ache faintly.

If he accidentally died at a time like this...

It would be such a waste.

After winding through numerous turns, he finally stopped in front of a hardware store that looked like it was about to go out of business.

A sign hanging on the door read "Closed for Renovations."

Without hesitation, Lin Yu reached out and knocked on the rusty rolling shutter door five times with a "three long, two short" rhythm, neither too lightly nor too heavily.

After a moment, a corner of the rolling shutter was silently lifted to create a crack, and a turbid eye peered out from inside.

After confirming it was Lin Yu's familiar, malnourished face, the gap widened enough for one person to squeeze through sideways.

Lin Yu slipped inside, and the rolling shutter immediately dropped, cutting off the outside light.

This was one of the entrances to the largest underground black market in West Linzhou City—the "Junkyard."

Countless bottles of cheap Mental Stabilizers that had kept him alive over the past five years were purchased here.

He couldn't afford the ones from legitimate pharmacies.

After passing through a long, narrow corridor filled with the smell of mold, the space suddenly opened up before him.

A massive underground area appeared, with various stalls arranged chaotically. Dim light bulbs hung overhead, and the air was thick with the complex scent of tobacco, alcohol, and sweat.

The place was bustling with people, but everyone hid their faces with hoods, masks, or cheap spell illusions.

Anonymity was the first rule of the black market.

Lin Yu walked familiarly to a counter in the corner.

A man wearing a mask sat behind the counter.

"Get me a private room. And assemble the cheapest 'Crow' set for one day." Lin Yu's voice was very low.

"Crow" was black market slang referring to the most basic disguise set, typically consisting of a large black cloak and a plain white hard mask without any features.

"One hundred thirty total." The man behind the counter was brief.

Lin Yu pulled out a crumpled hundred-dollar bill from his pocket, then fished out several dozen coins, placing them all on the counter.

This was the last of his real money.

The man took the money and handed him a key and a package.

Lin Yu took the items and quickly found the corresponding room.

The room was small, containing only a table, a chair, and a mirror hanging on the wall that was full of scratches.

But the rooms here were absolutely secure.

If nothing else, at least his Eye of Analysis couldn't see through them.

He quickly changed into the large black cloak, put on the white mask, and stored his original clothes.

The person in the mirror was tall and thin, shrouded by the large black robe, showing no physical characteristics. The face was a blank slate, with only two dark eye holes.

There was a faint flow of energy.

The more basic the service, the more stable it tended to be.

After completing this, Lin Yu sat down.

He looked at his empty pockets and fell into brief contemplation.

Startup capital—gone.

To quickly improve his strength, he needed money to buy materials, Medicine, and equipment.

He needed his first bucket of gold.

The effect of [Joker] was to copy a previously used card.

When he had replicated in the rental room, he had used the [Hundred Dollar Bill] card.

[Replication successful]!

An identical [Hundred Dollar Bill Card] appeared in his hand.

He didn't continue using the [Doubling Card].

Replicating currency was too risky. He didn't plan to go down that path.

This was merely a last resort method to obtain startup funds.

Forgive him—he swore this was the first and last time he would use counterfeit money!

He materialized the card, and a brand new hundred-dollar bill appeared in his hand.

He kept it separate from the previous one—no big issue.

With startup capital in hand, Lin Yu left the private room and merged back into the black market crowd.

He didn't look at the stalls selling equipment or Medicine.

He couldn't afford those things now, and they were likely to attract attention.

His target was clear.

After wandering around, he finally stopped at a completely inconspicuous corner.

The stall was piled with various industrial waste and materials. The stall owner was a skinny old man, also wearing a mask.

Lin Yu's gaze locked onto a pile of cylindrical material emitting a soft white glow among the items.

White Basic Consumable Material.

This was a standard product created by decomposers, mainly obtained from breaking down low-level equipment.

Its uses were extremely wide-ranging—from crafting equipment down to construction, toys, and industrial production.

Because it appealed to both professionals and ordinary people across two circles, its price was very stable.

Standard unit: one kilogram for one hundred dollars.

Massive circulation volume, massive demand.

The perfect commodity for his first bucket of gold.

"Standard price, one hundred per kilogram." The stall owner didn't even look up.

"One kilogram."

Lin Yu handed over the hundred-dollar bill he had just replicated.

The stall owner took the money, scanned it with a cheap counterfeit detector, confirmed it was valid, then casually picked up a piece of the consumable material, put it in a bag, and tossed it to Lin Yu.

The standard for this stuff was also one piece per kilogram.

Lin Yu took the item and quickly returned to his private room.

He closed the door.

He poured the White Basic Consumable Material from the bag onto the table.

A piece that wasn't too big or too small, about the size of a palm.

Then, he pressed his hand against it.

Card Manifestation!

This time, the Card Manifestation process was considerably slower than when he had created the stone card earlier, and it consumed more Mental Energy.

Several minutes later, a card emitting a white halo finally took form.

[White Basic Consumable Material Card]

Success!

Lin Yu didn't pause, immediately activating his core ability.

[Joker Doubling Cycle]!

[Doubling X256]!

The effects of eight [Doubling Cards] instantly poured forth!

With a clattering sound.

Two hundred fifty-six kilograms! Two hundred sixty pieces of White Basic Consumable Material!

Chapter 15: Do Business Slowly

Two hundred and fifty-six pieces of softly glowing white material completely covered the shabby table, almost overflowing.

Beneath the mask, Lin Yu's breathing remained steady.

One piece was worth one hundred dollars.

Two hundred and fifty-six pieces meant twenty-five thousand six hundred dollars.

Not long ago, this amount of money would have required him to rely on various loans, robbing Peter to pay Paul, just to barely scrape it together.

Now, it only took a few minutes.

But this wasn't enough.

Far from enough.

Without stopping, he randomly picked up one piece from the mountain of consumable materials and activated his professional ability again.

[Card Manifestation]!

His Mental Energy receded like a tide as a new [White Basic Consumable Material Card] took shape in his hand.

Immediately after, came that perfect Closed Loop he had rehearsed for five years in his dreams, now finally realized.

[Joker]!

[Doubling X256]!

Clatter!

The sound of matter materializing out of thin air rang out again, crisp and pleasing to the ear. The pile of consumable materials on the table grew even higher, with several pieces rolling onto the floor.

Lin Yu's expression remained impassive, like a tireless machine, repeating the process.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

When the fourth cycle was completed, the floor of this cramped single room was completely filled with White Basic Consumable Materials. They formed a small hill, completely burying the only table and chair.

One thousand and twenty-four pieces.

One hundred and two thousand four hundred dollars.

A dull ache throbbed at his temples; the Mental Energy consumption was quite substantial. It was time to cash in these items.

Lin Yu took out the simple communicator provided with the room and sent a coded message.

"1024, White Basic Consumable Materials, standard. Room 307. Authorized buyers only."

He leaned against the door, waiting quietly.

The black market was efficient. In less than ten minutes, a "knock knock knock" sounded at the door.

Lin Yu pulled the door open.

Outside stood a man also wearing a black cloak, but with a bronze mask. His gaze swept over the small mountain of consumable materials in the room without any unnecessary reaction.

"All standard grade?" The man's voice was hoarse and low.

"Check yourself." Lin Yu stepped aside to make way.

The buyer entered the room, pulled out a small device from his sleeve, took one piece each from the upper, middle, and lower layers of the material pile, and scanned them. The device beeped softly a few times and lit up with a green light.

"Purity 99.8%, standard grade. I'll take it all."

"One hundred and two thousand four hundred." Lin Yu quoted the price.

"Acceptable." The buyer didn't haggle. For transactions involving these basic consumable materials, prices were transparent; bargaining would only waste both their time.

He pulled out a black card and a small terminal. "Your card."

"New here. Cash or transfer."

The buyer paused for a moment. "Cash is troublesome, transfers can be traced. Get a black card, that's the rule."

"Where do I get one?"

"The exchange. Mention my name 'Bronze Mask,' they'll set you up. I'll wait."

The buyer seemed very patient. He brushed off a chair half-buried in consumable materials and sat down, appearing completely unhurried.

Lin Yu locked the door and followed the directions to find the so-called exchange. An oily fat man sat behind the window.

"Sent by Bronze Mask, here to get a card."

The fat man slid out a form and a card. "Just fill in any code name. Card fee is one hundred."

Lin Yu paid with a replicated banknote and quickly received a pure black card with no markings except for a chip.

Returning to Room 307, the Bronze Mask buyer was still there.

Lin Yu handed over the card.

The buyer inserted the card into the terminal and operated it a few times.

"Beep."

"Transferred, one hundred and two thousand four hundred." He returned the card to Lin Yu.

Lin Yu waved his hand.

"It's all yours."

The buyer nodded, pulled out a seemingly ordinary burlap sack from under his cloak. He opened the sack and began stuffing the white consumable materials inside. The bag was like a bottomless pit; over a thousand kilograms of materials were completely packed away in less than a minute.

A low-level spatial storage artifact.

"Next time you have this quantity, contact me directly." The buyer hoisted the sack that looked quite heavy over his shoulder and turned to leave.

Lin Yu swiped the black card on the room's terminal.

Balance: 102,400.

Below was a line of small text.

[Internal black market circulation: No fees. External transfers: 30% fee.]

Plucking feathers from a goose as it passes—fitting for the black market's style. As long as the money circulated internally, he wouldn't be skimmed this cut.

One hundred thousand dollars—his first small pot of gold acquired!

But this method of filling the room and then trading was too inefficient and carried high risks. He needed a more convenient tool.

He left the room again and headed deeper into the black market toward an area selling miscellaneous goods.

He stopped in front of a stall filled with old equipment.

"I need a storage ring."

The stall owner was a thin, withered old man. He pointed at several rings on a tray. "Official standard, three cubic meters, three hundred thousand. Guild certified, five cubic meters, five hundred fifty thousand."

Both prices were beyond his means.

"Anything cheaper?"

The old man looked him over. "Cheaper? Of course there is."

He fumbled under the counter and pulled out a blackened iron ring. "If you don't mind, it's a replica."

"What's the issue?"

"The issue is, its spatial beacon is duplicated. Here, with the signal shielding, it works fine. But once you leave the black market, if you dare activate it, it will immediately trigger an alarm, sending your coordinates to the company, the company sends it to the police, and you'll be waiting for jail time."

The old man grinned, revealing a mouth of yellow teeth. "But inside the 'Junkyard,' it works perfectly."

A tool specifically for the black market.

"How big?"

"One hundred cubic meters. But it's unstable, can only store one type of non-living material. Once you load something, you have to empty it before storing a different type."

"How much?"

"Seeing as you're a regular, eighty thousand, no haggling."

Lin Yu only considered it for a second. Seed capital was meant to snowball; efficiency was most important.

"Deal."

Transfer the money, take the goods.

Back in the single room, Lin Yu put on the ring and channeled a thread of Mental Energy into it. A vast but chaotic space appeared in his perception.

He placed a piece of consumable material inside, then took it out. Smooth.

One hundred cubic meters—absolutely, definitely enough!

His [Joker Doubling Cycle] produced two hundred and fifty-six pieces per cycle.

An idea formed in his mind.

He placed one piece of consumable material into the ring, then manifested it as a card and activated his ability.

[Doubling X256]!

With a thought, two hundred and fifty-six pieces of consumable material directly materialized inside the ring's internal space.

Success.

This meant he could complete production and storage directly inside the ring!

Efficiency greatly increased!

Without the slightest hesitation, Lin Yu immediately began a new round of production.

Mental Energy consumption, [Card Manifestation], [Joker], [Multiplication]!

Done in one breath.

He planned to first fill the ring with one hundred cubic meters of consumable materials, then sell them all at once.

However, when he repeated the cycle forty times, his actions stopped.

[Prompt: Storage space full.]

Forty times?

One cycle was two hundred and fifty-six kilograms, meaning two hundred and fifty-six standard consumable pieces.

Forty cycles meant ten thousand two hundred and forty pieces.

Chapter 16: Old Ghost Hall

This ring...

Lin Yu's movements froze.

He picked up a piece of consumable material and tried to stuff it into the ring.

It wouldn't fit anymore.

It was truly full.

He didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

One hundred cubic meters?

That old man really just threw out numbers without thinking.

The volume of one standard consumable material was approximately one-thousandth of a cubic meter.

Basically 10cm*10cm*10cm.

Ten thousand pieces would be about ten cubic meters.

Lin Yu activated his Eye of Analysis to look, and sure enough, just as he had suspected!

It had shrunk by a full ten times!

As expected of the black market, as expected of counterfeit goods.

Even if he went back to find that old man now, the other party would absolutely refuse to admit it, and might even turn the tables on him.

Forget it.

Ten cubic meters was still ten cubic meters.

Ten thousand pieces of consumable material were still worth one million.

Not bad at all.

He piled the extra two hundred and forty pieces of consumable material in the corner of the room.

He would deal with them in the next round.

Now, the ring contained exactly ten thousand pieces of white basic consumable material.

Worth one million.

Lin Yu didn't contact that "Bronze Mask" again.

A one-time transaction of one million worth of goods was too conspicuous.

He valued his life too much and didn't want to attract any unnecessary attention.

Better safe than sorry.

He returned to the black market's main hall and began searching for new buyers.

He didn't go to those shops that looked large-scale, but specifically targeted those scattered, small stalls that didn't seem to be doing much business.

The first stall was run by a woman wearing a clown mask.

"Buying consumable materials? Standard quality."

"Buying, what's your price?"

"Market price."

"Ninety-eight per piece, how many do you have?" The woman drove down the price.

"Five hundred pieces."

"Do you have storage equipment? Let's change locations for the exchange?"

"Fine."

The transaction completed quickly, and his Black Card gained forty-nine thousand more.

Lin Yu turned and left without any hesitation.

He found a second stall, run by a young man who looked quite dejected.

"Consumable materials, want them?"

"Ninety-nine." The young man was very straightforward.

"One thousand pieces."

"Good."

Another ninety-nine thousand entered his account.

Lin Yu maintained extreme patience, moving through various corners of the black market like a ghost.

He split the ten thousand pieces of consumable materials into over a dozen transactions.

The largest transaction didn't exceed one hundred thousand, while the smallest was only a few thousand.

The black market had massive capacity, and white basic consumable materials were highly circulated hard currency, so his actions didn't attract anyone's attention.

When the final transaction was completed, Lin Yu returned to his private room.

He pressed his Black Card against the room's terminal.

A series of numbers jumped out.

Balance: 1,031,100.

Adding the initial one hundred thousand plus transferred by "Bronze Mask," then deducting the eighty thousand for buying the ring and the one hundred for getting the card.

Plus various price reductions.

Exactly one million, thirty-one thousand, one hundred.

Lin Yu looked at that number, put the Black Card back in his pocket, his heart completely calm.

It sounded exaggerated, but for him, this was just the beginning.

Over these five years, the various black market loans he owed, with interest compounding upon interest, totaled only about three million.

At his current efficiency, he could pay it off in just three days.

But Lin Yu had a more efficient plan,

though the prerequisite for the plan was having sufficient strength to protect himself.

Lin Yu pulled up his attribute panel.

■Name: Lin Yu■

■Profession: Myriad Forms Card Crafter (Epic)■

■Level: 0■

■Strength: 4■

■Constitution: 2■

■Agility: 3■

■Mental Energy: 45■

■Skills: Card Manifestation LVMAX, Card Innovation LV10, Mirror Copy LV1■

Except for his Mental Energy, which was slightly above average due to five years of uninterrupted card creation and medicine consumption, his other three attributes could only be described as feeble.

The recoil from punching through the stone pier still made his arm bones ache faintly—this was the consequence of having constitution that was too low.

He had to improve his strength as quickly as possible!

Besides leveling up, the fastest method was... taking medicine.

Lin Yu left that cramped private room and merged back into the black market's crowds.

This time, his destination was even more specific.

He passed through the noisy trading hall and turned into an even more remote, darker side alley.

The air here was filled with a strong herbal scent and a pungent chemical reagent smell, mixing together to form a nauseating odor.

Occasionally, one could see the corpses of experimental animals that had collapsed, their life force completely drained, lying by the roadside.

This was the black market's "Medicine Man Alley," one of the most chaotic areas in the entire West City black market.

Lin Yu moved with familiar ease to the deepest part of the alley, where there was an inconspicuous shop.

A wooden sign hung at the shop entrance, with three characters branded using a red-hot iron: Old Ghost Hall.

This was the place where he had bought cheap Mental Stabilizers over the past five years.

Compared to the other maniacs in the alley who wouldn't hesitate to treat customers as materials, the owner of this shop at least retained a trace of "business reputation."

Lin Yu pushed the door open.

Ding ling.

The wind chime on the door made a crisp sound.

The interior was dimly lit, with shelves filled with various labeled glass bottles containing all sorts of strange biological organs and plant roots soaking in liquid.

A gaunt man stood with his back to the door, stirring a bubbling green liquid in a crucible with a glass rod.

He didn't turn around.

"Mental Stabilizers are sold out, come back next week."

This was Old Ghost Hall's absolute bestseller—effective, cheap, and what most people came to buy, including Lin Yu in the past.

"I don't want that." Lin Yu lowered his voice, his "Crow" cloak effectively concealing his figure and vocal characteristics.

The man stopped stirring with the glass rod.

He slowly turned around.

The man also wore a mask on his face—the oldest type of plague doctor mask, with its long beak appearing bizarre and terrifying.

His exposed skin showed an unhealthy pallor, with several ugly suture marks on his neck.

"Oh? Then what do you want?"

"Medicine that can permanently enhance attributes." Lin Yu stated his purpose directly.

The man beneath the bird-beak mask, known as "Old Ghost" the pharmacist, let out a hoarse laugh.

"Quite ambitious. The things I have here aren't cheap."

"Name your price."

Old Ghost didn't answer immediately. His eyes, hidden behind the mask, scanned Lin Yu up and down.

"Medicine that permanently enhances attributes falls under the most forbidden of forbidden drugs. The materials for each dose are extremely precious, and the side effects are outrageously high. Are you sure you can afford it?"

Lin Yu didn't waste words, slapping his Black Card directly onto the counter.

"Check the balance."

Old Ghost picked up an old terminal from the counter and inserted the Black Card.

When that long string of numbers appeared on the terminal screen, his movements noticeably paused.

1,031,100.

"Not bad." Old Ghost pulled out the card and tossed it back to Lin Yu.

His attitude did a complete one-eighty.

"Since you're a valued customer, of course I have what you need."

Old Ghost carefully took out three boxes and placed them on the counter one by one.

Chapter 17: I Want Them All

"Strength, Agility, Constitution. Three types, corresponding to three different main ingredients."

He opened the first box.

Inside was a syringe filled with a deep red liquid as thick as molten lava.

"[Brute Potion-Inferior], main ingredient is heart blood from an abyss troll. Can permanently increase 1-3 points of Strength. The process will be extremely painful - your muscles will be torn apart and reconstructed. Those with weak willpower can literally be tortured to death. Price: two hundred thousand."

He then opened the second box.

This one contained a test tube holding pale cyan gas.

"[Windwalker's Breath-Inferior], main ingredient is wind elemental crystal. After inhalation, can permanently increase 1-3 points of Agility. The process is also quite interesting - you'll experience the sensation of every bone in your body being shattered inch by inch. Price: two hundred thousand."

Finally, the third box.

Inside was an earthy yellow, slightly pulsating fleshy tumor.

"[Stoneheart-Inferior], main ingredient is the life gland of a mountain giant. Swallow it, and it can permanently increase 1-3 points of Constitution. This one is the safest - basically just sleep through it and wake up fine. However, there's a ten percent chance you'll merge with rock and become a lifeless statue. Price: two hundred fifty thousand."

Lin Yu looked at the three medicines.

Random attribute gains, painful processes, and fatal risks.

Truly worthy of black market products.

He scanned them with his Eye of Analysis and found Old Ghost was indeed telling the truth - a rare conscientious person in the black market.

"Why are they all inferior versions?"

"Because I can't get the materials for the complete versions. Even if I could, you couldn't afford them with your current funds." Old Ghost spread his hands. "Besides, the complete versions have even worse side effects. Less than one in ten people survive continuous injections."

"Out of my simple professional ethics, I'll remind you - for these three types, I only recommend using each one once." Old Ghost added.

"Once?"

"Yes, once." Old Ghost's plague doctor mask turned toward him. "Theoretically, these things can raise your attributes to the 500-point cap. But that's just theory. The more you use them, the less effective they become - later uses might only give you 0.5 or 0.6 points. More importantly, toxins accumulate in your body. Use them once or twice, and those with good constitutions can endure it. Use them ten times, and people basically go insane. Twenty times? Even gods couldn't save you."

Old Ghost picked up the [Brute Potion-Inferior] and shook it under the light.

"Besides, with that kind of money, wouldn't you rather buy something else?"

Lin Yu remained silent.

He had heard that some truly wealthy people, or core members of major guilds, would raise their base attributes very high before leveling up. They also relied on medicines.

It seemed things weren't that simple.

"Is there a way to clear the side effects?" Lin Yu asked.

Old Ghost's movements stopped, and the eyes behind his mask seemed to be reassessing Lin Yu.

"Yes."

He slowly put back the [Brute Potion-Inferior] and turned to rummage through a locked cabinet behind him.

After a moment, he took out a silver metal briefcase.

With a "click," the case opened.

Inside was only one exquisitely crafted syringe containing pure golden liquid.

"[Life Serum-Standard Edition], produced by a legitimate company, military-grade quality. Can clear all toxins and side effects remaining from one medicine use. One dose: five hundred thousand."

Five hundred thousand.

Almost half of his entire fortune.

Just to clear the side effects of one use.

But Lin Yu understood clearly that this thing's value far exceeded five hundred thousand. For those madmen who wanted to stack attributes through medicines, this was life itself.

"I'll take one."

"Sorry." Old Ghost closed the case. "This one has been reserved."

Lin Yu's movements paused slightly.

"Reserved?"

"Yes. Someone paid a deposit and could come pick it up at any time." Old Ghost put the case back in the cabinet and relocked it.

Lin Yu didn't press the issue further.

"Do you have any mental attribute medicines?"

"Naturally we do."

When mentioning mental medicines, Old Ghost's attitude clearly changed, even carrying a trace of barely noticeable pride.

He took out what looked like an ordinary medicine bottle from under another counter, containing pale blue liquid.

"[Lucid Potion], can permanently increase 2 points of Mental Power. Moreover, there's little pain, and the effects are stable. Same price: two hundred thousand."

"This one doesn't have the 'inferior' suffix?"

"Of course not." Old Ghost's plague doctor mask lifted slightly. "This is a product from my former employer - I was one of the core designers. Later, due to some minor philosophical differences, I left."

Lin Yu looked at the medicine bottle.

"How many times can this be used?"

"Ten times." Old Ghost extended one finger. "Within ten uses, the effects remain stable with almost no side effects. Beyond ten uses, the effects diminish and some aftereffects begin to appear."

Ten times.

This was far better than those three basic attribute medicines.

Lin Yu's gaze swept over the three inferior medicines on the counter, finally settling on the [Lucid Potion].

He wouldn't take the other things for now.

"[Lucid Potion], and that [Life Serum-Standard Edition]."

Lin Yu spoke, his voice calm.

"I want both."

Old Ghost's movements froze, his plague doctor mask turning toward him.

"I already told you about the [Life Serum], it's reserved..."

"One million."

Lin Yu pushed the black card back onto the counter, interrupting him.

The entire Old Ghost Hall instantly fell into dead silence.

One million.

[Lucid Potion] was two hundred thousand, [Life Serum] was five hundred thousand - together they only totaled seven hundred thousand.

This offer was a full three hundred thousand higher!

Old Ghost was completely stunned.

His eyes hidden behind the plague doctor mask stared fixedly at the black card, as if he could see through the card to the string of numbers representing wealth inside.

This person... treats money so carelessly?

Reservation?

Damn it, reservations mean nothing!

At worst, he'd just pay the penalty! Even with double the deposit refund, he'd still make a huge profit!

"Ahem!"

Old Ghost coughed heavily, covering up his loss of composure.

Even the paleness of his face showed a hint of redness, beaming with joy.

"Our honored guest is truly straightforward! Reservations and such are minor issues! Business is business, after all - the highest bidder wins!"

As he spoke, he deftly turned around, used a key to open the recently locked cabinet, took out the silver briefcase again, and placed it heavily on the counter.

"Click."

The case opened, the golden [Life Serum] lying quietly inside.

Deal concluded on the spot.

Old Ghost picked up the terminal, took Lin Yu's card, and operated it with flying fingers.

"Beep."

Transfer completed.

The balance on Lin Yu's black card instantly shrank, leaving only slightly over thirty thousand.

But he didn't care at all.

He stored both the [Lucid Potion] bottle and the silver briefcase containing the [Life Serum] into his Storage Ring.

Chapter 18: No One is a Good Person

Money can always be earned again, but these two items, especially the [Life Serum], were hard currencies that couldn't necessarily be bought with money even if you had it.

With the transaction completed, Lin Yu turned around ready to leave.

But he hadn't even taken two steps out.

"Ding ling—"

The wind chime at the door emitted a rapid, piercing sound.

The door was violently shoved open by a tremendous force, slamming heavily against the wall.

A massive figure blocked the doorway, completely obscuring the already dim light inside the shop.

It was an exceptionally burly man, nearly two meters tall, his muscles straining tightly against the leather armor he wore, making his entire body resemble a moving small mountain.

He wore a ferocious demon mask on his face, revealing only a pair of bloodshot eyes filled with anxiety and rage.

"Old Ghost!"

The man let out a beast-like growl the moment he entered.

"Where's the [Life Serum] I reserved?!"

The smile on Old Ghost's face instantly froze, then quickly switched to a professional fake smile, though no matter how you looked at it, it carried a hint of resentment.

He spread his hands open.

"Aiyo, dear customer, I'm truly sorry."

"The serum is gone!"

The large man who had just entered immediately flew into a rage. He took a step forward, causing the entire shop's wooden floorboards to groan under the strain.

"Gone?!"

His voice rose an octave, carrying an uncontrollable fury.

"I clearly made a reservation! I even paid the deposit! Do you have any idea I need this thing to save my life!"

Old Ghost maintained his smile, but his body subtly shrank backward.

"Customer, please calm down. Business is business. The other party offered too high a price, and as someone running a small business, I really couldn't refuse."

He pulled out a small stack of cash from under the counter and tossed it on the table.

"Your deposit, I'm returning it. The penalty fee, I'll compensate you at the agreed price. When I, Old Ghost, do business in Medicine Man Alley, what I value most is reputation and rules."

"Please understand, this is business for me, not charity."

The large man looked at the money pouch on the table, his breathing beneath the demon mask growing increasingly heavy and labored.

Did he need money?

He needed his life!

Seeing him like this, Old Ghost's eyes shifted cunningly as a scheme came to mind.

He pointed at Lin Yu, who was still standing nearby.

"Besides, if you have any grievances, don't take them out on me."

"The buyer hasn't left yet. It's him."

Lin Yu instantly tensed up.

His "Crow" cloak effectively concealed his physique, but it couldn't change his weak attributes. Just by standing there, the man at the door emitted a strong scent of blood and an oppressive aura.

In a direct confrontation, his chances of winning weren't high.

The demon mask turned toward Lin Yu, those bloodshot eyes burning with nearly erupting fury and despair.

"It was you?" The man's voice was low, carrying a beast-like snarl.

He took another step forward, causing the entire shop's wooden floorboards to groan under the strain once more.

Old Ghost schadenfreudely shrunk his neck back, hiding behind the counter, revealing only his eyes as he prepared to watch the show unfold.

The black market's rule was that no fighting was allowed inside shops.

But rules were rigid, while people were flexible. When someone was truly pushed to the brink, who would care about any rules?

Lin Yu didn't move, nor did he speak. He was contemplating countermeasures.

However, what happened next stunned both Lin Yu and Old Ghost.

The iron tower-like man stopped just three steps away from Lin Yu. His massive body trembled violently, his breathing beneath the demon mask as heavy and ragged as an old, broken bellows.

"Thump!"

A dull sound echoed.

The man's knees went weak, and he heavily knelt on the ground. His knees created two clear indentations in the hard wooden floorboards.

The entire Old Ghost Hall fell into dead silence.

"Please..."

What emerged from beneath the ferocious demon mask was no longer a roar, but a tearful, utterly humble plea that scraped the very dust.

"Sell it to me... I'm begging you..."

Old Ghost peeked out from behind the counter, his bird-beak mask even askew. In all his years working in Medicine Man Alley, this was the first time he had witnessed such a scene.

Lin Yu also hadn't expected things to unfold this way at all.

He knelt down?

The burly man seemed unable to bear his inner collapse any longer, tearing off the demon mask from his face to reveal a young face covered in sweat and tear stains.

It was an exceptionally young face, with features still carrying unrefined childishness—at most eighteen or nineteen years old.

He wasn't some battle-hardened ruthless character at all, just a high school student on the verge of being driven insane.

"My name is Zhao Tianyang!" he sobbed, pulling out his student ID and identification card from his chest, raising them overhead with both hands, and offering them toward Lin Yu's direction.

"Linzhou First High School, Senior Year Class Seven! In just two more days, it'll be our school's Profession Awakening Ceremony!"

"Please, sell the [Life Serum] to me! I can't die... I really don't want to die..."

Zhao Tianyang completely broke down, laying all his cards on the table.

In order to obtain a better initial panel during the Profession Awakening, he had listened to others' advice and purchased large quantities of cheap attribute-enhancing medicines from some irregular channels.

In a short time, his physical fitness had indeed rapidly improved.

But he soon tasted the bitter consequences. The toxins from those medicines had wildly accumulated in his body, pushing his system to the brink of collapse. A black market doctor had clearly told him that with his current physical condition, participating in the Profession Awakening Ceremony would cause the impact of the awakening energy to instantly detonate all the toxins inside him, resulting in only one outcome—death.

The [Life Serum] was his only hope.

"Five hundred thousand! This is the highest price I can offer!" Zhao Tianyang pulled out a black market Black Card from his pocket, also raising it high, "This is my parents' lifetime savings, I brought it all! Please..."

He even threw his identification card and student ID on the ground, just wanting to prove that everything he said was true.

At that moment, he was practically on the verge of saying "I'm a student, give me the stuff, and throw in another fifty bucks for travel expenses too."

Old Ghost watched from the side, sighing repeatedly.

He knew the kid was telling the truth. Linzhou First High School indeed had its awakening the day after tomorrow. He was also fully aware of the side effects of those illegal medicines.

This kid had been destroyed by his own impatience for success.

But sympathy was one thing, business was another.

The fact that Old Ghost could acquire this one serum through special channels was already him doing his utmost, considering the kid's pitiful situation. Now that someone was willing to buy it at almost double the price, he had no reason not to sell.

He needed money too; he also had a life to save.

None of them were running charities.

Old Ghost's gaze turned toward Lin Yu. He didn't believe that this mysterious cloaked figure who could casually spend a million would be some soft-hearted, kind person either.

Chapter 19: I Agreed!

Lin Yu stared at Zhao Tianyang kneeling on the floor, saying nothing.

This young man in front of him was completely different from the bullies he remembered from school. The despair and pain on his face could not be faked.

A high school student forced into a corner with no way out.

Old Ghost watched from behind the counter with obvious relish—he loved this kind of show. The weak struggling, the indifferent strong, money making the judgment. This was the black market; this was reality.

"Please... this is all I have..." Zhao Tianyang's voice was hoarse. He shoved the Black Card forward and then smashed his forehead hard against the cold floor, producing a dull thud.

"Bang!"

He hit his head again and again, snot and tears flowing.

The only sounds in Old Ghost Hall were the muffled thuds of his head and his suppressed sobbing.

Old Ghost had had enough; was the kid genuinely stupid or pretending? Who in the black market fell for this? People here had hearts harder than stone.

Sure enough, the mysterious buyer in the Crow cloak still stood where he had been, motionless, like an emotionless statue.

After a dozen or so prostrations, Zhao Tianyang's forehead was swollen and streaked with blood. He looked up and saw Lin Yu still standing there in that same way. The last thread of hope seemed to be ripped away.

He went berserk and suddenly roared.

"Not enough? Is the money not enough?!"

"I! I'll pawn myself to you!"

Grasping at the last lifeline, Zhao Tianyang shouted incoherently: "I'll give you my life! The black market can do this! A slave brand! As long as you give me the serum and let me live, I'll be your dog forever! If I live, I'll make you money! I'll earn five hundred thousand! More! One million! Two million!"

He had run out of time and options.

The Awakening Ceremony was the day after tomorrow—he couldn't wait.

A slave brand was one of the black market's darkest contracts. One party burned a brand into another's soul, binding life and death to the owner's control. Such contracts were cheap.

For someone like Zhao Tianyang—an unawakened high schooler with an uncertain future—getting branded might not even fetch one hundred thousand yuan.

Old Ghost finally stepped out from behind the counter, shaking his head. A sigh escaped beneath his beaked mask.

"Young man, you greatly overestimate your worth."

He walked over to Zhao Tianyang and looked down at him from above.

"Right now you're just an ordinary high school student, full of injuries and toxins. Don't mention five hundred thousand—your life isn't even worth a hundred thousand now."

"Besides, you've taken so many medicines, one serum might not even save you..."

Old Ghost's words were like a cold blade plunged into Zhao Tianyang's heart.

"If you were already awakened with decent potential, maybe we could talk. But as it stands..." Old Ghost spread his hands. "This customer buying your life would be better off buying several strong potions—the cost-effectiveness is far higher."

Zhao Tianyang froze completely; his color drained, leaving only a deathly pallor.

All his chips had been laid bare.

And the other party remained unmoved.

Despair surged like a tide and swallowed him whole.

Old Ghost prepared to shoo him away—the show was over; he had business to attend to.

The shop's atmosphere was suffocating to the extreme.

Lin Yu still stood there, his body motionless under the cloak.

To Zhao Tianyang and Old Ghost, he seemed to be coldly weighing things or silently refusing.

But in truth, Lin Yu's mind was weathering an unprecedented storm.

While Zhao Tianyang was prostrating himself, Lin Yu had already made up his mind.

He was not a saint, but he was not a demon either. A dying high schooler, a potential asset, a loyal subordinate.

The deal was a bargain.

Because... his cost was... zero!

Zero cost, zero risk!

But the premise was that he himself needed to have a Life Serum to use.

When Zhao Tianyang shouted he would pawn himself, Lin Yu quietly retrieved a silver suitcase from his Storage Ring.

He didn't open it. Instead, he activated his skill.

Card Manifestation!

Target: Life Serum-Standard Edition!

A resistance so massive it defied imagination slammed back from the suitcase. This was completely different from the experience of making pebble cards or food cards before.

As a military-grade advanced alchemical product, the Life Serum's internal structure was extraordinarily complex, and the energy contained within far exceeded ordinary items.

Normalizing its rules was hundreds to thousands of times more difficult than for a pebble!

Lin Yu felt as if a heavy hammer had smashed his brain. Forty-five points of Mental Energy poured out like an uncontrolled flood.

Blurred vision rippled across his sight, his legs went weak, and he almost collapsed on the spot.

No—he had to hold on!

He bit down hard and forced every ounce of Mental Energy he had into the task.

One second, two seconds, three seconds...

Time seemed to stretch to infinity.

Finally, at the moment his Mental Energy was about to be exhausted, the suitcase in his hand suddenly lightened.

Card Manifestation success!

Item Card: Life Serum-Standard Edition

A card shimmering with blue light appeared in his hand, and he immediately tucked it back into his ring.

It worked!

Lin Yu swayed; under the cloak his face was as white as paper, cold sweat soaking the lining.

But he didn't stop.

Almost the instant the card was manifested, he used his core ability.

He didn't need to cycle through Joker and Doubling Card mechanics because he only needed one.

First, use the Life Serum-Standard Edition card to obtain the physical Life Serum.

Then...

Joker!

Use it!

Hum—

A chunk of Mental Energy was siphoned away again, but compared to the previous drain it was nothing.

A brand-new Life Serum-Standard Edition card formed in his storage space.

Now he had two Life Serums.

The entire process took place in a flash.

From the outside, Lin Yu simply stood there, silent for a dozen or so seconds.

Zhao Tianyang had given up completely and lay slack on the floor.

Old Ghost had also lost patience and was about to tell him to get out.

At that moment, Lin Yu finally moved.

He lifted his head and his gaze under the cloak landed on Zhao Tianyang.

"Five hundred thousand, and the terms you mentioned."

Lin Yu's voice was calm, breaking the shop's deadly silence.

"I agreed."

For an instant, the air froze.

Zhao Tianyang jerked his head up; his tear-streaked, blood-stained face was filled with disbelief.

Did he hear that right?

Agreed?

Old Ghost was stunned too, his beaked mouth hanging wide under the mask.

This man... was he crazy?

Spending eight hundred thousand to one million on a single Life Serum would already be a rip-off. Now this man wanted to buy it for five hundred thousand and resell?

What was going on? Charity?

Since when did the black market cultivate do-gooders?

"What... what did you say?" Zhao Tianyang's voice trembled; he could hardly believe his ears.

Lin Yu didn't repeat himself.

He took the silver suitcase out of his ring again and placed it on the counter.

With a click, the case opened.

The Life Serum, emitting a golden glow, lay quietly inside.

Lin Yu looked at Zhao Tianyang.

"The item is here. The money and the contract—do it now."

Chapter 20: Master-Servant Contract

These words finally jolted the stunned Zhao Tianyang awake.

He scrambled and crawled to the counter, pushing his black card and ID card forward with trembling hands. In his extreme agitation, his fingernails scraped across the wooden counter, producing a harsh screeching sound.

"I... I'm here! The money's here! Old Ghost, call someone!!"

Old Ghost watched this dramatic scene and finally snapped back to reality.

His expression when looking at Lin Yu had shifted from viewing a fat sheep to viewing a monster, or rather, an existence he couldn't comprehend at all.

But he reacted extremely quickly, his businessman's instincts instantly overwhelming all his shock.

"Good! Good! Honored guest, please wait a moment! I have someone who can do it!"

Old Ghost immediately picked up an old-fashioned communicator from the counter and dialed a number.

"Hello, Seventh Master? It's Old Ghost. Yes, a small job, branding... yes, right now, at my place... I'll pay."

Old Ghost's movements were so fast they didn't seem like those of an elderly person.

He hung up the communicator and turned to Zhao Tianyang, who was still kneeling on the ground. The voice coming from beneath the bird-beak mask regained its business-like shrewdness.

"Alright, get up. Seventh Master will be here soon."

He glanced at Lin Yu again and added, "I'll cover the branding fee, consider it compensation for that breach of contract penalty. We're even now."

Zhao Tianyang stared blankly at Old Ghost, then looked at Lin Yu, seemingly still not processing this massive turn of events.

Old Ghost waved his hand impatiently.

"Don't just stand there dazed, get up and prepare. Seventh Master doesn't like waiting."

Only then did Zhao Tianyang snap out of it, scrambling up from the ground using both hands and feet. He stood up so abruptly that he staggered, almost falling again. He moved to stand to the side, head bowed, hands tightly clutching the corners of his clothes like a convict awaiting sentencing.

Lin Yu remained quietly standing in place, his cloak completely enveloping him, revealing no emotion whatsoever.

He was just thinking that this fellow called Old Ghost was quite the shrewd character.

Waiving the contract fee served both as a gesture of goodwill toward him and as a way to completely settle that unpleasantness with Zhao Tianyang.

Old Ghost Hall fell into silence again, but the atmosphere was completely different from before.

The previous dead silence had been despair; the current silence was eerie.

Old Ghost wiped his bottles and jars behind the counter, but the corners of his eyes kept darting between Lin Yu and Zhao Tianyang.

He couldn't figure it out.

Really couldn't figure it out.

Buy for eight hundred thousand, then sell for five hundred thousand? Losing three hundred thousand in the process, just to acquire a high school student with an uncertain future and a body full of toxins as a servant?

This calculation didn't make sense no matter how you looked at it.

At least in this world... no!

A human life wasn't worth three hundred thousand.

Unless... this person simply didn't care about these hundreds of thousands.

Or, he had other purposes.

Having spent half his life mixing in Medicine Man Alley, Old Ghost had seen too many crazy things, but this kind of loss-making charity was a first for him.

Looking at Lin Yu's mysterious "Crow" cloak, a thought emerged in his mind.

This person was either a super idiot whose brain had been smashed by a door.

Or, he was a genuine big shot from some major family that he couldn't see through at all.

The world of big shots might be different from those of them rolling in the mud.

A few hundred thousand might really just be a small risk investment for them.

If the bet pays off, you gain a potential fighter in the future.

If it fails... that amount of money is something they can afford to lose.

Indeed, otherwise why would he not hesitate to add three hundred thousand to buy something?

Thinking this, Old Ghost's posture toward Lin Yu unconsciously became several degrees more respectful.

Not long after.

"Ding ling—"

The wind chime at the door gently rang.

An elderly man wearing traditional Chinese attire, with graying hair and a gaunt face, walked in. He carried an ancient-looking wooden case in his hand, moving without a sound, like a ghost.

"Seventh Master." Old Ghost immediately went to greet him, his face covered with smiles.

The old man called Seventh Master merely nodded, his gaze sweeping around the shop before finally settling on Zhao Tianyang and Lin Yu.

He didn't ask a single question.

The black market had its own rules; he only handled business, without asking for reasons.

"Who is master, who is servant?" Seventh Master's voice was hoarse, like two pieces of sandpaper rubbing together.

"Me." Lin Yu spoke.

"I..." Zhao Tianyang also spoke up, but his voice was so soft it was almost inaudible, filled with shame and unease.

Seventh Master placed the wooden case on an empty table and opened it.

Inside weren't any strange props, just some tools that looked quite ordinary: a small silver knife, a porcelain bowl containing vermilion liquid, and a few yellow talisman papers covered with complex symbols.

"Extend your hand." Seventh Master said to Lin Yu.

Lin Yu extended his left hand.

Seventh Master picked up the small silver knife and made a light cut on Lin Yu's fingertip. A drop of blood welled up and dripped into the porcelain bowl.

The vermilion liquid immediately began to churn, as if coming to life.

Then, Seventh Master looked at Zhao Tianyang.

"Kneel, press your forehead against the table edge."

Zhao Tianyang's body trembled, but without any hesitation, he immediately complied. He knelt on both knees, pressing his already swollen and broken forehead tightly against the cold wooden table edge.

This posture was filled with humiliation.

Seventh Master picked up a talisman paper, dipped a brush into the liquid mixed with Lin Yu's blood from the bowl, and quickly began drawing on the talisman paper.

His movements flowed smoothly and swiftly, leaving only afterimages.

Soon, a new talisman was completed.

"This is the master-servant brand. Once engraved, life and death are entirely controlled by the master. Resistance results in soul scorching, making death impossible. Have you thought this through clearly?"

Called master-servant, but in reality, it meant slavery.

Seventh Master asked this final question as per tradition.

Zhao Tianyang's body shook violently. He closed his eyes and squeezed out three words through gritted teeth.

"I am willing."

Seventh Master said nothing more.

He picked up the talisman, murmuring incantations under his breath. The talisman ignited without fire.

He flicked his finger, and the burning ashes accurately landed on the center of Zhao Tianyang's forehead.

"Sizzle—"

A faint sound.

Zhao Tianyang let out a suppressed groan, his body convulsing violently, veins bulging on his forehead, sweat instantly soaking through his back.

A charred smell spread through the air.

Lin Yu also felt it.

The moment the talisman ashes landed, it felt as if an invisible thread had appeared in his mind.

The other end of the thread connected to a humble, fearful, yet grateful and ecstatic soul.

He could clearly sense all of Zhao Tianyang's current emotions.

It was a relief of surviving a disaster, a determination to surrender everything of himself, and also... a loyalty approaching religious devotion.

This kid... really is an honest person.

His family probably is too.

He genuinely believed that Lin Yu was a living bodhisattva who had saved his life.

The contract was complete.

The entire process took less than five minutes.

Seventh Master packed his things, closed the wooden case, nodded to Old Ghost, turned and left, as silent as when he arrived.

From beginning to end, he didn't speak an extra word.

Old Ghost slipped a black card into Seventh Master's pocket as payment.

After completing all this, Old Ghost finally turned to Lin Yu, rubbing his hands together, his face full of smiles.

"Honored guest, the contract has been settled. Between him and me, and between you and me, everything is clear now."

"Beep."

The transfer completed.

Lin Yu's account balance jumped from just over thirty thousand back to five hundred thirty thousand.

And that [Life Serum] he had bought at a three hundred thousand price difference, was now quietly resting in Zhao Tianyang's hands.

Zhao Tianyang held that silver case as if cradling the world's most precious treasure. He walked up to Lin Yu and once again knelt heavily on the ground.

"Master... Brother"

He raised his head, his face covered with tears, but this time, it wasn't despair—it was rebirth.

"From now on, Zhao Tianyang's life is yours."

Chapter 21: Not heroic enough, nor treacherous enough

Lin Yu looked at the young man kneeling on the ground who had completely surrendered everything about himself, his expression beneath the hood remaining completely unchanged.

The pure, unreserved loyalty and gratitude transmitted through the soul link left him generally satisfied with this transaction.

This was a qualified investment product.

"Get up."

Lin Yu spoke.

Zhao Tianyang's body trembled, and he immediately scrambled up from the ground, standing respectfully to the side with his head slightly bowed, not daring to look directly at Lin Yu.

"What you need to do now is find a safe place and use the medicine." Lin Yu's instructions were very clear.

"Yes, Master!" Zhao Tianyang responded immediately, then urgently added, "I... I'll go with you! Wherever you go, I'll follow!"

In his view, he was now his master's private property and should stick close without leaving even a single step.

"Unnecessary."

Lin Yu refused.

He looked at this still-youthful young man before him and continued arranging matters in a calm tone.

"When I need you, I will naturally find you."

Zhao Tianyang froze for a moment, about to say something more.

Lin Yu then threw out another statement that left him completely stunned.

"Before I come for you, you are free. Go do what you need to do."

Free?

Zhao Tianyang's mind went completely blank.

He thought he had signed a contract selling himself into servitude, that from now on he would lose all dignity and freedom, becoming a dog chained by shackles.

But now, his new master was actually telling him he still had freedom?

Zhao Tianyang's eyes instantly reddened, tears he thought had already dried up once again uncontrollably welling up.

He stepped forward, wanting to kneel again, but was stopped by the invisible aura emanating from Lin Yu.

"I... I understand! Master!"

Zhao Tianyang choked out, tightly clutching the silver briefcase in his arms as he bowed deeply to Lin Yu.

"I definitely won't let you down!"

Having said this, he no longer dared to delay, turning and rushing out of Old Ghost Hall.

He wanted to survive, he wanted to become stronger, he wanted to create a hundredfold, a thousandfold value for this master who had given him new life and dignity!

"Ding ling—"

The wind chimes faded into the distance, and the shop returned to quiet once again.

Old Ghost stood behind the counter, having even forgotten to straighten his bird-beak mask as he stared at Lin Yu like he was looking at a monster that had fallen from the sky.

His mind was a complete mess.

Bought for eight hundred thousand, sold for five hundred thousand—a loss of three hundred thousand.

All just to recruit some high school student of unknown background, and after recruiting him, actually letting him go?

What kind of operation was this?

Was this some young master from a major family in Linzhou coming out to experience life?

Or was this some special recruitment process for a mysterious organization?

Really... impossible to understand!

The more Old Ghost thought about it, the more his heart raced with fear, feeling like he had accidentally glimpsed into some level of existence he completely couldn't comprehend.

Lin Yu paid no attention to Old Ghost's shock. Having finished his business, he turned to leave.

Seeing Lin Yu about to leave, Old Ghost's heart suddenly jolted.

No!

Couldn't just let him leave like this!

This might be an opportunity, a heaven-sent opportunity!

This young man, whether he was truly foolish or just pretending, the energy he represented behind the scenes was absolutely something a small character like himself, wallowing in the mud, needed to desperately grasp!

Time to gamble!

"Honored guest, please wait!"

Old Ghost shot out from behind the counter in one swift movement, blocking Lin Yu's path.

Lin Yu stopped walking but didn't speak.

Old Ghost bowed deeply to Lin Yu, his posture extremely humble.

"Honored guest's actions today have truly opened my eyes and filled me with admiration!"

He said this with genuine emotion, as if truly moved by Lin Yu's "benevolence and righteousness."

"I, Old Ghost, may operate in this Medicine Man Alley recognizing money, but I also recognize character! For a righteous man like yourself, if I, Old Ghost, continued to calmly profit from that price difference, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night!"

Lin Yu remained silent.

He actually wanted to see what tricks this old fox was trying to play.

Seeing Lin Yu unmoved, Old Ghost gritted his teeth and directly pulled out his own black market Black Card.

"The extra three hundred thousand I charged you earlier was me, Old Ghost, failing to recognize true greatness, my heart blinded by greed!"

"This money, I must return to you!"

He offered the card to Lin Yu, his face filled with a pained yet resolute expression.

"Consider it... consider it me, Old Ghost, wanting to befriend you!"

Three hundred thousand, buying a chance to form a connection.

This was the biggest risk investment Old Ghost had ever made in his life.

Lin Yu looked at the Black Card offered before him.

Returning money?

Now this was interesting.

This Old Ghost was more decisive than he had imagined.

He was gambling, betting that Lin Yu's future value far exceeded these three hundred thousand.

Unfortunately, he gambled correctly, but not completely correctly.

Lin Yu didn't hypocritically decline, nor did he pretentiously refuse with profound mystery.

He simply silently took out his own card.

"Then I'll graciously accept."

Old Ghost froze.

He had anticipated Lin Yu might refuse, might exchange a few polite words, or even coldly laugh and say he didn't need it.

But he never expected Lin Yu would just... directly accept it?

Without the slightest hesitation?

"Beep."

The transfer completion notification sound rang out.

Lin Yu's account balance jumped from five hundred thirty thousand to eight hundred thirty thousand.

He retrieved his card and nodded to Old Ghost.

"Until we meet again."

Having said this, he turned and left, his cloak tracing an arc through the air without the slightest reluctance.

"Ding ling—"

The wind chimes rang again, and this time, the shop door completely closed.

Old Ghost stood alone in place, still maintaining the card-offering posture.

Looking at the three hundred thousand deducted from his account, then at the completely empty doorway, his entire being went numb.

Just like that... accepted it?

And then left?

He felt like he had punched cotton—no, punched into a bottomless black hole.

That whole spiel about "moved by righteousness" and "befriending you"—the other party simply hadn't listened to it at all.

The other party had merely, very simply, taken back what belonged to him.

A few seconds later, an intense wave of regret surged into Old Ghost's heart.

"Smack!"

He viciously slapped his own face.

"Damn it!"

He cursed under his breath, pacing back and forth irritably in the shop.

"Idiot! I'm such an idiot!"

"If I wanted to befriend him, I should have returned the entire million! Given him the stuff for free! That would be called boldness! That would be called investment!"

"He didn't even blink spending an extra three hundred thousand on goods—does he care about your three hundred thousand?"

The more he thought about it, the angrier he became, the more regretful he felt.

"Like this, returning three hundred thousand... what the hell is that! He doesn't even care about it!"

"Can't even suck up properly, and didn't even manage to keep all the money either!"

Old Ghost painfully grabbed his own hair, feeling like he had missed out on a fortune.

He slumped dejectedly into his chair, his face full of self-loathing.

"Old Ghost, oh Old Ghost, no wonder you're stuck guarding this broken shop your whole life!"

"Not bold enough, and not cunning enough! Serves you right for not making any real money!"

Chapter 22: Apply pesticides! Apply pesticides!

Lin Yu left Old Ghost Hall.

The wind chimes from the shop behind him were swallowed by the black market's chaotic human noise.

This guy called Old Ghost was truly interesting.

That final move of returning money—wanting to curry favor yet unwilling to go all out—perfectly revealed the shrewdness and limitations of a businessman.

His vision was too narrow.

However, this actually made Lin Yu feel more at ease.

Ordinary people were just like that.

Not willing to gamble big enough, but not rotten to the core either.

Future matters could be considered later.

Lin Yu passed through the crowded, chaotic alleyways. He now had only one goal.

Become stronger.

Soon, he returned to the single room he had initially rented.

The room was still dim, the air filled with the mixed scent of cheap disinfectant and mildew.

Lin Yu stood in the center of the room, taking inventory of the items from his storage ring one by one.

One [Life Serum·Standard Edition] card.

One physical [Lucid Potion].

And one Black Card with a balance of 830,000.

Everything was ready.

He prepared to begin.

But after glancing around, he halted his movements.

Not here.

Too unsafe.

The soundproofing of this room was practically nonexistent, and the disguise was only the most basic. If any accidents occurred during the process of enhancing his strength, the slightest commotion could attract unnecessary trouble.

Lin Yu didn't hesitate. He put everything back into the ring, turned, and left this single room he had occupied for less than half an hour, merging once again into the black market's flow of people.

He headed straight for an area deep within the "Junkyard."

The buildings here were no longer temporarily built sheet-metal shacks, but solid concrete bunkers, with several guards of considerable strength standing at the entrances.

"Rent a room."

Lin Yu walked up to a building with a "Honeycomb" sign and spoke to the guard at the door.

The guard looked him over, didn't ask any questions, and moved aside to make a path.

Inside was a spacious lobby. A woman wearing professional attire but with a metal mask on her face sat at the front desk.

"What level?" the woman asked without looking up.

"Gold level."

The woman raised her head, her eyes behind the mask scanning Lin Yu's cloak.

"Codename 'Bunker.' Independent power supply, physical isolation, energy shielding. Eighty-eight hundred per day, deposit for one month, pay for one month."

"Acceptable."

Lin Yu handed over his Black Card.

Seventeen thousand six hundred was instantly deducted.

"Bunker Three. Here is the key card and the shield activator."

The woman pushed a card and a small remote control over.

Lin Yu took the items, turned, and left without another word.

He found Bunker Three, used the card to open the heavy alloy door, and walked in.

"Boom—"

The door slowly closed behind him, completely cutting off all the noise from outside.

The world instantly fell silent.

The room wasn't large, only thirty square meters, but the walls, ceiling, and floor were all made of thick metal, giving a sense of ultimate security.

Lin Yu pressed the remote control in his hand.

Hum.

An invisible energy field instantly enveloped the entire room.

This was a military-grade signal shielding device that could block all forms of prying.

Now, this place was absolutely safe.

Lin Yu took off his cloak, revealing his somewhat pale young face.

He sat cross-legged in the center of the room and took out the [Lucid Potion].

Next was the critical step.

[Card Manifestation]!

Target, [Lucid Potion-Standard Edition]!

A resistance no less formidable than when he created the [Life Serum] card surged forth.

The internal structure of this potion was equally complex and precise, and the energy properties it contained were extremely unique. Attempting to codify its rules consumed mental energy at a terrifying rate.

Lin Yu felt his temples throbbing. His mental energy was being drained at an unprecedented speed.

A mental energy limit of 45 points felt as fragile as a sheet of paper under this kind of consumption.

Over these five years, he had created tens of millions of junk cards. The [Card Manifestation] skill had long been trained to the limit of his current level.

Theoretically, whether it was [Life Serum] or [Lucid Potion], their item levels far exceeded the range he could currently manifest into cards.

Succeeding was entirely dependent on the rule proficiency brought by his max-level skill and that tiny bit of luck.

His brain began to feel dizzy; the scenery before his eyes started to blur and double.

His mental energy was about to be completely depleted.

Now!

Just before his consciousness completely faded, Lin Yu fiercely pressed down with the last shred of his mental energy.

The potion in his hand vibrated sharply.

[Card Manifestation Successful!]

A card shimmering with a clear blue light quietly appeared in his hand.

Success!

Lin Yu's body swayed, and he plopped down onto the floor, gasping for breath.

Just creating one card had almost drained him completely.

But he didn't rest.

He took out a few mental energy recovery pills he had purchased elsewhere from his ring, tossed them into his mouth like candy, and immediately activated his core ability.

[Joker]!

[Doubling Card]!

Infinite loop, initiate!

Hum—

The space within the storage ring began to undergo a marvelous change.

One [Lucid Potion] card, one [Life Serum] card.

Two, four, eight, sixteen...

His mental energy slowly recovered under the effect of the recently consumed pills, only to be rapidly consumed again in the card replication process.

Lin Yu's complexion fluctuated between pale and flushed.

He closed his eyes, immersing his entire mind in this mad proliferation.

256 times!

This was the limit his current mental energy could withstand.

When the cycle stopped, his storage ring held two neat stacks of cards.

One stack flowed with a clear blue light; the other emitted a sacred golden radiance.

256 [Lucid Potion-Standard Edition] cards!

256 [Life Serum-Standard Edition] cards!

No joy showed on Lin Yu's face.

This was only the beginning.

He took out one [Lucid Potion] card and activated it.

A syringe filled with blue liquid appeared in his hand.

Then, he took out one [Life Serum] card and activated it as well.

A syringe filled with golden liquid appeared in his other hand.

Without any hesitation, he aimed the blue syringe at his own arm and stabbed it in hard!

The cold liquid injected into his blood vessel.

The next second, he stabbed the golden syringe into his other arm.

Two syringes, one blue, one gold, were unhesitatingly pushed into the blood vessels of his arms.

Cold and warm, two completely different liquids surged into his body simultaneously.

Wherever the blue liquid went, the fatigue in his brain seemed to be instantly smoothed away by an icy hand. His thoughts became clearer than ever before. Every idea, every fragment of memory, seemed like glass wiped clean, utterly transparent.

Meanwhile, the golden liquid transformed into a warm torrent, instantly washing through his entire body, limbs, and bones. It acted like the most efficient repair crew, capable of repairing, replenishing, and nourishing even the hidden injuries left behind after each mental energy expenditure, and the vitality depletion from every all-nighter spent creating cards.

Chapter 23: Million Increase!

An indescribable sense of comfort rose from the depths of his soul.

Lin Yu could clearly "see" that his originally fragile spiritual foundation, damaged by extreme card manifestation, was being rapidly reinforced by a warm golden current. Meanwhile, the pool representing his total mental energy capacity was expanding slightly upward under the effect of the blue medicine.

It seemed the Life Serum could not only remove toxins but even restore one's foundation!

[Mental Energy: 47]

Success!

A single [Lucid Potion] had brought a full 2-point increase in mental energy.

Lin Yu didn't pause, retrieving two more cards from his Storage Ring and activating them.

Two more syringes appeared.

Expressionless, he inserted the needle into the same injection point from before.

Second injection.

[Mental Energy: 49]

Third time.

[Mental Energy: 51]

...

Tenth time.

[Mental Energy: 65]

Within the cold metallic bunker, only the faint sound of activated syringes and the dull noise of liquid being pushed into blood vessels repeated in an endless cycle.

Lin Yu's movements were mechanical and precise, like a tireless robot.

His expression remained completely unchanged from start to finish, but his mind was performing the most precise and efficient calculations.

Each potion meant a 2-point increase in mental energy.

And each point of mental energy growth represented an increase in the maximum number of [Doubling Cards] he could simultaneously control.

This was the foundation of all his future plans.

When he used the twenty-eighth [Lucid Potion], he stopped his movements.

[Mental Energy: 99]

Just one point away from one hundred.

This was an important threshold.

According to information circulating in the black market, any attribute-enhancing medicine would experience dramatically reduced effects after forcibly raising a user's basic attribute to 100 points.

He took out the twenty-ninth potion and injected it.

As expected.

That cooling sensation had noticeably weakened.

[Mental Energy: 100]

This time, it only increased by 1 point.

The medicinal effect had halved.

Lin Yu wasn't surprised by this.

He looked toward his Storage Ring.

Out of 256 potions, he had already consumed twenty-nine, leaving 227 remaining.

At a growth rate of 1 point per dose, the remaining potions could only provide at most a little over two hundred more points of mental energy.

Not enough.

Far from enough.

His target was this medicine's theoretical maximum limit—500 points.

Moreover, as his mental energy increased, he needed more [Life Serum] to neutralize the increasingly strong medicine resistance and ensure his body didn't develop problems.

It was time to improve efficiency.

Lin Yu sat cross-legged and closed his eyes.

His consciousness sank deep into his mind.

There, a jester-faced card and a card printed with "x2" floated quietly.

[Joker]!

[Doubling Card]!

His current mental energy was 100 points.

Based on the experience he had summarized over the past five years, 100 points of mental energy was enough to support him simultaneously maintaining the existence of 12 [Doubling Cards]!

Excluding the two used as initial capital, he could perform a full ten doublings!

Two to the tenth power.

One thousand twenty-four!

"Buzz—"

Lin Yu's temples throbbed violently as mental pressure far exceeding anything before descended.

[Joker] activated, copying [Doubling Card].

[Doubling Card] activated, continuously doubling the number of copies [Joker] could produce.

This was exponential crazy growth!

In just a few seconds.

The cycle stopped.

Lin Yu's face paled momentarily but quickly returned to normal under the effect of the residual [Life Serum] in his body.

He looked toward his Storage Ring.

The cards that originally numbered just over two hundred had now become...

[Lucid Potion-Standard Edition] x 1251.

[Life Serum-Standard Edition] x 1251.

A single operation had replenished his inventory to a completely new magnitude.

This was efficiency!

Lin Yu felt no joy whatsoever; he was merely an emotionless executor.

New "ammunition" was now loaded.

He picked up the syringe again.

Thirtieth injection.

[Mental Energy: 101]

Thirty-first.

[Mental Energy: 102]

...

One hundredth time.

[Mental Energy: 171]

Time lost all meaning in the absolute silence of the bunker.

Lin Yu had completely immersed himself in this monotonous cycle.

Inject, feel, inject again.

His body had grown numb to the pain of needle pricks, but his spirit became increasingly excited and clear with each growth.

This was a positive cycle.

The stronger his mental energy became, the more precise his control over his body grew, and the higher his efficiency in absorbing medicinal effects.

When the medicines in his ring were once again depleted, Lin Yu's mental energy had broken through the 300 mark.

He activated the [Joker Doubling Cycle] again.

This time, the number of [Doubling Cards] he could simultaneously maintain had reached 16!

Number of doublings: 14 times!

Two to the fourteenth power... sixteen thousand three hundred eighty-four!

A massive quantity of medicines instantly filled a corner of the Storage Ring, with blue and golden lights shimmering together.

Lin Yu didn't even glance at them, continuing along his strengthening path.

Three hundred points... four hundred points... four hundred fifty points...

When his mental energy approached five hundred, the growth slowed once more.

From 0.8 points per dose, to 0.5 points, then to 0.1 points...

He was squeezing the [Lucid Potion]'s potential to its absolute limit.

Lin Yu didn't even furrow his brow.

As long as there was still growth, even if only 0.01, he would continue.

Because what he possessed was nearly unlimited resources.

He could disregard cost, disregard consumption.

This was the most terrifying aspect of the [Joker Doubling Cycle]!

Another unknown period of time passed.

When Lin Yu injected another [Lucid Potion], that sensation of mental energy growth completely disappeared.

His mental energy value stabilized firmly at a round number.

[Mental Energy: 500]

Reached the peak.

This potion, worth two hundred thousand on the black market, had its enhancement limit completely exhausted by him.

Lin Yu made a rough estimate.

To reach this limit, he had consumed over two thousand [Lucid Potions] and an equivalent amount of [Life Serum].

Converted to market prices, this represented a terrifying expenditure exceeding four hundred million.

And what he had paid was merely some mental energy and time.

Lin Yu slowly stood up.

He felt the unprecedented vast mental power within his body.

If his previous mental energy was a small pond, then now it was a bottomless lake.

500 points of mental energy.

This meant the number of [Doubling Cards] he could simultaneously maintain was... 22!

Excluding the two starter cards.

The number of [Doubling Cards] he could use consecutively was a full twenty!

Lin Yu's breathing halted for a moment.

A number automatically surfaced in his mind.

Two to the twentieth power.

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six.

Over one million times amplification!

Chapter 24: I Don't Have to Be Controlled by Anyone

Five hundred points of mental energy gathered into a deep lake within his sea of consciousness.

Lin Yu slowly stood up, stretching his slightly stiff body from sitting too long.

He didn't indulge in the pleasant sensation of his power surge, but immediately began calculating instead.

Twenty Doubling Cards used simultaneously.

Two to the twentieth power.

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six.

An amplification coefficient exceeding one million times.

This was now his most fundamental trump card.

With such a trump card in hand, what he needed to consider next was how to transform this power into genuine combat strength.

He temporarily had no intention of touching potions that directly enhanced physical attributes.

Setting aside the side effects of those other three-attribute potions in Old Ghost Hall, the process of forcibly boosting attributes inevitably involved immense pain.

This was what he had personally said.

Lin Yu wasn't afraid of hardship, but he wasn't insane either—he had no penchant for self-torture.

When there were simpler, more efficient, and safer methods available, why would he choose the most painful path?

His main attribute now was mental.

Vast mental energy meant he possessed natural advantages in spell-type skills.

So the answer became very clear.

Lin Yu put on his cloak, concealing himself once more in the shadows, and left this "bunker" that had cost him seventeen thousand six hundred dollars.

He stepped back into the chaotic, noisy streets of the "Junkyard."

This time, he didn't head toward shops selling materials and potions, but walked directly toward a more remote corner.

Most stalls here sold secondhand goods. Among them were exactly what he needed—skills.

In this world, skills came from various sources—they could be skill crystals dropped by monsters, or skill books produced in certain special dungeons.

Lin Yu soon stopped before a stall bearing a "General Store" sign.

The stall owner was a one-eyed man lounging lazily in his chair, showing little interest in passing customers.

"Boss, do you have basic spell skills?" Lin Yu asked.

The one-eyed man lifted one eyelid to examine Lin Yu's "Crow" disguise.

"Yeah. What do you want?"

"Earth, fire, water, wind, ice, lightning—all six elements, the most common types."

The one-eyed man paused, then sat up straight from his recliner.

"Little brother, are you... buying enlightenment textbooks for some newly awakened nephew or junior?"

As he spoke, he rummaged through a dust-covered box behind him.

"These things you mentioned are all common goods that even vocational college first-years look down on—only useful for tricking unawakened kids into getting a preliminary feel for elemental affinity."

Although the one-eyed man complained verbally, his hands moved quickly, soon producing six colored but dull, glass bead-like crystals.

These were the lowest-grade skill crystals.

"Anything else?" Lin Yu ignored his teasing.

"More?" The one-eyed man grew interested again. "Tell me what you're looking for."

"Hardening technique for defense enhancement, and a shield technique."

"Hah!" The one-eyed man laughed. "Quite comprehensive, alright alright."

These worthless items were everywhere.

But for small business, no profit was too small to take.

While speaking, he found two more dusty gray crystals and pushed all eight toward Lin Yu.

"Bundle price, eighty. No bargaining."

Lin Yu took out his black card and paid directly.

"Beep."

Transfer completed.

The one-eyed man put away his terminal, watching as Lin Yu picked up the eight worthless crystals, and couldn't resist adding one more comment.

"Little brother, take my advice. These things are fine for playing around, but if you actually use them as combat methods, you'll die without knowing how. With these eighty dollars, you'd be better off buying a small knife—far more reliable than these things."

Lin Yu stored the crystals and turned to leave.

The one-eyed man watched his retreating back, shook his head, and lay back down in his chair.

Another delusional rookie.

As Lin Yu moved through the crowd, his mind had already sunk into his storage ring.

Card Manifestation!

The eight cheap skill crystals offered no resistance before his vast mental energy, instantly transforming into eight brand-new cards.

Skill cards!

Fireball Technique · Beginner

Water Arrow Technique · Beginner

Wind Blade Technique · Beginner

...

Hardening Technique · Beginner

Mana Shield · Beginner

Looking at these eight cards, Lin Yu's mind rapidly began constructing combat models.

What would the most ordinary Fireball Technique become under million-fold amplification?

How durable would the most basic Mana Shield be under million-fold amplification?

Any insignificant trash, when amplified a million times, would unleash terrifyingly formidable power!

After completing this, Lin Yu didn't linger in the black market.

He planned to return to the container he had lived in for five years.

On one hand, there were still some things he needed to take from there...

On the other hand, he needed to go back and contemplate a question.

Should he participate in this year's College Entrance Exam or not?

He had already deferred for five years.

Given his current abilities, the College Entrance Exam, university—these conventional paths to success—had become completely meaningless to him.

He didn't need that diploma to prove himself.

But he harbored a resentment in his heart.

A resentment that had been building for five full years.

He couldn't forget the expressions on those people's faces five years ago when he awakened the epic-level profession of Myriad Forms Card Crafter.

Top domestic universities sent admissions officers who crowded his doorstep, promising the most favorable conditions.

Representatives from major top corporations arrived with "genius training contracts" that amounted to servitude contracts, using threats and incentives to try binding his future permanently to their enterprises.

It was true he was a genius, but precisely because he was a genius, their methods of competing for him became extreme.

In their eyes, he wasn't a person.

He was a walking gold mine, a resource with limitless potential.

What they considered wasn't how to nurture him, but how to use him, how to exploit him, how to turn all his value into numbers on their financial reports.

And how to ensure Lin Yu wouldn't go to rival companies...

At that moment, Lin Yu realized this world wasn't as law-abiding, stable, and peaceful as he had imagined.

For those companies, conglomerates, and collectives that possessed sufficient high-level professionals and substantial power of their own...

They inherently had the capacity to disregard laws.

The state's enforcement agencies might not necessarily overpower profit-driven capital.

They operated above the law, they monopolized everything.

If he walked the path they had planned.

Lin Yu would have no possibility of extricating himself!

So Lin Yu knew that these five lost years were inevitably lost.

Five years in exchange for a future of limitless possibilities.

Now, even alone, he could proceed without being constrained by anyone!

Therefore, he would take the College Entrance Exam.

He didn't want to prove to the world how remarkable he was.

He simply wanted to return, stand before those people, and slap them hard across the face with achievements they couldn't comprehend or imagine.

He wanted to tell those arrogant companies, those self-important universities.

I don't need your funding.

I don't need your contracts.

I don't need your agreements.

He, Lin Yu, wouldn't attach himself to anyone, didn't have to be constrained by anyone.

Alone, he could not only survive.

But could also surpass them all!

Lin Yu emerged from the dark exit of the "Junkyard," where the outside sky had turned dusky.

He hailed a taxi.

"Driver, to the Economic Development Zone, Fuzhuo Old Factory."

Chapter 25: Hey, Sister

The driver was a middle-aged chatterbox who glanced at Lin Yu in the rearview mirror but didn't ask further, simply stomping on the accelerator.

"Going to that place? It's pretty desolate now, used to be so lively back in the day, a factory with tens of thousands of workers."

Lin Yu just grunted in response.

"Young man, your accent doesn't sound local? Here looking for work? Better not go to that area, it's all messy types there now, no decent people would go."

Lin Yu didn't respond, just watched the streetscapes flying backward outside the window.

The car soon entered the desolate development zone, where half the streetlights were broken.

"We're here, this is it. The road gets rough further in." The driver stopped the car outside the old factory area's main gate.

"How much."

"Thirty-eight."

Lin Yu habitually took out the black market's exclusive Black Card from his chest pocket and handed it over.

Then immediately realized his mistake!

This card was the black market's internal currency, physically encrypted and completely unusable on any external terminal.

What a foolish mistake.

"Can I scan a code?" The driver didn't even look, his expression somewhat impatient.

Lin Yu withdrew the card, reached into his pocket, pretending to search.

With a slight mental stir, a brand new Hundred Dollar Bill appeared between his fingers.

He handed the bill over.

"Keep the change."

The driver took the money, held it up to the light, then rubbed it between his fingers. The crisp new texture made him take a second look, but he ultimately pocketed it.

"Thanks."

Lin Yu pushed the door open and got out. The taxi quickly turned around and left, leaving him alone on this abandoned land.

He returned to the shipping container he'd lived in for five years.

The massive granite boulder lay shattered nearby, like a dismembered giant beast silently recounting what happened that day. The bloodstains on the ground had been washed away, but the air still seemed to carry a faint metallic scent.

He pushed open the creaking iron door.

A familiar smell—mixed with rust, dust, and cheap materials—assaulted his senses.

This was his prison, but also his sanctuary.

He stood in the center of the cramped space, five years of memories flooding back like a tide. Those desperate, mad, obsessive days and nights felt like they happened just yesterday.

Right at that moment.

"Buzz buzz—buzz buzz—"

The old-fashioned phone in his pocket, now free from the black market's Signal Shielding, vibrated violently as if gone mad.

Dozens of missed calls and hundreds of unread messages popped up frantically on the screen, all from the same person.

Lin Yao.

Lin Yu opened the most recent message.

"Reply immediately upon seeing this. If no response in three days, calling police."

Just this short sentence, carrying an undeniable commanding tone.

Lin Yu froze momentarily, then found himself torn between laughter and tears.

He understood.

This girl...

She must have seen the shattered rocks and bloodstains at the entrance and thought something terrible had happened to him.

He didn't know how long Lin Yao had struggled after seeing the counterfeit money before suppressing her urge to call the police and settling on this three-day deadline.

What kind of nonsense was this.

Lin Yu thought to himself.

Yet a warm current began melting in his heart.

So there really was someone in this world still caring about him in this clumsy yet earnest way, desperately concerned.

He quickly began typing on the screen.

"I'm fine, was just somewhere with no signal before. What you saw was all a misunderstanding."

He thought for a moment, then added another line.

"Don't worry, I've moved past it now, everything's getting better."

He wanted to say he'd succeeded, but considering the reality, he felt it better to keep it secret.

This infinite replication Multiplication Card Deck... was ridiculously overpowered.

One careless moment could bring fatal danger.

He wasn't strong enough yet.

Message sent successfully.

...

In Linzhou City, inside a residential apartment.

At the dining table, Lin Yao absentmindedly poked at the rice in her bowl with chopsticks, her pretty face filled with lingering worry.

"Yao Yao, eat properly if you're eating, what are you poking at?" Mother Lin placed some vegetables in her bowl, her voice full of concern.

Father Lin glanced at his daughter, put down the tablet he'd been browsing news on, and sighed.

"Still thinking about your awakening?"

Lin Yao didn't speak, just nodded.

Right at that moment, her phone on the table lit up.

Lin Yao's body jolted violently as if electrocuted, snatching up the phone.

When she saw the familiar name and message on the screen, her breath caught.

"I'm fine..."

"Everything's getting better..."

The fear, despair, and worry that had built up over two days burst through their dam at this moment.

Tears instantly blurred her vision.

He was alive!

Lin Yao wiped her tears haphazardly with the back of her hand. Her fingers trembled from excessive excitement, hitting wrong keys several times.

"Where are you?! Where are you right now?!"

"Are you hurt?! What actually happened that day?!"

A rapid-fire series of questions sent over.

On the other end, Lin Yu watched his sister's barrage of questions, as if he could see her jumping with anxiety on the other side.

He replied: "At home, that shipping container. I'm really fine, completely unharmed. Don't panic, and don't imagine things."

In the dining room.

When Lin Yao saw the words "shipping container," she instantly sprang up from her chair.

"Dad! Mom! I'm full!"

She stuffed her phone into her pocket, picked up her rice bowl, and with nearly frantic speed, shoveled the remaining half-bowl of rice into her mouth.

Mother Lin was startled by her.

"Oh you child, slow down, don't choke!"

Lin Yao didn't listen at all, finishing her meal in seconds, then slamming her bowl and chopsticks heavily on the table.

"I'm going out! Something really important!"

She shouted while rushing toward the door like a whirlwind, scrambling to put on her shoes.

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged glances, both seeing helplessness and surprise in each other's expressions.

"You think... our daughter might be... in puppy love?" Father Lin picked up his tablet but couldn't focus on a single word.

"Shouldn't be..."

"Should we check?"

"No no no, let's ask later?"

"Seems our daughter needs a special talk."

"Bang!"

The security door slammed shut forcefully.

Lin Yao's figure had already disappeared down the hallway.

Lin Yu looked at the new message popping up on his phone screen, just one short sentence.

"Stay where you are, don't move! I'm coming right now!"

He put down his phone, looking around the messy shipping container.

Seemed like an interrogation was unavoidable.

But it was fine—as long as he handled it properly, Lin Yao would definitely be fooled by him.

He leaned against the cold metal wall, waiting.

Not long after, hurried, chaotic footsteps came from outside the container, growing closer until they stopped right at the door.

"Bang!"

The rusted iron door was violently pushed open from outside, crashing against the wall with a piercing screech.

A figure rushed in, bringing with her a whirlwind of urgency and dust.

It was Lin Yao.

She stood panting heavily at the doorway, chest heaving dramatically, her bangs soaked with sweat and plastered to her skin.

Her gaze swept quickly through the dim room before locking tightly onto Lin Yu standing in the corner.

There was no expected interrogation, no torrent of scolding.

Lin Yao just looked at him.

Looked at his body—still thin, but standing straight.

Looked at his face—no longer carrying that sickly pallor, his complexion much improved thanks to the Life Serum compared to their last meeting.

Looked at the clean cloak he wore, instead of the grease-stained, worn-out work clothes.

Most importantly, he wasn't fiddling with those useless little stone cards anymore.

Lin Yao's tense body suddenly relaxed at this moment.

The fear and despair accumulated over two days seemed to have found a release valve.

She rushed forward two steps.

With a whoosh.

Lin Yao spread her arms and, using all her strength, tightly hugged Lin Yu.

Her soft body crashed into his embrace, carrying a slight tremble.

Chapter 26: A surprise tomorrow!

"You jerk!!"

The angry shout came muffled from his sister's tear-filled voice against his chest, her fists pounding weakly against his back again and again.

"I thought you were dead! I thought you'd been beaten to death!!"

"I saw the stones on the ground were all broken! And there was blood! You wouldn't answer my calls! You wouldn't reply to my messages!"

"Do you have any idea how scared I was!"

Lin Yu raised his hand and patted his sister's back.

It was a gesture he used to do all the time, but now it felt somewhat unfamiliar.

"I'm fine."

"You're lying! Something definitely happened! Did you borrow money again? Did those people come looking for you again?" Lin Yao lifted her head, her reddened eyes filled with tears as she grabbed Lin Yu's arm, checking him up and down.

"No, really, I didn't." Lin Yu let her examine him.

After confirming that Lin Yu really had no injuries on him, Lin Yao seemed to have all her strength drained away. She released her grip but still clung tightly to the corner of Lin Yu's clothes, as if he would disappear if she let go.

"Brother, come home with me."

Her voice was very soft, carrying a pleading tone.

"Let's go home, okay? Mom and Dad will figure out the money we owe, our whole family will pay it back together!"

"We'll never be separated again!"

Lin Yao tugged firmly on Lin Yu's hand, trying to drag him outside.

"Don't stay in this awful place anymore! This isn't fit for humans to live in!"

Lin Yu didn't move.

Looking at his sister's tear-streaked face, he spoke calmly.

"Yao Yao, the money problem... I've already solved it."

Lin Yao's movements stopped, and she looked at Lin Yu in disbelief.

"Solved it? How did you solve it? Where did you borrow from? Did you..."

She thought of those brand new banknotes, but couldn't bring herself to say the rest.

"It's not what you're thinking." Lin Yu interrupted her, "Trust me, everything is over, and everything has gotten better."

"I don't believe you!" Lin Yao shook her head vigorously, "Unless you come home with me! Come with me right now!"

Seeing her stubborn expression, Lin Yu didn't refuse again.

A hint of joy appeared on Lin Yao's face as she started pulling him to leave.

But she had only taken one step when she stopped again.

She leaned close to Lin Yu, sniffed hard, then wrinkled her nose in disgust.

"Brother, how long has it been since you bathed?"

The sudden shift in focus made even Lin Yu pause for a moment.

"And these clothes! What is this thing? Take it off quickly! Change into something else!"

Lin Yao released his hand and began rummaging through the shipping container, with such determination that it seemed she was about to conduct a thorough cleaning.

"Look at this place of yours, it's as messy as a dog's den! No, you can't go home like this! You'll scare Mom and Dad to death!"

While muttering to herself, she pulled out all of Lin Yu's worn-out clothes and threw them on the ground.

"These! All of them, throw them away!"

"And this! Throw it away too!"

Lin Yu watched his sister bustling around like a busy little bee, commanding everything in his tiny "cage," and smiled affectionately.

"Okay, whatever you say."

Hearing Lin Yu's response, Lin Yao's movements paused.

She turned around, looked at the long-absent, genuine smile on Lin Yu's face, and felt her eyes grow hot again.

She quickly walked up to Lin Yu, stood on her tiptoes.

And gently pressed her forehead against Lin Yu's forehead.

"Brother, I've missed you so much."

Her voice was very low, with a strong nasal tone.

Lin Yu didn't speak, just raised his hand and ruffled her hair.

A few seconds later, Lin Yao stepped back, wiped the tear stains from her face haphazardly, and regained her energetic appearance.

"Wait for me here! I'll go home first to prepare Mom and Dad! Otherwise if you suddenly come back, Mom won't be able to handle the shock!"

"And! You have to take a bath! Clean yourself up properly! When I come to pick you up tomorrow, I want to see a completely new you!"

She waved her fist at Lin Yu.

"Tomorrow I'll bring new clothes!"

After saying this, she turned and ran off, as brisk and energetic as when she had arrived.

"Tomorrow... I'll come pick you up and bring you home!"

When she reached the door, she turned back and shouted again.

Lin Yu stood where he was, watching her disappearing figure in the sunset, and responded loudly.

"Okay!"

The last rays of the setting sun streamed in through the open iron door, casting a warm golden hue over everything inside the shipping container.

Lin Yu stood in place, the faint fragrance and vitality that his sister Lin Yao had brought with her still lingering in the air.

"Tomorrow... I'll come pick you up and bring you home!"

These words echoed repeatedly in his ears.

Going home.

Such a distant, yet such a heavy word.

Lin Yao's words also stirred up memories for Lin Yu.

Over these years, it wasn't that he hadn't thought about his parents.

How could he not think about them.

It was just that he couldn't go back.

He knew very well that in his condition at the time, returning would only bring greater burden and pain to his already struggling family.

He had never blamed his parents.

They had already worried themselves sick over him, had already done more than enough.

But they had their own limitations.

They were ordinary people who couldn't understand what an epic-level profession meant, and even less could they believe that their son was destined to walk a path that no one had walked before, a path that was inevitably difficult.

In their eyes, giving up on the College Entrance Exam, cutting ties with his family, hiding in an abandoned shipping container making a pile of useless garbage Cards—this was being irresponsible, this was self-destruction.

They didn't believe in the path Lin Yu wanted to walk.

Fortunately...

Lin Yu let out a soft sigh.

He had already forged his own path!

Five years, in exchange for a future of unlimited possibilities.

This deal wasn't a loss.

Now, he had the ability to control his own destiny, and the ability to change his parents' lives.

Even... he might be able to change this World.

Of course, those were all matters for the future.

He quietly sat down on the only somewhat intact chair in the shipping container, thinking about returning home tomorrow, and actually felt a trace of nervousness in his heart.

This feeling was very unfamiliar.

It was like a wanderer who had been away from home for many years, feeling apprehensive as they approach their hometown.

...

On the other side.

Lin Yao hummed a little tune, her steps so light she almost seemed to fly.

She rushed home at top speed, took out her keys and opened the door.

"I'm home!"

In the living room, Father Lin and Mother Lin were sitting at the dining table, facing several dishes that had barely been touched, the atmosphere somewhat gloomy.

Seeing her daughter return, Mother Lin immediately stood up.

"Yao Yao, where did you run off to?"

"Mom! Dad!"

Lin Yao flew to the dining table like a happy butterfly, her face unable to suppress her smile.

Father Lin looked at his daughter's elated expression and exchanged a glance with his wife.

"Surprise? What surprise?"

"Top secret for now!" Lin Yao blinked mysteriously, "Anyway, you'll know tomorrow! I guarantee it'll shock you!"

Mother Lin looked at her daughter and asked tentatively, "Is it... related to your profession awakening?"

"No!" Lin Yao shook her head like a rattle-drum, "It's a hundred times more important than that!"

Father Lin pondered for a moment, then spoke slowly.

"This surprise... is it a person?"

His question was extremely tactful.

In his mind, at his daughter's age, with such a big reaction, what else could it be besides falling in love?

Chapter 27: Different Families, Same Sorrow

Lin Yao's movements instantly froze.

She raised her head, her eyes sparkling as she looked at her father.

Mom and Dad really do care about Brother after all! They guessed it!

They're just too hurt to mention Brother's name directly!

A wave of emotion washed over her, and she nodded vigorously.

"Yes! It's a person! Someone you'd absolutely never expect!"

"Hiss—"

Both Father Lin and Mother Lin simultaneously gasped in shock.

It really is a person!

And judging by her tone, she's bringing them home tomorrow?

Mother Lin's feelings immediately became complicated, experiencing that sensation of a precious cabbage they'd painstakingly grown being about to be devoured by a pig.

"Yao Yao, you... you're moving a bit too fast, aren't you?"

"Too fast?" Lin Yao completely missed her mother's implication, thinking only that getting her brother home even one day earlier would be good.

"It's not fast at all! Any later and it'll be too late!"

Any later, and Brother will undergo his awakening, and he'll definitely be even busier with even less time!

These words landed in Father and Mother Lin's ears with an entirely different meaning.

Too late?

So urgent?

This...

It seems their daughter has truly fallen hard.

But as the saying goes, grown children follow their own path.

At their daughter's age, she really has reached the appropriate age for marriage discussions.

And she's even bringing him home tomorrow—that's already model daughter behavior.

Thinking this, the couple couldn't bring themselves to question further, afraid of provoking their daughter's resentment.

"Alright then, as long as you're happy." Mother Lin sighed. "Bring him tomorrow so we can meet him."

"Mm-hmm!" Lin Yao nodded energetically.

After finishing dinner, she immediately buried herself in her room, preparing to order clothes for pickup and dressing tomorrow!

She wanted to pick the most handsome outfit for her brother!

So he could return to this family with a completely new appearance!

In the living room, only Father Lin and Mother Lin remained.

The television was on, but neither had any mind to watch it.

"Do you think... this is reliable?" Mother Lin asked anxiously.

"The child's grown up, she has her own ideas." Father Lin picked up the newspaper but couldn't read a single word. "She looks quite happy, and as parents, we should just support her."

"I'm just afraid she's being deceived."

"We'll see tomorrow."

The two fell silent for a while.

Someone sighed first, though it was unclear who.

"Ah..."

That sigh acted like a switch, instantly triggering the deepest pain in both their hearts.

"If only... if only Xiao Yu were half as sensible as Yao Yao." Mother Lin's eyes reddened.

Father Lin's expression also darkened.

Lin Yu.

That name was the unspoken taboo in their household.

"Don't mention him." Father Lin's voice grew hoarse. "Whenever he's mentioned, my heart feels blocked up."

"How can I not mention him!" Mother Lin's tears fell. "He's also a piece of my flesh and blood! Five years, a full five years! What kind of life has he been living! Whenever I think of him living in that metal container, I..."

She covered her face, sobbing uncontrollably.

Father Lin silently handed her a tissue and sighed heavily.

This child was truly a scar on their hearts that would never heal.

He picked up the remote and turned off the television.

...

Compared to the sorrow suppressed beneath silence in the Lin household, Zhao Tianyang's home was completely drowned in weeping darkness.

The living room lights shone pale white, illuminating the despairing faces of the family of three.

That so-called [Life Serum]—claimed to cleanse all toxins and bring rebirth—had indeed taken effect. It pulled Zhao Tianyang back from death's edge, restoring his clear consciousness so he no longer had bloodshot eyes and bursting blood vessels.

But its effects stopped there.

The diagnostic report left by the private doctor who had just departed lay coldly on the coffee table like a death sentence.

The drug toxins had already invaded his bone marrow and soul, too deeply entrenched to reverse.

The Life Serum's powerful vitality had only forcibly slowed the rate of organ failure. But it clearly gave Zhao Tianyang his final breathing space—one month.

"How could this be... how could this be!"

Mother Zhao collapsed on the sofa, hands tightly covering her mouth, unable to suppress her heartbroken sobs. Her body trembled violently as if she might break down at any moment.

"I've killed you... I've killed you, my son!"

Father Zhao, usually a resolute and strong middle-aged man, now resembled a trapped beast with its backbone removed. He punched his own leg, his bloodshot eyes crimson, face filled with regret and self-blame.

"I shouldn't have searched for any folk remedies! I shouldn't have believed those people's nonsense! I pushed you into this fire pit!"

The information about the drug had come from an unreliable channel he'd sought through connections at great cost. He thought it was a shortcut, never imagining it would be a one-way ticket to hell.

Zhao Tianyang sat opposite them, his face as pale as paper. Hearing his parents' cries and self-blame, the chill running through his body felt more piercing than any drug's side effects.

He was finished.

In his final moments of life, he should stay and properly accompany his parents.

But his mind uncontrollably conjured the image of that mysterious figure wearing the crow cloak.

That person, who without hesitation provided the money, gave him a chance, and essentially bought his life.

That person, who after signing the Master-Servant Contract, still granted him "freedom."

That person... was his master, his benefactor.

Zhao Tianyang slowly rose from the sofa.

This movement abruptly cut off his parents' weeping. They stared at their son in terror.

"Tianyang, what are you doing?"

"I don't blame you." Zhao Tianyang spoke, his voice hoarse and dry. "I chose this path myself, and I took the drug willingly."

He looked at his parents, the people who loved him most in this world.

"But I can't stay."

"What nonsense are you saying!" Mother Zhao screamed, rushing over to grab his arm. "You only have one month left! You can't go anywhere! You need to stay home with Mom and Dad!"

"Mom." Zhao Tianyang grasped his mother's icy hand in return. "You taught me that one should know to repay kindness."

He paused, speaking each word with perfect clarity.

"My life... was bought back by someone with money. This final month was also given by him. So it doesn't belong to me, nor to you."

"It belongs to my... master."

"I need to find him, to tell him this news. If he needs it, I'll do any work during this last month. I need to repay this debt of gratitude."

He couldn't let his benefactor, who spent a fortune, end up with only worthless trash—a dead man.

Even more, he couldn't die pathetically while still owing such an enormous debt of gratitude.

Father and Mother Zhao stood stunned.

They looked at their son's young face filled with determination, at those eyes dimmed by weakness yet burning with a stubborn flame.

Chapter 28: You can't settle accounts like this!

That was their son.

This loyalty that bordered on foolishness was something they had personally taught him.

What more could they say?

In the end, Father Zhao slumped his head in defeat and waved his hand weakly.

"Go ahead."

Mother Zhao's tears burst forth again. She couldn't speak a single word, simply turning and rushing into the room, haphazardly packing her son's luggage as if he weren't going to his death, but rather heading off to a distant university.

After a brief yet deeply painful farewell, Zhao Tianyang left home.

He didn't look back.

He was afraid that if he looked back, he wouldn't be able to take another step forward.

...

Black Market, "Junkyard."

In the noisy, chaotic alleyways, Zhao Tianyang wore an ill-fitting old jacket, head bowed, struggling to make his way through the crowd of people.

Every breath tugged at his internal organs, bringing waves of dull pain.

He could feel his life gradually draining away with each step.

He didn't know where Lin Yu was.

Lin Yu had only said that when he needed him, he would find him.

But he couldn't wait.

He only had one clumsy method.

"Ding ling—"

The wind chime at the entrance of Old Ghost Hall emitted a crisp sound.

Old Ghost, who had been dozing behind the counter, was startled awake. He lifted his head impatiently, wanting to see which clueless person was disturbing his peaceful slumber.

Then, he saw Zhao Tianyang.

"You, kid?" Old Ghost was momentarily stunned, then frowned, "Why are you back again? Looking at your complexion, it's worse than last time. The medicine didn't work?"

Zhao Tianyang leaned against the doorframe, catching his breath for a few moments.

"Old Ghost... I'm here to find someone."

"Find someone?" Old Ghost looked him up and down, "Looking for who? This is a pharmacy, not a detective agency."

"Looking for..." Zhao Tianyang mentioned that characteristic, "That person... the one who bought the serum that day."

Old Ghost's movements froze.

He took off his Bird-Beak Mask, revealing a shrewd face, and carefully studied Zhao Tianyang.

"What do you want with him?"

Zhao Tianyang didn't hide anything, recounting everything that had happened exactly as it occurred.

The serum hadn't completely eradicated the toxin - he only had one month left. He had come to repay his debt.

After listening, Old Ghost remained silent for a long time.

The shop fell into complete stillness.

After a long while, Old Ghost finally let out a sigh from his nose that was difficult to interpret.

"Ai..."

He had seen too many madmen who would stop at nothing for power, too many fools who brought about their own destruction through greed.

But someone like Zhao Tianyang - this was his first time encountering such a person.

"I don't know where he is." Old Ghost put his mask back on, his voice returning to the cold tone of a businessman, "People in the black market come and go like flowing water. He left after buying what he needed - how could I possibly know his whereabouts?"

A flicker of disappointment crossed Zhao Tianyang's face.

But he didn't leave.

"Then I'll wait here."

"Wait?" Old Ghost found this somewhat laughable, "Wait until when? What if he never comes back?"

Zhao Tianyang found an out-of-the-way corner, leaned against the wall, and slowly sat down.

He wrapped his jacket tighter around himself, his body trembling slightly from the cold and pain.

"Then I'll wait until I die."

"If I die, please help me inform him... of my death. I'll repay his kindness in my next life."

I'll repay his kindness in my next life.

These words pierced Old Ghost's heart like a rusty nail.

Looking at the young man huddled in the corner, his body trembling uncontrollably yet stubbornly refusing to leave, Old Ghost felt momentarily dazed.

In the black market, life was the cheapest commodity.

He had seen too much - fathers turning against sons, brothers killing each other - all for a bit of resources, for a single opportunity.

Loyalty?

That was a luxury only the wealthy could afford.

Or rather, it was a shackle used by those in power to restrain their subordinates.

Someone like Zhao Tianyang, who valued his own life so lightly yet treated a seemingly illusory "debt of gratitude" as heavier than the heavens...

In his half lifetime mixing in Medicine Man Alley, this was Old Ghost's first time encountering such a person.

At this moment, even if Zhao Tianyang was a completely useless waste, even if he were to die in this corner of his shop the very next second...

Old Ghost finally felt that Lin Yu's seemingly loss-making three hundred thousand that day had been an incredibly worthwhile investment.

Such people... were far too rare to find in this predatory society.

But immediately afterward, an even stronger sense of absurdity and confusion surged within him.

He couldn't understand it.

His businessman's mind couldn't process this kind of pure emotional logic.

He took off his mask, walked over to Zhao Tianyang, and crouched down in front of him.

"Kid, has the medicine fried your brain?"

Zhao Tianyang lifted his head, his pale lips moving slightly, but he said nothing.

"You think he saved you, that he's your benefactor, right?" Old Ghost continued questioning.

Zhao Tianyang nodded, this movement tugging at his internal organs and making him cough uncontrollably.

Looking at his condition where he could breathe his last at any moment, Old Ghost lowered his voice and revealed something he shouldn't have said.

"Let me tell you something, listen carefully."

"That [Life Serum] was originally supposed to be yours."

"Before you came, that serum had already been reserved for you. It was me - when I saw the higher price he offered - who temporarily broke our agreement and prepared to sell it to him. I was the one who breached the contract first." Old Ghost spoke each word clearly and deliberately.

He stared at Zhao Tianyang's face, trying to find expressions of shock, anger, or sudden realization.

But he was disappointed.

Zhao Tianyang simply listened quietly, his dim eyes showing not the slightest ripple of emotion.

This wasn't right.

This reaction wasn't right!

The frustration in Old Ghost's heart grew heavier. He felt his worldview was being shaken to its foundations by this half-dead kid.

"Didn't you understand what I said?"

"The extra three hundred thousand he added was only because I breached the contract - he wanted to jump the queue to buy what should have been yours!"

"This isn't any kind of debt of gratitude! This was a transaction! He was just a buyer who cut in line!"

Old Ghost felt he had to wake up this "fool."

He refused to believe that such an incredibly stupid person truly existed in this world.

However, Zhao Tianyang simply shook his head gently.

"It's different."

"What's different?" Old Ghost almost shouted.

"If that day, I had been in his position." Zhao Tianyang looked at Old Ghost, speaking slowly, "If I had already paid the money and obtained that serum, and another person, someone dying, knelt down and begged me..."

"I wouldn't have given it."

"Because that was my life, my only hope for survival. I'm not that noble."

Every word Zhao Tianyang spoke felt like a heavy hammer pounding on Old Ghost's heart.

"But he gave it."

"Therefore, he deserves it."

The logic was just that simple.

So simple that Old Ghost couldn't refute it.

Old Ghost opened his mouth, only to find he couldn't utter a single word.

Yes.

He himself couldn't have done it either.

In this black market, who could?

Give their only chance at survival to a complete stranger?

Impossible!

But... but this account shouldn't be calculated this way!

Chapter 29: Trial

Old Ghost felt like he was going crazy. He suddenly stood up and began pacing back and forth in the shop like a wild beast trapped in a cage.

"Wrong! Wrong!"

He pointed at Zhao Tianyang, practically roaring at him.

"Do you know? After he left, I returned that three hundred thousand to him!"

"I fucking returned the money to him!"

"That means he didn't spend a single cent! He gave nothing! Yet he got himself such a loyal slave for free!"

"Do you understand! He was getting something for nothing! You've been cheated! You complete and utter fool!"

This was the truth of the matter.

A cold, cruel truth filled with calculation.

That mysterious Crow cloak wasn't any living bodhisattva - he was a speculator even more cunning than Old Ghost himself!

Using Old Ghost's guilt over breaking the contract and Zhao Tianyang's desperation, he had completed a perfect investment without spending a single coin!

However, facing this truth that would make anyone collapse, Zhao Tianyang's reaction remained calm.

He just leaned against the wall and said softly.

"So what?"

Old Ghost's roar abruptly stopped.

He stared blankly at Zhao Tianyang.

"You said... what?"

"Even if he didn't spend a single cent, even if this was a trap." Zhao Tianyang's breathing grew weaker, but his thinking remained crystal clear, "The fact is, he got the serum, and then, he gave the serum to me."

"This action saved my life, even if only for one more month."

"That's enough."

"I, Zhao Tianyang, only acknowledge this fact."

Old Ghost was completely speechless.

He slumped back into his chair, picked up a bottle of cheap alcohol from the counter, and took a fierce gulp.

The pungent liquid burned his throat but couldn't clear his chaotic mind in the slightest.

He looked at that "madman" curled up in the corner, quietly waiting for death.

Then he remembered that other "madman" who had remained unnervingly calm from start to finish, taking the money and leaving without hesitation.

After a long while.

Old Ghost shook his head in disbelief and cursed under his breath.

"Madmen... you're all fucking madmen."

"Lunatics!"

"Lunatics!!!!"

...

The next day, at the Lin Family residence.

Lin Yao had excitedly gone out early in the morning to "pick someone up," leaving Father Lin and Mother Lin sitting restlessly in the living room.

The dining table was set with a lavish breakfast, but no one had any appetite to eat.

Mother Lin paced back and forth in the living room, sometimes checking the wall clock, sometimes walking to the window to look outside, her face filled with unconcealed anxiety.

"Tell me... what's going on with Yao Yao? Yesterday she suddenly said she had a boyfriend, and today she's bringing him home. Isn't this a bit too fast?"

Father Lin sat on the sofa holding a newspaper, but his focus wasn't on it at all.

"The child has grown up and has her own ideas."

"I'm just afraid she'll be deceived! How old is she? She has no social experience. What if she meets some smooth-talking bad boy?" The more Mother Lin thought about it, the more uneasy she felt.

She stopped pacing and clapped her hands.

"No, I feel too unsettled. I need to get someone else to help evaluate him. I'll call my good friend and ask her to come over too."

Father Lin put down the newspaper and nodded.

Old Su was Mother Lin's good friend of several decades, also Su Qingxue's mother. She was sharp and had a good eye for people. Having her here would indeed provide some reassurance.

The call connected quickly.

After Mother Lin briefly explained the situation, Old Su on the other end immediately agreed, saying she'd arrive in half an hour.

After hanging up, Mother Lin's mood finally calmed a bit.

In less than twenty minutes, the doorbell rang.

Mother Lin hurried to open the door. Standing at the doorway was not only her good friend Mother Su, but also Su Qingxue following behind, along with a young man who looked quite energetic.

"Oh my, why are you all here?" Mother Lin was somewhat surprised.

"After my mom mentioned it, I was worried about Yao Yao too, so I came along to see," Su Qingxue explained with a smile, while naturally linking arms with the man beside her, "Auntie, Uncle, this is my boyfriend, Chen Rui."

"Hello, Uncle and Auntie." Chen Rui immediately greeted politely, holding some high-end gifts in his hands.

"Come in, come in! You didn't need to bring anything!" Father Lin and Mother Lin quickly welcomed everyone inside.

Suddenly, the originally quiet living room now seated five people, the atmosphere becoming both lively and peculiar.

Father Lin, Mother Lin, Mother Su, Su Qingxue, and Chen Rui - five people sitting around the sofa, forming a temporary "in-laws review panel," all waiting for that soon-to-arrive "boyfriend" of Lin Yao's.

"Qingxue, your boyfriend is really handsome and talented," Mother Lin examined Chen Rui, growing more satisfied the more she looked.

Chen Rui wore a well-fitted casual suit, behaved appropriately, and maintained a gentle smile on his face.

"You flatter me, Auntie."

"More than just handsome and talented!" Mother Su immediately took over the conversation, her face showing some pride, "Our Chen Rui is a proper university graduate and a senior professional, already at level thirty!"

At these words, Father Lin and Mother Lin's expressions became more serious.

Level thirty - for ordinary people who hadn't awakened combat professions, this was already a height that required looking up to.

Su Qingxue wore a proper smile on her face, speaking modestly: "Mom, why are you saying that? Chen Rui just doesn't like going to frontline battles and abyssal domains, he wants a stable life, so his level progression has been a bit slow."

Though this sounded modest, between the lines it carried a sense of superiority.

Chen Rui also spoke up at the right moment, maintaining a proper posture: "In today's society, stability is most important. Although my level isn't high, my strength is quite good among peers, more than enough to protect Qingxue."

His words were flawless, showing both capability and stability.

Mother Su looked at her prospective son-in-law with satisfaction, then changed the subject, looking at Mother Lin.

"Hey, Old Lin's family, have you asked about the situation with your Yao Yao's... guy?"

Mother Lin's expression instantly fell, and she shook her head awkwardly.

"That girl Yao Yao didn't say anything, just told us to wait and see."

"Didn't say anything?" Mother Su's voice rose a bit, "That won't do! For girls, the most important thing is to see if a man has prospects! Can't be deceived by some useless poor boy! Oh no! Isn't your Yao Yao not awakened yet! Her awakening is in a couple of days... this guy probably wants to secure Yao Yao first!"

Su Qingxue also chimed in: "Yes, Auntie, Yao Yao has a simple personality and is easily soft-hearted. Many men these days, without any capability themselves, specialize in deceiving young girls. You really need to screen him properly."

As she spoke, she glanced at Chen Rui beside her.

"A man's ability and profession are what truly matter. Like our Chen Rui, although he chose stability, he could get a high-paying position at a big company anytime. That's real confidence."

Chapter 30: Dad, Mom, look who I brought back!

Chen Rui didn't speak, but the faint curve at the corner of his mouth already revealed his attitude.

He genuinely looked down upon ordinary people without strength or background. Since everyone present today were elders, he had restrained himself considerably. In his view, being chosen by Su Qingxue naturally made him outstanding among men. As for the one Lin Yao found... most likely, he was just an insignificant character.

Listening to these words, Father Lin and Mother Lin felt their hearts growing heavier.

They were already worried, and now with the Su mother and daughter saying these things, they became even more anxious.

Indeed, Yao Yao was so outstanding—what if she really ended up with someone completely worthless...

Mother Lin grew increasingly fearful and couldn't help asking Su Qingxue, "Then... Qingxue, in your opinion, what kind of person would be considered reliable?"

"Auntie, these days, even without considering family background, at the very least they should be a professional who awakened a combat profession, right? Their level shouldn't be too low—level twenty is the minimum. They also need to have a proper job, not someone who just wanders around in the abandoned districts."

With each condition Su Qingxue mentioned, Father Lin and Mother Lin's hearts sank further.

These conditions all sounded so familiar.

Each one seemed to describe their disappointing son, Lin Yu.

The atmosphere in the living room instantly became oppressive.

Su Qingxue seemed to realize she had brought up an inappropriate topic and quickly tried to remedy the situation, "Of course, feelings are what matter most! As long as they have good character and treat Yao Yao well, other things might be acceptable."

Chen Rui also nodded in agreement, "Right, uncle and aunt don't need to worry too much. Even if the other person is just an ordinary person, as long as they're diligent and hardworking, life can still be good. After all, not everyone has the talent to become a powerful professional."

His "comforting" words were filled with a condescending sense of charity.

The Lin couple's expressions grew even more unpleasant.

Just as the atmosphere became both awkward and heavy.

"Ding dong—"

The doorbell rang.

Everyone in the living room froze instantly.

He's here!

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged glances, both seeing nervousness on each other's faces.

"You all sit, you're guests, I'll get it." Father Lin stood up, straightened his clothes, and walked toward the door.

"Old Lin, I'll come with you." Mother Lin couldn't sit still either and quickly followed.

Mother Su, Su Qingxue, and Chen Rui sat on the sofa, exchanging knowing glances.

This setup was just like a job interview.

Mother Su lowered her voice and said to Su Qingxue and Chen Rui, "Look how nervous they are—probably the one Yao Yao found really isn't up to par. Sigh, that girl is just too soft-hearted."

Chen Rui didn't respond, just picked up his teacup and gently blew on the steam.

What kind of decent person could an unawakened young girl possibly find? He was only here today out of respect for Su Qingxue.

Su Qingxue gently patted her mother's hand, signaling her to stop talking.

She wanted to see for herself what kind of person could make Lin Yao bring them home so formally.

At the doorway.

Father Lin paused for a moment with his hand on the doorknob before turning it and pulling the door open.

The figure outside came into view.

The next second.

Father Lin froze completely in place. His mouth opened, but no words came out, and the color visibly drained from his face.

Mother Lin, who was behind him, swayed violently the moment she clearly saw the face outside the door.

She covered her mouth tightly with her hand, holding back sobs, but tears streamed down like broken pearls, pouring out uncontrollably.

The three people in the living room were instantly bewildered.

What's happening?

Why this reaction?

Mother Su was the first to lose patience. Leaning forward, she whispered to Su Qingxue, "Crying? Why is Sister Lin crying?"

Chen Rui also put down his teacup.

Crying?

Could it be... from overwhelming emotion?

A thought instantly flashed through his mind: Could it be that the boyfriend Lin Yao found was so outstanding that it moved her parents to tears of joy?

What kind of person could have that effect?

The son of Linzhou's mayor? Or the heir of some S-rank guild?

Mother Su obviously thought of the same possibility. Her expression became quite dramatic, filled with shock and a hint of barely noticeable envy.

"Qingxue, quickly look, who is it really?"

Su Qingxue was also filled with immense curiosity.

She and Lin Yao were close friends and of the same generation—standing up to look at this moment wouldn't be considered impolite.

She swallowed, stood up from the sofa, pretended to casually walk a couple steps toward the doorway, and secretly peeked.

Just one glance.

Su Qingxue froze completely.

The curiosity and amused expression on her face instantly solidified, replaced by an extremely complex mix of shock, absurdity, and disbelief.

How... could it be him?

In the living room, seeing Su Qingxue's reaction made Chen Rui's speculation even more confused.

Even the usually arrogant Su Qingxue was shocked like this?!

What's going on?

He sat up straight, adjusted his collar, and prepared to greet this important figure who could make both the Lin family and Su Qingxue "lose their composure" simultaneously.

What kind of person could this possibly be?

Chen Rui's curiosity reached its peak.

The dead silence at the doorway continued.

Father Lin's lips trembled, and it took him a long moment to squeeze out two words from his throat.

"You..."

Mother Lin was already sobbing uncontrollably, her arm covering her mouth shaking violently.

A slightly hoarse male voice broke the dead silence.

"Dad, Mom."

Chen Rui jolted sharply.

Calling them mom and dad at the first meeting!

This guy shouldn't be underestimated!

Mother Su finally couldn't contain her curiosity any longer and also stood up, taking a look.

She also froze, her expression equally complex—shock, relief, and helplessness.

Just then, a lively figure emerged from behind the man wearing a sharp suit.

Lin Yao stood playfully with her hands on her hips, tilting her head to lean against the man, her face showing an unprecedentedly brilliant smile.

"Dad! Mom! Look who I brought back!!"

This exclamation completely awakened everyone.

Mother Lin could no longer hold back, leaning against Father Lin's chest as she burst into loud sobs.

Mother Su was the first to regain her senses, breaking the awkward situation.

"Xiao Yu is back! What's with the family crying at the doorway! Come in, come in!"

Only then did Father Lin and Mother Lin snap out of their daze, quickly wiping their tears and somewhat flusteredly guiding their son, whom they hadn't seen for five years, into the house.

Chen Rui watched Lin Yu walking in, feeling completely bewildered.

He whispered to Su Qingxue beside him, "What's going on?"

Su Qingxue didn't look at him, but took out her phone and quickly typed a line of text.

[He's that Lin Yu who shook Ninghai Province five years ago.]

Chen Rui's phone vibrated. He looked down.

Lin Yu!

Of course he had heard this name!

The genius who awakened the Epic-level profession [Myriad Forms Card Crafter] five years ago, but willfully degenerated, obsessed with creating garbage cards, and eventually broke with his family—that madman!

Chapter 31: A Good Meal

A complex mix of emotions instantly surged through Chen Rui's heart.

To put it deeply, he was jealous. He envied Lin Yu's talent, and even more so, he despised him for squandering that talent so recklessly!

To put it simply, during his first two years of university, he had failed to pursue Su Qingxue precisely because, back then, she still held a sliver of hope for this childhood friend genius, expecting him to soar to great heights after a brief period of silence!

So it was him.

Su Qingxue noticed the change in her boyfriend's aura beside her. Without any visible reaction, she reached out under the table and affectionately squeezed his hand.

She leaned close to his ear and spoke in a volume only the two of them could hear.

"Don't cause any trouble today."

An atmosphere named "awkwardness" rapidly condensed and spread throughout the Lin family living room.

Su Qingxue discreetly withdrew her hand, sensing the intense emotional fluctuations in her boyfriend beside her. She didn't say anything more, just quietly watched Lin Yu being pulled into the house by Lin Yao.

Five years.

He seemed to have changed, yet he also seemed unchanged.

His face was still that familiar one, just that the immaturity and flamboyance of those years had faded, replaced by a calmness that was hard to read. His figure remained slender, but his posture was straight, without any hint of dejection.

Most importantly, that five-year-long obsessive aura of indifference toward everything about him had disappeared.

In its place was a settled composure, almost bordering on aloofness.

This made Su Qingxue feel somewhat unfamiliar.

"Oh my, look at my poor memory!"

Mother Lin finally snapped out of her intense emotional turmoil. She wiped her tears, and a brilliant smile instantly bloomed on her face.

"Yao Yao, you silly girl, such a huge surprise! I thought... oh, never mind, never mind!"

She quickly walked over to Lin Yao, grabbed Lin Yu's hand, and looked it over repeatedly.

"You've lost weight, really lost weight! You definitely haven't been eating properly outside!"

Father Lin also came over. He patted Lin Yu's shoulder, his lips moving as if he wanted to say something, but in the end, it only turned into a long sigh.

"It's good that you're back, it's good that you're back."

Seeing the lively scene in the room, Lin Yao only then belatedly registered her surprise.

"Mom, Auntie Su, Sister Qingxue... why are you all here?"

"Auntie Su and Qingxue came to help vet your choice! We thought you really found a boyfriend!" Mother Lin shot her daughter a reproachful look, but the joy in her eyes was impossible to hide.

Her son was back.

For the Lin family, this was the best news possible.

Nothing else mattered anymore.

The family was finally reunited.

Mother Su also chimed in cheerfully to smooth things over: "This is a wonderful surprise, truly wonderful! Xiao Yu is back!"

Mother Lin slapped her thigh, her entire being filled with energy. "Everyone sit, make yourselves at home! Xiao Yu, you sit too! I'm heading to the kitchen right now!"

Mother Su was a sensible person. She knew the Lin family must have a lot to talk about at this moment, and it wasn't appropriate for her to stay.

"Dear sister, we won't disturb your family reunion, we should get going first..."

"Hey, don't go!" Mother Lin grabbed her arm. "What's the relationship between you and me? How are you an outsider! You must stay for dinner today! Qingxue and... Xiao Chen, right? Both of you stay too, perfect for Xiao Yu to get to know you!"

Mother Lin's enthusiasm was impossible to refuse.

Mother Su thought about it; she and Mother Lin were indeed as close as sisters. Staying at a time like this could be considered sharing in their joy.

Su Qingxue was both Lin Yao's best friend and had grown up with Lin Yu, so it made sense for her to stay as well.

Thus, Chen Rui became the sole outsider.

He stood there, neither comfortable standing nor sitting, feeling utterly ill at ease.

This feeling further intensified the resentment and frustration in his heart.

Fortunately, the Lin and Su families were warm enough.

Father Lin invited Chen Rui to sit and proactively started a conversation: "Xiao Chen, what line of work are you in?"

"Uncle, I work as a consultant at a security company," Chen Rui replied politely, not forgetting to add, "Mainly providing security solutions for some major clients. The work is relatively relaxed."

"Good, stable work, stability is good!" Father Lin nodded repeatedly.

In the living room, the elders chatted.

Lin Yao, like a cheerful little bird, chirped incessantly around Lin Yu, telling him about the changes at home over the past few years.

Lin Yu listened quietly, occasionally nodding. His gaze swept over the familiar yet unfamiliar furnishings in the living room, finally settling on the awkward and uncomfortable Chen Rui.

This person... harbored hostility towards him.

Very obvious hostility.

The aroma of food soon wafted from the kitchen.

A large round table was laden with a sumptuous feast.

Mother Lin took off her apron, her face glowing as she urged everyone: "Dinner's ready! Don't stand on ceremony, start eating! Xiao Yu, eat more of this, the sweet and sour pork ribs you used to love most!"

The meal proceeded harmoniously.

At least on the surface.

The conversation at the table consistently revolved around Lin Yao's upcoming career awakening and Su Qingxue and Chen Rui's future marriage plans.

No one touched upon the most sensitive topic—Lin Yu's past five years, and his future.

Until the meal was halfway through.

Father Lin, having drunk two glasses of wine with flushed cheeks, looked at his silently eating son and ultimately couldn't hold back.

"Xiao Yu."

As soon as he spoke, the atmosphere at the table instantly froze.

Mother Lin immediately shot him a warning look.

But Father Lin ignored it.

He looked at Lin Yu and spoke in a consultative tone.

"Look, you're back now. A person can't just idle around forever. Let bygones be bygones. In the future, find a proper job, live a stable life, that's better than anything else."

As these words fell, everyone stopped using their chopsticks.

Su Qingxue lowered her head, pretending to pick up food.

A curve unconsciously lifted at the corner of Chen Rui's mouth.

Here it comes.

The family interrogation session.

He was quite interested to hear how this former genius would answer this question.

Lin Yao looked nervously at her brother.

Lin Yu put down his chopsticks, picked up a napkin, and wiped his mouth.

He didn't look at his father, but calmly scanned the room.

Finally, he spoke.

"Dad, regarding work, I have my own plans. You don't need to worry."

His reply was calm, neither agitated nor impatient.

But it was precisely this calmness that choked back all the prepared lectures Father Lin had in his throat.

"You... what plans do you have? Don't tell me you're going back to messing with those..."

"Old Lin!"

Mother Lin slammed her chopsticks on the table, her voice suddenly rising sharply.

"Are you determined to ruin the mood today?"

She pointed at the table full of dishes, then at Lin Yu.

"Our son has finally come home for once! The family is happily having a meal together! Why must you bring up those unpleasant things?!"

"No lecturing! No one is allowed to lecture during this meal today!"

Mother Lin was truly angry.

Father Lin was startled by her outburst. Seeing his wife's red-rimmed eyes, he ultimately swallowed his words, picked up his wine glass, and drained it in one gulp.

A minor storm was thus forcibly suppressed.

However, the atmosphere at the table could never return to its previous harmony.

Chen Rui took all of this in.

He sneered inwardly.

His own plans? What kind of plans could a good-for-nothing who's been detached from society for five years possibly have?

Nothing more than relying on his parents' doting to continue being a parasite.

He felt increasingly that coming here today was a mistake.

Sitting down to eat with a family like this simply lowered his own standards.

He glanced at Su Qingxue beside him.

Su Qingxue seemed to sense his thoughts. Under the table, she gently nudged him with her foot.

Chapter 32: A Small Punishment

The meal finally concluded in an atmosphere of delicate harmony with undercurrents swirling beneath the surface.

Mother Lin enthusiastically packed the leftovers, practically forcing them into Mother Su's hands while saying, "Sis, take these home, you can heat them up tomorrow, don't let them go to waste!"

"Look at you, always so polite!" Mother Su verbally declined, but her hands very honestly accepted the package.

The entire family grandly escorted their guests downstairs.

Inside the elevator, the atmosphere became peculiar again. Chen Rui stood in the corner, hands in his pockets, not saying a word. Su Qingxue, holding her mother's arm, chatted with Lin Yao, but her peripheral gaze kept unintentionally sweeping over Lin Yu and Chen Rui.

Reaching the underground parking garage, the dim yellow lights stretched everyone's shadows long and thin.

"Alright, no need to see us further, hurry back inside," Mother Su said to the Lin parents as she opened the car door.

"Drive safely!" Mother Lin was still waving.

Just as Lin Yu prepared to turn back with his parents and sister, a voice called out to him.

"Lin Yu... that's you, right? Wait a moment."

It was Chen Rui.

He walked over from beside the car, his face wearing an uncomfortable, self-satisfied gentle smile.

"Uncle, Auntie, Yao Yao, you can go up first." Chen Rui turned to the three Lin family members. "I'd like to have a few words alone with Xiao Yu. We're both young people, perhaps there are some areas where I can offer help."

The words sounded lofty and righteous.

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged glances, somewhat hesitant.

Lin Yao immediately became alert, stepping forward to position herself in front of Lin Yu.

"If my brother needs anything, we'll help him ourselves, no need to trouble you."

"Yao Yao!" Su Qingxue spoke up, gently pulling her friend back, her face wearing a perfectly measured smile. "Uncle, Auntie, don't worry. Chen Rui just wants to discuss matters within the professional circle with Xiao Yu, he means no harm. I'll be here keeping an eye on things."

Su Qingxue's words clearly carried different weight.

She was both Lin Yao's close friend, Lin Yu's contemporary, and Chen Rui's girlfriend.

With her saying this, Father and Mother Lin's slight doubts immediately dissipated.

"Well... alright then," Father Lin nodded. "Xiao Yu, have a proper chat with him."

Mother Lin also advised, "Don't be discourteous."

Lin Yu gave his parents and sister a reassuring nod.

"You go up first, I'll be right there."

Seeing that even Lin Yu said so, Lin Yao had no choice but to relent, though she still glanced back worriedly every few steps as her parents pulled her into the elevator.

For a moment, only Lin Yu, Chen Rui, and Su Qingxue remained in the parking garage.

Mother Su had already gotten into the car, leaning out to urge, "Qingxue, you two hurry up as well."

Su Qingxue had come with Chen Rui and wasn't in the same car as Mother Su.

But tonight, they were both heading back to the Su family first.

"Mom, you go ahead, I'll be right there." Su Qingxue said to her mother, then turned and walked towards Chen Rui and Lin Yu.

She was uneasy.

She knew Chen Rui very well. Arrogant and proud, obsessed with face. After today's meal, he was definitely seething inside.

Su Qingxue thought that at most, he would make a few snide remarks, or use his status as a level 30 seasoned professional to lecture Lin Yu, flaunting his superiority.

He probably wouldn't resort to physical violence.

After all, this was right below Lin Yu's home, and causing a scene wouldn't benefit anyone.

However, she had underestimated the foolishness a man is capable of when driven by jealousy.

She had only taken a few steps when she saw Chen Rui already extending his hand towards Lin Yu, a hypocritical smile plastered on his face.

"Lin Yu, let's consider this a proper introduction. I'm Chen Rui, Qingxue's boyfriend."

He emphasized the words "boyfriend" in his tone.

Lin Yu looked at him calmly and also extended his own hand.

Two hands clasped together.

In that very instant!

Su Qingxue saw the veins on the back of Chen Rui's hand, the one gripping Lin Yu's, bulge violently. A faint, almost imperceptible earthy yellow glow flashed from his palm!

Attribute glow!

He was using his professional's power!

Alarm bells screamed in Su Qingxue's mind.

Not good!

Chen Rui was a level 30 [Boulder Warrior], half-strength, half-constitution build. His strength attribute had long approached the fifty-point mark!

This handshake, seemingly a courtesy, was actually an attack brimming with power!

What did fifty points of strength mean?

Bending steel bars bare-handed was effortless!

He still couldn't hold back!

What was he trying to do? Cripple Lin Yu's hand?

Su Qingxue's face instantly turned pale. She lifted her skirt and sprinted over.

"Chen Rui! What are you doing!"

In Chen Rui's mind, there was only one thought at this moment.

A little lesson.

He certainly didn't intend to actually cripple Lin Yu, but making him lie in bed in pain for ten days to half a month, making him understand the gap between them, was completely acceptable.

He used his attributes, but only applied thirty percent of his strength.

In his view, dealing with a waste like Lin Yu who had been disconnected from society for five years, thirty percent strength was more than enough.

He had even anticipated the next second: Lin Yu would let out a pig-slaughtering scream and collapse to his knees in agony.

However...

One second passed.

Nothing happened.

The sound of cracking bones he expected never came. Not even a trace of pain appeared on Lin Yu's face.

Chen Rui was stunned.

What was going on?

He increased his strength a little.

Still no reaction.

He felt like what he was holding wasn't a human hand.

It was a piece of... granite frozen by ten-thousand-year profound ice!

No!

Even harder than that!

How was this possible!

Chen Rui's pride faced an unprecedented challenge at this moment.

He refused to believe it!

Just a waste! How could he possibly resist his strength!

It must be an illusion!

"Break for me!"

Chen Rui roared inwardly. He no longer held back. His professional core within his body spun wildly. All fifty points of strength, without reservation, poured entirely into his right hand!

He wanted to completely crush this hand that made him feel humiliated into powder!

Lin Yu still stood calmly.

The moment Chen Rui made his move, Lin Yu didn't even need a thought process.

[Hardening Technique].

Profession Skill activated, then amplified by the terrifying 1,048,576-fold multiplier of the [Joker Doubling Cycle].

In that instant, the physical defense attribute of his hand had surpassed the definition of any known substance on this planet.

Chen Rui's strength, in his view, was no different from the struggle of an ant.

Even somewhat laughable.

"CRACK—"

A crisp, grating sound of bone fracturing finally exploded in the dead silence of the parking garage!

But the source of the sound was completely opposite to what Chen Rui had anticipated!

"AHHH—!!!"

A heart-wrenching scream tore through the night air.

Chen Rui violently snatched back his own hand, staggering back two steps, his face filled with extreme pain and utter disbelief.

His once proud right hand was now twisted at a grotesque angle. Pale white bone fragments even pierced through the skin, exposed to the air.

Blood gushed out, streaming through his fingers.

Su Qingxue, who had just rushed to the scene, witnessed this utterly horrifying spectacle.

Her entire body froze on the spot.

Chen Rui...

Used all his strength to crush Lin Yu's hand...

And ended up crushing his own hand until it fractured?

Chapter 33: The Way to Death!

Lin Yu looked at the man before him whose face was twisted in agony.

He felt relieved—this wasn't some revenge plot or special action.

Just a little boy's jealous rivalry.

Nothing more.

Not worth paying attention to.

He released his grip, letting Chen Rui stumble backward while clutching his deformed right hand.

"Lin Yu!"

Su Qingxue's voice trembled with terror as she finally reached them. Seeing the gruesome state of Chen Rui's hand and then looking at Lin Yu who remained completely unharmed, her mind went completely blank.

She wanted to question him, but realized she had no grounds to do so.

Chen Rui had thrown the first punch.

Chen Rui had used his professional combatant's strength.

Yet, it was Chen Rui who ended up with a broken hand.

How... how was this possible?

Lin Yu paid no attention to either of them. He turned and prepared to go upstairs.

As far as he was concerned, this farce was over.

However, the extreme humiliation and excruciating pain had completely ignited the flames of jealousy burning in Chen Rui's heart.

Trash!

A worthless piece of trash!

A failure who had wasted five years, been abandoned by his family, and lived off loans!

How dare he! How could he!

"I'll kill you!!!"

Chen Rui let out a beast-like roar.

Ignoring the heart-piercing pain from his right hand, he clenched his left fist violently, his body sinking slightly. The concrete beneath his feet even developed fine cracks from the concentration of his power.

The full strength of a level 30 Boulder Warrior erupted without reservation at this moment!

A yellowish-brown glow completely enveloped his left arm—the physical manifestation of his strength attribute pushed to its absolute limit!

"Chen Rui, don't!"

Su Qingxue screamed in despair.

She tried to pull him back, but Chen Rui was too fast!

A fist carrying all his dignity and rage, like a fired cannonball, shot straight toward Lin Yu's back!

This punch was powerful enough to blast a massive hole through a reinforced concrete wall!

He wanted this trash dead!

Lin Yu's footsteps halted.

But he didn't turn around.

Thump!

A dull, thunderous impact echoed.

Chen Rui's fist connected solidly with Lin Yu's back.

But the expected scene of flesh and blood flying everywhere didn't materialize.

Lin Yu's body didn't budge an inch.

It was as if what had been struck wasn't a human back, but a mountain that had stood firm since ancient times.

The madness on Chen Rui's face froze solid.

He felt as if his fist had slammed against an immovable divine metal.

Then, a force a hundred times more violent than what he had unleashed surged back through his fist in a frenzied counter-current!

"CRACK!!"

Another loud sound, but this time it was the sound of bones shattering.

Chen Rui's left arm, from fist to elbow, exploded into a cloud of blood mist in an instant!

But it didn't end there!

The terrifying recoil force continued unabated, surging into his body.

"CRUNCH! CRUNCH!"

His already fractured right hand was completely pulverized under the impact of this force.

"AAAAAAHHHH—!!!"

A piercing, agonized scream finally erupted.

Chen Rui flew backward like a kite with its string cut, soaring over ten meters before crashing heavily against a load-bearing column, then sliding to the ground like a pile of mud.

Both his arms had completely vanished, leaving only two bloody, mangled wounds gushing blood like fountains.

Su Qingxue stood frozen in place, watching Chen Rui lying in a pool of blood, unsure if he was dead or alive, then looking at that unharmed back that still faced her. Her blood felt like it had frozen solid throughout her body.

Dead?

Or crippled?

She didn't know.

All she knew was that her proud, level 30 elite professional boyfriend had used his full strength to attack a "worthless trash"...

And ended up crippling himself from the recoil.

This was a horror story beyond her comprehension.

At this moment, Lin Yu finally turned around slowly.

The calmness on his face had vanished, replaced by a faint but bone-chilling anger.

"If not for the fact that Qingxue grew up with me since childhood, your actions just now would have warranted a death sentence."

Warranted a death sentence!

He wasn't joking.

He had genuinely intended to kill!

Su Qingxue trembled violently, a fear originating from the depths of her soul making her almost kneel on the spot.

She looked at Lin Yu, this familiar yet strange man, and for the first time felt that she had never truly known him.

Lin Yu didn't look at Chen Rui on the ground again.

Such an ant wasn't worth his time.

But he needed to send a warning.

A warning that would make all the petty troublemakers shut their mouths.

He raised his right hand, palm facing upward.

Doubling Card!

He didn't use that terrifying million-fold amplification.

Such a small fry wasn't worth that much.

In an instant, the effects of fourteen Doubling Cards stacked within his mental sea.

Sixteen thousand three hundred eighty-four times amplification!

A gray card materialized in his palm.

Lightning Spell!

Effect: Summons a weak lightning bolt, with power roughly equivalent to static electricity from taking off a sweater in winter.

But under this sixteen thousand three hundred eighty-four-fold amplification, this worthless card would display divine punishment-like power!

"Bzzz—"

No earth-shattering roar, only a vibration that seemed to come from the depths of space.

The next second.

All the lights in the entire underground parking lot extinguished simultaneously!

Replaced by endless, blinding white light!

Thick electric serpents spread out wildly in all directions from Lin Yu's palm as the center!

"ZZZT! ZZZT!"

The surveillance cameras installed in every corner burst into sparks the instant the electricity touched them, completely destroyed!

"BEEP! BEEP! BEEP—!!"

All the parked vehicles had their alarms triggered simultaneously, emitting piercing shrieks!

But it lasted only half a second.

"POP! POP! POP!"

As the electric light swept through, all the alarm sounds cut off abruptly. The vehicles' electronic systems were instantly destroyed, falling into complete silence.

The entire parking lot had transformed into an ocean of lightning!

Su Qingxue was scared out of her wits by this apocalyptic scene. She screamed, crouched down, covered her head with both hands, her body trembling violently.

At the center of this lightning ocean, a main thunderbolt trunk thicker than a load-bearing column took shape!

It didn't strike anyone.

Instead, carrying an aura that could destroy everything, it slammed violently against the distant wall of the parking lot!

BOOM!!!

A roar loud enough to collapse buildings!

The entire building shook violently!

Dust filled the air, debris flew everywhere!

When the electric light faded and darkness once again enveloped the parking lot, only Lin Yu's figure remained standing in place.

And on the distant wall, there was a terrifying hole over three meters in diameter, bottomless, with electric arcs still flickering around its edges!

Cold wind poured in through the hole, stirring Lin Yu's clothes.

Su Qingxue slowly raised her head, looking through the billowing dust at that hole, then at Lin Yu who remained completely unharmed.

She was dumbfounded.

Completely and utterly stunned.

What was happening?

What in the world was going on?

Hadn't Lin Yu wasted five years?

Wasn't he that worthless trash obsessed with creating garbage cards, wallowing in self-degradation?

Who... who was this monster who could blast through a parking lot wall with a single strike?

Chapter 34: Brother, what are you doing!

Lin Yu didn't look back.

He simply left behind a statement, as calm as stating an objective fact.

"Finding a doctor now would still be timely."

As his words fell, he stepped forward toward the elevator, completely leaving behind the shock, bloodshed, and ruins behind him.

These words felt like a bucket of ice water being poured directly over Su Qingxue's head.

She jolted, breaking free from the apocalyptic scene and the trembling of her soul.

Doctor!

Right, a doctor!

She scrambled and crawled toward the pile of mush lying beneath the load-bearing column.

Chen Rui...

He was still breathing, but had completely lost consciousness. Where his two arms should have been, there were only two bloody, mangled holes, with blood still continuously gushing out, forming a small pool on the ground.

Su Qingxue's stomach churned violently, and she fought back the urge to vomit as she pulled out her phone with trembling hands, only to find the screen completely black - destroyed by the terrifying electrical discharge moments before.

Her car!

Su Qingxue frantically rushed toward Chen Rui's expensive sports car. Fortunately, it could still start. She exerted tremendous effort to drag the unconscious Chen Rui into the passenger seat.

The car roared to life, tires screeching sharply against the ground as it rapidly sped out of this hellish parking lot.

Cold wind poured in through the broken window, stinging Su Qingxue's cheeks painfully.

Her mind was a complete mess.

Lin Yu...

What was going on?

What in the world was happening?

Was that man really Lin Yu?

Was he really that Lin Yu she had known since childhood, who later willingly degraded himself, whom she despised, looked down upon, and even felt that speaking a single word to him was a waste of time?

Impossible!

Last time, not long ago, she had gone with Lin Yao to find him in that shabby shipping container.

What had he been like back then?

Sallow and emaciated, looking half-dead and destitute, his entire body emanating a decaying aura of being disconnected from society.

And today?

Today he wore a proper suit, his complexion was somewhat better, but his frail physique clearly hadn't changed at all!

Yet it was this exact frail body...

Uncontrollably, scenes from moments ago replayed in Su Qingxue's mind.

Chen Rui, a level 30 Boulder Warrior, an elite professional! Using all his strength to shake his hand, only to have his own hand crushed!

A furious punch, powerful enough to smash through walls, striking his back - he didn't budge at all, while Chen Rui's own arm exploded into bloody mist from the recoil force!

And then that final... that divine punishment-like lightning!

That wasn't power an ordinary person, or even an ordinary professional, could possess!

That was a natural disaster!

Su Qingxue's hands gripping the steering wheel trembled violently.

These five years...

What exactly had Lin Yu been doing during these five years of disappearance?

Was he really... playing some grand scheme?

This absurd notion, which she had once scoffed at, now transformed into the most terrifying brand, deeply engraved into her mind.

She felt like she had glimpsed an incomprehensible, horrifying secret.

Lin Yu paid no attention to the outcome of those two insignificant ants behind him.

He entered the elevator, returned to his doorstep, and opened the door.

"Brother! You're back!"

A petite figure immediately pounced over, like a happy young swallow, directly clinging to his arm.

It was Lin Yao.

She had changed into a cute rabbit pajama set and was waiting for him at the doorway with a cheerful smile.

A hint of helplessness appeared on Lin Yu's face.

He would bet that if he hadn't run away from home these five years, at Lin Yao's current age, she would definitely be more annoyed by him than fond of him. She wouldn't be clinging to him like an affectionate little tail like this.

"Impossible! I love my brother the most!"

Lin Yao held onto Lin Yu's arm, pulling him to sit on the living room sofa, chattering nonstop.

Father Lin and Mother Lin completely relaxed when they saw their son return home, and the earlier unpleasantness at the dinner table had already vanished without a trace.

This was how a family should be.

Lin Yu sat quietly, listening to his younger sister talk about interesting things from school, his gaze sweeping across the familiar yet somewhat unfamiliar decorations in the living room.

Home.

This feeling wasn't bad at all.

Lin Yao talked until her mouth felt dry, took a big gulp of water from her cup, then naturally leaned against him again, resting her small head on Lin Yu's shoulder while still holding his arm, playing with the cufflinks on his suit.

"Brother, this outfit looks really good on you, a hundred times better than what you used to wear!"

"Is that so."

"Of course!"

Lin Yao's fingers moved upward from the cuff, unconsciously gently tracing along his arm.

Suddenly, her movements stopped.

Her fingertips detected a strange texture.

Through the layer of shirt fabric, she felt some subtle, densely packed bumps.

Something wasn't right.

Lin Yao's brows lightly furrowed.

Yesterday in the shipping container, she had also held her brother's arm, but the situation had been chaotic then, her emotions turbulent, and she hadn't paid attention at all.

With a hint of curiosity, she carefully, cautiously pushed Lin Yu's suit sleeve up a little, then the shirt sleeve underneath.

When that small section of arm was exposed under the bright living room lights.

The smile on Lin Yao's face instantly froze solid.

That section of arm that still looked frail was covered with densely packed, tiny needle marks!

Some had already turned into light brown spots, clearly old marks.

But many more were fresh marks with slight redness and swelling!

These needle holes spread upward from his wrist, disappearing deep into his sleeve, with no end in sight!

She hadn't seen them yesterday!

Because the needle marks themselves weren't obvious, and the lighting had been dim at the time, she hadn't even thought to look for such things!

Today, under the bright lights, with just a little attention, this horrifying scene could no longer hide!

"Ah!"

Lin Yao instinctively cried out in surprise.

"What's wrong, Yao Yao? So jumpy!"

Mother Lin's voice came from the kitchen.

Father Lin also looked up from behind his newspaper.

Lin Yao's body stiffened, she immediately released her grip, quickly pulling Lin Yu's sleeve back down, forcing a smile toward her parents that looked worse than crying.

"Nothing... nothing! It's fine! A bug!"

She turned back, staring intently at Lin Yu, this brother who had once made her feel incredibly secure.

At this moment, she only felt a chill rising from the soles of her feet straight to the top of her head.

Lin Yao's heart felt like it was being tightly gripped by an invisible hand.

She looked at Lin Yu, her lips trembling, speaking in a voice only the two of them could hear, filled with sobs and panic.

"Brother..."

"What... what have you been doing?"

Lin Yao's fingertips felt as if they had been burned, abruptly pulling back.

The bright living room lights now felt unbearably glaring to her. Those tiny, old marks that had healed into light brown spots, and those fresh holes with recent redness and swelling, looked like ugly centipedes crawling from her brother's wrist deep into his sleeve.

How had she not noticed yesterday in that dim shipping container!

"Brother..."

Lin Yao's voice trembled, filled with a fear she hadn't even realized she felt.

How could her brother, who made her feel so secure, who seemed capable of anything, have these things on his arms?

Was it what she was thinking?

Selling blood for money?

Or something even more terrifying, the kind of thing that only appears in news reports, something that once you're contaminated with, ruins your entire life?

Chapter 35: Three Million

In an instant, countless terrifying thoughts flashed through Lin Yao's mind, each one sending a chill through her body.

She remembered her brother's shabby state in the shipping container, remembered Brother Wang the debt collector's viciousness, remembered the stack of brand-new bills she had found...

All the clues now pointed to the most desperate conclusion.

"You... what exactly are you doing?"

Lin Yao's lips had lost their color. She asked again in a voice so quiet that only the two of them could hear, choking with tears.

She stared fixedly at Lin Yu, hoping to see a flicker of panic on his face, a trace of embarrassment at being exposed.

But there was none.

Lin Yu only glanced calmly at the marks on his arm, then slowly pulled his sleeve down to cover that disturbing patch of skin.

He thought for a moment.

That question had to be answered.

But the answer could not be the truth.

"This is proof of getting stronger."

He did not lie; he just chose an explanation she could not understand.

"Getting stronger?"

Lin Yao nearly broke down. She could not accept that answer.

"What kind of 'getting stronger' needs this?! Brother, don't lie to me! Are you... are you short on money? If you're short, tell me, tell Mom and Dad! We're a family! Why would you go... do something like this!"

Her voice rose uncontrollably; tears welled up at the edges of her eyes.

"What are you yelling about? Yao Yao, what are you shouting?"

Mother Lin came out of the kitchen carrying a plate of cut fruit, and Father Lin put down his newspaper and looked over.

Lin Yao froze; the rest of what she wanted to say got stuck in her throat.

She couldn't say it. She couldn't voice those terrible suspicions in front of their parents.

Lin Yu stood up and walked to his sister, gently patting her shoulder.

"I haven't done anything wrong."

His movement was light, but carried an unquestionable steadiness.

"Trust me."

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged a look and both saw something off in each other's reaction. They had lived more than half their lives—how could they not perceive the taut atmosphere between their two children?

Father Lin stood up and walked over to the siblings.

He didn't press about the earlier argument. Instead, he took a bank card out of his pocket.

It was an ordinary savings card.

He handed the card to Lin Yu.

"Xiao Yu, take this."

Lin Yu looked at the card but did not move.

Mother Lin stepped forward, wiped her hands, her eyes a little red.

"Your father's right, take it. The password is your birthday."

Lin Yao was stunned. She watched her parents' solemn actions, glanced at the card, and for a moment the previous terror went blank.

"Dad, Mom, this is..."

"There are three million in here."

Father Lin spoke, each word clear and heavy.

Three million!

Lin Yao's head buzzed.

Lin Yu's body trembled slightly as well.

"We've sold off everything we could, aside from this house—anything that won't affect our lives." Mother Lin's voice was soft, but it hit the two children like a hammer, "We looked into it. The loans you've taken these years, plus all the messy interest, this amount should be enough to pay them off."

"Pay off the debts." Father Lin looked at his son—the one he had once been proud of, who had later disappointed him countless times, but who was still his flesh and blood—"Don't keep roaming alone out there. We have a place for you to live."

"Yes, Xiao Yu." Mother Lin finally let tears fall, "Come back home. No matter what, family stays together. Whatever hurdles there are, we'll face them together."

The living room fell into dead silence.

Only Mother Lin's muffled sobbing remained.

Lin Yao was completely dazed.

She looked at their parents' faces—no longer young, even a little haggard—and at the bank card that seemed to carry the weight of the whole family.

So... Mom and Dad knew everything.

They knew how much debt her brother owed, knew how hard he had struggled these five years.

They spoke of disowning him, of harsh words, but behind the scenes they were preparing, in their own way, a final way out for their son.

Lin Yao couldn't hold back her tears any longer; they fell in big, hot drops.

Lin Yu kept his head down.

Three million.

This was his parents' lifetime savings.

They should have used this money to enjoy their retirement, to travel, to live the life they wanted.

And now, without hesitation, they handed it all to their "unfilial son."

All so he would "come home."

This money was unbearably heavy.

So heavy that even someone who had the ability to amplify millions and could easily create billions in wealth felt a suffocating pressure.

This was not just money.

This was all of his parents' remaining hope for their later years.

He could not refuse.

Under these circumstances, any refusal would be a trampling and an insult to that love.

Lin Yu slowly reached out.

His fingertips touched the cold card.

Then he took it and held it in his palm.

The card seemed to warm instantly under his body heat.

"Dad, Mom."

Lin Yu looked up. His face showed none of the guilt or overwhelming emotion his parents might have expected—only an unprecedented calm and solemnity.

"Thank you."

He did not say, "I will pay you back," nor did he say, "I don't need it."

He simply accepted it.

Because he understood clearly that from this moment on, what he carried was not only his own future, but the family's as well.

Seeing his son accept the card, Father Lin's tight expression softened a little; he patted Lin Yu heavily on the shoulder.

"Just come back."

Mother Lin, through tears, finally smiled and nodded repeatedly.

"Yes, come back, come back..."

Lin Yao watched this and wiped her eyes. The huge pressure on her chest—like a pinhole of dread—seemed temporarily pressed down by the mountain called "family."

No matter what her brother had done, as long as he was willing to return home, there was still hope.

Lin Yu put the card into the inner pocket of his suit, pressed close to his chest.

That heavy family meeting ended silently after Lin Yu accepted the bank card.

Father Lin and Mother Lin seemed to have set down their heaviest stone; exhausted, but with a rare sense of relief, they reminded them to rest early and returned to their rooms.

Only Lin Yu and Lin Yao remained in the living room.

Lin Yao's eyes were still red. She took Lin Yu's hand and silently returned to her room.

The pink walls, the study desk piled with revision materials, the cute rabbit desk lamp—everything was much the same as when Lin Yu left five years ago.

"Brother."

When the door shut, cutting off the light from the living room, the room was left with only the warm halo from the lamp.

Lin Yao's emotions surged again.

"You took Mom and Dad's money. When are you moving back to live here?"

Lin Yu sat on the chair at his sister's desk and looked at her.

"For now, I'm still staying out."

"Why!"

Lin Yao's voice instantly shot up; she couldn't understand, "The family debts are paid off! Why are you still living in that crappy shipping container! Didn't you say you were setting up a big plan? Is that plan finished now?"

"Not yet." Lin Yu's answer was calm and direct.

"Then what exactly are you doing!"

Chapter 36: Little Sister's Power Is Massive!

Lin Yao's fury was fully ignited. At the thought of the countless holes on her brother's arm, she felt as if her heart were being cut to pieces.

She stepped forward and grabbed Lin Yu's arm. The fears and suspicions that had been forcibly suppressed yesterday surged up again.

"Brother, tell me the truth. Did you... did you..."

She wanted to say the most terrifying word, but she couldn't force it out.

Lin Yu stared at his sister's face, which was written all over with panic and pain. He was silent for a few seconds.

He raised his right hand and solemnly held up three fingers.

"I, Lin Yu, swear to heaven. I absolutely have not done anything illegal or hurt myself. Everything I do is to become stronger."

His movements and his promise carried a solemnity beyond his years, instantly calming the nearly broken Lin Yao.

Lin Yao stared blankly at him. There wasn't a trace of mockery or half-heartedness on her brother's face.

She was half convinced, but that enormous panic was at least temporarily suppressed.

She let go and slumped onto her bed, burying her face in her knees.

Silence settled over the room.

After a long while, Lin Yao let out a muffled voice.

"Brother, I'm so bothered."

"Hmm."

"Three days left until the Awakening Ceremony."

Lin Yao lifted her head, her face full of confusion and helplessness. "For more than ten years I've studied like crazy, trying to be the best at everything. But... all that effort seems to count for less than that one random awakening three days from now."

"What if... I awaken into a terrible profession?"

"What if for the rest of my life I can only be ordinary? What would I do?"

"I don't want to be ordinary, brother. I don't want to be helpless like today when something happens, and only watch you and Mom and Dad..."

This feeling was all too familiar to Lin Yu.

Five years ago, he had the exact same anxiety.

This world was that cruel. Talent—or luck—at a certain point can easily negate all your previous efforts.

Lin Yu stood up and walked over to Lin Yao. Mimicking how he had when they were kids, he ruffled her hair.

"What are you worrying about?"

"My sister is so smart and so hardworking. Your awakened profession won't be bad."

"What if though!" Lin Yao swatted his hand away.

"There is no 'what if,'" Lin Yu said firmly. "You will definitely awaken a very powerful profession."

He joked around, trying to ease his sister's anxiety in the simplest way.

Lin Yao curled her lips, clearly unimpressed.

Lin Yu watched her; the lightness on his face slowly faded and he grew serious.

"Yao Yao, listen to me."

Lin Yao, drawn by his sudden shift in tone, lifted her head.

"Promise me one thing."

"What?"

"Three days from now, after your Awakening Ceremony, until I get back home..."

Lin Yu enunciated each word deliberately and clearly.

"Don't make any decisions."

"At all!"

Lin Yao froze.

"What do you mean? What do you mean 'don't make any decisions'?"

"I mean it literally." Lin Yu didn't explain further. "Whether it's about your profession, your future, or anything else, don't decide on your own. Wait for me."

"Brother, you're being cryptic again!" Lin Yao's displeasure returned. "Why do you never explain anything? What are you hiding from us?"

Lin Yu looked at her stubborn face—so much of it resembled his own.

The same obstinacy, the same seriousness, the same... unwillingness to accept mediocrity.

He sighed softly.

"I'm being cryptic because I hope you'll never face the kind of moment I did—where you have to make a choice."

"Yao Yao, you're too much like me."

Those words lodged all her complaints in Lin Yao's throat. She looked at her brother and suddenly felt wronged.

"I'm not like you! I'm way better at studying than you!"

She snorted, as if trying to prove her difference.

Lin Yu smiled.

"Yes, yes, you're great at studying. You're so much better than me~"

At that, Lin Yao's face finally brightened a little; she proudly puffed out her small chest.

"Of course! I'm the class president now!"

"Oh? Class president?" Lin Yu played along with a surprised expression. "Does that come with a lot of power?"

"Huge power!"

Lin Yao perked up instantly. She lowered her voice and leaned in conspiratorially toward Lin Yu.

"Don't tell Mom and Dad. Our homeroom teacher gave me his private stamp! Now I can approve leave slips for the whole class!"

Lin Yu was amused by her presenting it like a treasure.

"Haha, that's it? What's so powerful about that?"

"You don't understand!" Lin Yao retorted. "It's grassroots power decentralization! Not only can I approve for our class, I can help students from other classes fake leave slips too!"

She got more enthusiastic as she spoke, as if she truly were a master strategist.

"With this ability, I've already won over everyone in the entire senior year! Now, with one order I could even take down the homeroom teacher, sideline the dean, and pressure the principal!"

Lin Yu watched her ferocious little performance and laughed harder.

This girl—give her time—she would become something great!

Seeing Lin Yu not take her seriously, Lin Yao grew flustered.

"It's true! I'm not lying! A while ago I approved a leave for someone in the next class. The guy's big and burly, and now he calls me 'Sister Yao' like a good kid!"

Lin Yu followed up on her story.

"And then? Where did he go on leave to?"

"Who knows." Lin Yao stuck out her tongue; her expression turned a bit odd. "Later his parents came to the school and asked for a long leave for him... he still hasn't come back."

She mumbled softly.

"Isn't it weird? It's almost time for the Awakening Ceremony, such a crucial moment, yet the kid still hasn't come back. His parents don't seem worried either."

Lin Yu felt something stir inside. He asked casually,

"What's his name?"

"What was it..." Lin Yao tilted her head to think. "Oh, I remember now, it's something like... Zhao Tianyang?"

Small world.

No—since Lin Yao had truly won over the whole senior year, it wasn't strange that she knew someone from the next class.

Lin Yu frowned slightly and asked another question.

"He still hasn't come back these past few days?"

Lin Yao shook her head. "I don't know. We're not in the same class."

She suddenly realized and glared at Lin Yu in annoyance.

"No! Why are you caring about Zhao Tianyang? Care about your sister! Look at me! I'm the troubled one!"

"I'm not talking to you anymore!"

Watching her hair flare up, Lin Yu reached out and gently pressed his fingertip to her forehead.

"Do you still have that card I gave you?"

It was the only card Lin Yang had made himself: a white card called the Blessing Card.

Rumor had it it gives a random blessing...

Blessings were mysterious; people said they could help with Awakening.

Lin Yao solemnly took it out.

Lin Yu fumbled with it for a moment, then returned it.

He also returned a full 1,048,576 layers... of Blessing Card effects!

If this truly worked, Lin Yao could definitely awaken into a very formidable profession!

The moment the blessing transferred, Lin Yao seemed to go stunned for an instant.

Lin Yu immediately pressed his forehead to hers.

He now had a full five hundred points in the Spirit attribute and only needed to expend a tiny, negligible amount of power to easily soothe an ordinary person's emotions.

A cool, indescribable comfort flowed from the forehead and spread through her body.

Lin Yao calmed down in an instant.

The anxiety and inexplicable restlessness about the future vanished completely.

She blinked and looked at Lin Yu with a bit of dazedness.

"Get some rest early." Lin Yu withdrew his hand. "Don't overthink things."

Lin Yao obediently nodded and stopped fussing.

Chapter 37: I gave it to you too!

Lin Yu walked out of the room and gently closed the door behind him.

He stood still at the doorway, his mind stirring as he instantly locked onto Zhao Tianyang's approximate location through the invisible "Master-Servant Brand."

Taking a long leave... It seemed Zhao Tianyang's situation hadn't been resolved at all.

Perfect timing—he needed manpower anyway.

He hoped this Zhao Tianyang would be worth all the effort he'd put in.

Lin Yu pulled out his phone, opened the map, and compared the vague location he sensed in his mind with the map display.

This place is... the center of a lake?

Is Zhao Tianyang soaking in water?

No!

Lin Yu quickly switched to the black market map in his mind and compared again.

The point in his senses perfectly overlapped with a location on the black market map.

This place is... Old Ghost Hall?

...

Half an hour later, at the "Junkyard" black market.

Lin Yu changed into the cheapest 'Crow' disguise from a few days ago, pulling the hood low to cover most of his face as he blended back into this chaotic yet vibrant shadow world.

He walked straight through the noisy crowd and arrived at the entrance of Old Ghost Hall.

"Ding ling—"

The wind chime rang.

Lin Yu pushed the door open and was greeted by a strong mix of herbal medicine and disinfectant smells.

The shop was quiet.

Behind the counter, Old Ghost wearing his bird-beak mask was idly wiping a beaker.

In the corner of the shop, a figure was curled up there, wrapped in an ill-fitting coat, his body trembling uncontrollably.

It was Zhao Tianyang.

His complexion looked even more ashen than a few days ago, his lips chapped, and he exuded an aura of impending death.

Hearing the wind chime, Old Ghost looked up. When he recognized Lin Yu, he stopped wiping.

The figure curled in the corner also struggled to lift his head.

The moment Zhao Tianyang saw Lin Yu, an astonishing light burst forth from his dim eyes.

Struggling, he supported himself against the wall, trying to stand up.

"Mas... Master."

As soon as he spoke, violent coughing wracked his body as if he would cough his lungs out.

Watching this scene, Old Ghost's expression beneath the bird-beak mask was quite colorful.

He actually waited and got him?

This foolish kid used the dumbest method—waiting by the tree stump for the rabbit—and actually managed to wait for that rabbit!

This world is truly absurd.

Lin Yu ignored Old Ghost and walked up to Zhao Tianyang.

"I roughly understand your situation."

Zhao Tianyang gasped for breath, wanting to say something, but Lin Yu cut him off directly.

"Come with me."

No extra words, just the most direct command.

Without the slightest hesitation, Zhao Tianyang nodded and mustered all his strength to follow behind Lin Yu, preparing to leave.

Old Ghost watched Zhao Tianyang's faltering back that could collapse at any moment, shaking his head inwardly.

Beyond saving.

This kid is completely beyond saving.

The medicine toxins in his body have invaded his bone marrow and internal organs. Even if a great immortal descended, they couldn't do anything.

One [Life Serum]? That's just a drop in the bucket.

To completely clear the toxins from his body and pull him back from death's door, he'd need at least ten doses!

And that might not even be enough!

That's five million!

Who would spend five million to save someone who's already finished?

This deal is a total loss.

Lin Yu reached the door but stopped walking.

He turned around and looked back at Old Ghost behind the counter.

"Do you still have those three attribute medicines from before?"

Old Ghost was momentarily stunned, then quickly understood.

"Yes, of course I do."

He pulled out the three boxes from under the counter again.

[Brute Potion-Inferior].

[Windwalker's Breath-Inferior].

[Stoneheart-Inferior].

"What's up?" Old Ghost lined up the three boxes on the counter.

Lin Yu didn't answer his question, instead asking calmly.

"How much?"

"Same price as before, six hundred fifty thousand total."

Old Ghost's merchant instincts made him quote the price immediately.

But the moment the words left his mouth, he hesitated himself.

He looked at the fiercely loyal but soon-to-die Zhao Tianyang at the door, then at the mysterious, free-spending Lin Yu before him.

A crazy idea suddenly emerged in his mind.

Could he... take a gamble?

Investment!

This was an extremely high-risk investment, but the returns could be unimaginable!

Old Ghost's heart began to beat faster.

He'd spent half his lifetime in Medicine Man Alley relying on shrewdness and caution.

But today, facing these two madmen, these lunatics before him, he wanted to go crazy too, to see if his gamble would pay off.

"Ahem."

Old Ghost cleared his throat and did something that even surprised Lin Yu.

He pushed the three boxes toward Lin Yu.

"These three, I'm giving them to you."

"Giving?"

"Yes, giving." Old Ghost's mask faced him directly. "Consider it... making friends."

Lin Yu looked at him.

What is this old fox thinking?

However, Old Ghost's madness had only just begun.

Seeing Lin Yu's relatively unresponsive reaction, he gritted his teeth as if making an even bigger decision.

"The inferior products have poor effects and big side effects—they don't suit you."

As he spoke, Old Ghost turned and walked toward a triple-locked safe at the very back of the shop.

He used three different keys to open the safe door one by one.

From inside, he carefully brought out three boxes made of special metal that emitted a chilling cold.

"Thud, thud, thud."

The three boxes were heavily placed on the counter, making dull, weighty sounds.

Old Ghost took off his bird-beak mask, revealing a face slightly flushed with excitement.

Today, he was going to bet his entire fortune!

"[Brute Potion], [Windwalker's Breath], [Stoneheart]."

He opened the first box, revealing a deep red medicine inside. The liquid's luster was far purer than the inferior version, flowing as if it had life.

"Genuine products from a regular military-industrial enterprise! Original goods! No 'Inferior' suffix! Can stably increase 5 points of strength, and the pain level is only one-third of the inferior product!"

He opened the second one—pale cyan gas formed a miniature whirlwind inside the test tube.

"[Windwalker's Breath], original! Stably increases 5 points of agility!"

Finally, the third one—this was no longer a fleshy lump, but a yellow crystal as clear as amber, with a point of light pulsating at its core.

"[Stoneheart], original! Stably increases 5 points of constitution! Assimilation risk reduced from ten percent to one percent!"

Old Ghost's breathing was somewhat rapid as he pointed at these three medicines.

"These three samples cost me a fortune to obtain through special channels. Originally, I wanted to study them myself and crack their technical barriers."

"The market price for each of these three medicines on the black market is no less than eight hundred thousand! And they're practically unavailable at any price!"

Old Ghost stared at Lin Yu, speaking word by word.

"Today, if you need them..."

"I'm giving them to you too!"

Chapter 38: I don't know what else to do

Deathly silence filled the air.

Old Ghost removed his bird-beak mask, revealing a face flushed red with excitement and exhilaration. He stared fixedly at Lin Yu, his heart pounding wildly in his chest like a drum.

He had gambled everything.

He had practically bet his entire life savings on this unfathomable young man standing before him.

These three genuine medicine vials were his most prized possessions, his hope for turning his life around in his later years. Now, he had personally handed over that hope.

Lin Yu looked at the three vials on the counter emitting pure energy radiance, then glanced at Old Ghost before him who had fallen into a state of near-mania.

Interesting.

Truly fascinating.

From initial shrewd calculations, to subsequent testing and currying favor, and now this all-or-nothing gamble.

This Old Ghost had far more courage than he had imagined.

Lin Yu didn't stand on ceremony. He reached out and collected the three heavy metal boxes one by one into his storage ring.

His movements were crisp and efficient, without the slightest hesitation.

Seeing this, the muscles on Old Ghost's face twitched uncontrollably.

The exhilaration before giving away the items and the heartache after they were taken away—these two extreme emotions intertwined on his face, twisting his expression into something grotesque.

Lin Yu let out a hearty laugh.

"Old Ghost, you've chosen the right path!"

He turned around, preparing to leave with Zhao Tianyang.

Reaching the doorway, he paused, leaving behind one final sentence without looking back.

"Don't worry, your good fortune lies ahead!"

"Ding ling—"

The wind chime rang, then fell silent.

Only Old Ghost remained in the shop. He collapsed into his chair as if drained of all strength, breathing heavily in great gasps.

He looked at the empty counter, then at the doorway where Lin Yu had disappeared. The twisted expression on his face finally melted into a long sigh that was neither bitter nor amused.

...

Lin Yu walked through the chaotic alleyways of the black market.

Zhao Tianyang followed closely behind, wrapping the ill-fitting coat tighter around himself. With each step, his body swayed unsteadily, as if it might fall apart at any moment.

He didn't dare get too close, afraid of offending his master.

Nor did he dare stay too far, fearful that he might lose sight of his only hope if he wasn't careful.

Soon, the two returned to the entrance of "Honeycomb."

Lin Yu used his card to open the heavy alloy door of Bunker Three and stepped inside.

Zhao Tianyang followed behind. When the door slammed shut behind him with a thunderous boom, his body visibly trembled.

Cut off from the world.

This feeling reminded him of the days when he was locked at home, waiting for death.

"M-master."

Zhao Tianyang forced his body upright, attempting to bow. When he spoke, his voice was as hoarse as a broken bellows.

Lin Yu turned to look at him.

Master?

This form of address felt incredibly awkward.

It felt like they were acting in some third-rate historical drama.

"Don't call me that from now on." Lin Yu's response was matter-of-fact.

Zhao Tianyang froze, lowering his head in panic. "Then... then how should I address you?"

"Call me brother." Lin Yu said casually.

As soon as the words left his mouth, he himself frowned.

No.

The title "brother" belonged exclusively to Lin Yao.

"Forget it." Lin Yu changed his mind. "Call me boss from now on."

"Boss?" Zhao Tianyang was stunned again.

Compared to "master," this title carried less absolute domination and more of a modern transactional feel.

But he had no right to question anything.

"Yes, boss." He responded respectfully.

Lin Yu nodded, no longer paying him any mind, and pressed a communication button on the wall.

Soon, a processed electronic voice sounded in the room.

"Bunker Three, what do you need?"

It was exactly the same front desk woman who wore the metal mask earlier.

"Expand the space." Lin Yu stated his purpose directly.

"What level?"

"Maximum."

There was a two-second silence on the other end of the communication, as if confirming Lin Yu's authority and financial capability.

"Throne'-level spatial expansion, using military-grade spatial expansion arrays. Can expand standard bunker to three hundred thousand cubic meters, absolute physical isolation, independent circulation system. Cost: ten thousand per day, deposit required for first payment."

Ten thousand per day.

That meant three hundred thousand per month.

This price was enough to rent a top-tier luxury mansion in the city center.

Zhao Tianyang listened nearby, his heart pounding with terror.

He had never seen so much money in his entire life.

And this new boss was willing to pay such an exorbitant price just to expand a temporary room?

"Acceptable."

Lin Yu's response held no hesitation.

He pressed his black card against a sensor area on the wall.

"Beep. Payment successful. Balance: eight hundred ten thousand."

Twenty thousand vanished instantly.

"Spatial expansion array activating. Estimated duration: ten seconds. Please do not move."

The electronic voice fell silent.

"Hum—"

The entire bunker emitted a deep, resonant hum.

Zhao Tianyang watched in horror as the metal wall before him retreated into the distance at an impossible speed that defied physics!

The ceiling rose higher, the floor extended further.

The originally cramped thirty-square-meter room transformed within mere seconds into an enormous cavern so vast he couldn't see its boundaries.

Its scale was equivalent to several football fields!

Ten seconds later, the humming ceased.

The world returned to absolute silence.

Leaving only emptiness.

Boundless, endless emptiness.

Zhao Tianyang stood in this massive space, feeling as insignificant as a speck of dust.

He looked at Lin Yu standing not far away. That figure wearing the cheap cloak appeared immensely large and profoundly mysterious in this moment.

Was this... the world of the powerful?

Casually altering space, treating money as worthless dirt.

In Zhao Tianyang's heart, beyond the relief of having survived catastrophe, there was more of an indescribable discomfort and self-abasement.

He clenched his fists, his nails digging deeply into his palms.

He knew that between him and his boss lay an unbridgeable chasm.

He shuffled his heavy feet over to stand behind Lin Yu, lowering his head.

"Boss..."

His voice carried an unmistakable tremor.

"I... I don't know what I can do for you."

"I haven't awakened yet, but because of my reckless use of medicine, I can no longer participate in the Awakening Ceremony. My body is... is ruined too."

He spoke with great difficulty, each word tearing open his bloody wounds anew.

"I only have this last month of life left..."

He raised his head, his gray, defeated eyes igniting with a desperate flame.

"But I promise you! In this final month, no matter what you ask me to do, even if it means dying, I won't even blink!"

"I will definitely repay this debt of gratitude!"

His words were resolute, filled with the determination to stake everything.

Yet, this determination appeared pathetically feeble when faced with this despairingly empty space.

What could he possibly do?

Clean up?

There wasn't even a single speck of dust here.

Chapter 39: Two hundred, one hundred million!

Lin Yu looked at him, at this young man desperately clutching at his final lifeline in utter despair.

His vow was heavy, sincere.

But to Lin Yu, it meant absolutely nothing.

He didn't need someone who would die for him; he needed a living person who could handle tasks for him, who could create value for him.

"You won't die."

Lin Yu spoke calmly, his voice echoing in the oppressively empty space.

Zhao Tianyang abruptly lifted his head.

"But," Lin Yu's next words extinguished half of the hope that had just ignited within him, "it will be very painful."

"Thank Old Ghost." Lin Yu added, "The genuine medicines he gave will make this pain somewhat more bearable."

Zhao Tianyang was stunned, completely failing to understand.

What did that mean?

Lin Yu offered no explanation.

He took out a card from his Storage Ring and activated it.

A syringe emitting a soft golden glow appeared in his hand.

[Life Serum-Standard Edition].

"Take it." Lin Yu passed the syringe over.

Zhao Tianyang took it with trembling hands.

"Inject."

Lin Yu uttered only that single word.

Zhao Tianyang didn't dare hesitate in the slightest. He pulled up his sleeve, revealing an arm mottled blue and purple from abusing inferior medicines, covered in needle marks.

Gritting his teeth, he forcefully plunged the needle in.

The golden liquid was slowly pushed into his bloodstream.

A warm sensation instantly spread through him, nourishing his nearly withered body. His organs, which had already begun to fail, seemed infused with a spark of vitality. The excruciating pain that tormented him constantly lessened by just a tiny fraction.

Just a tiny fraction.

When the medicine was fully injected, the warm flow quickly dissipated.

His physical condition had improved slightly, but the distance to full recovery was still worlds apart.

Zhao Tianyang was dumbfounded.

That was... it?

The medicines he used before were counterfeit, toxic concoctions brewed by unscrupulous workshops. The damage to his body was devastating and deeply entrenched.

One standard [Life Serum] was a miracle cure for ordinary people, but for his severely deteriorated condition, it was merely a drop in the bucket.

Another five hundred thousand!

Just... gone? In exchange for such a minuscule sensation?

Zhao Tianyang's face instantly turned even more ashen than before.

So... that previous five hundred thousand of his couldn't actually save his life at all!

Watching his reaction, Lin Yu showed no surprise.

With a flip of his hand, another [Life Serum] card appeared, which he activated.

An identical golden syringe.

"Inject."

Still that one word.

Zhao Tianyang jerked his head up. Staring at the second dose of medicine in Lin Yu's hand, his mind went completely blank.

Another one?

This is five hundred thousand!

"Boss..." His lips trembled, unable to form words.

"Inject."

Lin Yu's command held no emotion, yet carried an undeniable authority.

Zhao Tianyang gritted his teeth, took the second dose, and once again jabbed it into his own arm.

The same warm flow, the same effect.

His body improved a bit more, but it still wasn't enough.

Far from enough!

Lin Yu, expressionless, took out another one.

"Inject."

The third dose.

Zhao Tianyang's breathing grew rapid. He mechanically accepted it and injected.

The fourth dose.

"Inject."

The fifth dose!

"Inject!"

...

The tenth dose!

When the effects of the tenth [Life Serum] spread through his body, Zhao Tianyang's condition finally showed significant improvement. A hint of color returned to his face, and his breathing steadied considerably.

But his entire body was trembling violently, not from the medicine's effects, but from sheer terror.

Ten doses!

A full ten doses of [Life Serum]!

At Old Ghost Hall's price of five hundred thousand per dose, ten doses meant... five million!

Five million!

This figure crashed down on his heart like a massive mountain, nearly suffocating him.

He had never seen so much money in his entire life!

And now, these five million had just been injected into his body!

How could he ever repay this debt?

With his life?

Was his life even worth five million?

"Boss..." Zhao Tianyang's voice was choked with tears, "It's enough, really enough! I..."

Before he could finish, the scene before him completely stunned him.

Lin Yu waved his hand.

Clatter—

A large pile of medicines shimmering with golden light was casually dumped onto the ground.

[Life Serum-Standard Edition]!

One dose, ten doses, fifty doses, one hundred doses!

Over a hundred doses of [Life Serum] piled up into a small hill, their brilliant golden glow almost dyeing the entire area gold.

Zhao Tianyang's mind buzzed, going completely blank.

He was utterly dumbfounded.

What was this?

An illusion?

What was he seeing?

A mountain of [Life Serum]?

Each dose represented five hundred thousand!

How much money was here... here?

Ten million?

Fifty million?

He didn't dare think; his brain had completely shut down, incapable of any thought.

The next second, he acted on pure instinct.

"Thud!"

Zhao Tianyang's knees gave way, and he heavily knelt on the ground, desperately kowtowing to Lin Yu, to that pile of cards.

"Boss! No! Don't use any more!"

"I'm not worthy! I'm truly not worthy!"

"I'm begging you! Take them back! My worthless life isn't worth this much money! Really isn't!"

Tears and mucus streamed down his face as his spirit completely shattered.

This was no longer gratitude; it was a terrifying burden heavy enough to crush his very soul.

He'd rather die from his illness than accept even one more dose of medicine.

Looking at Zhao Tianyang kneeling on the ground, completely losing his composure, Lin Yu's face remained impassive.

He knows gratitude, and even thinks about saving his boss money. Sigh, truly a top-tier workhorse.

He bent down, casually picked up one dose from the pile.

Walked over to Zhao Tianyang, and shoved the syringe into his hand.

"Inject."

This time, Zhao Tianyang clutched the syringe tightly, shaking his head desperately.

"No! Boss! I won't inject it! I can't take any more!"

"Please, just kill me! I can't repay this! I'll never be able to repay this in my lifetime!"

Lin Yu didn't speak again.

He simply reached out, grabbed Zhao Tianyang's arm.

Then, he took that syringe, aimed it at a needle mark, and without the slightest hesitation, plunged it in, pushing all the medicine inside.

The eleventh dose.

After doing this, he picked up another one and shoved it into Zhao Tianyang's hand again.

The action repeated, precise, and cold.

Zhao Tianyang despaired.

He looked at Lin Yu, at this "boss" he couldn't comprehend at all.

Resistance was meaningless.

Refusal was meaningless.

This was... the boss's command!

He gave up thinking.

He became an emotionless machine.

Pick up, inject.

Pick up again, inject again.

Twenty doses...

Fifty doses...

One hundred doses...

His movements grew increasingly numb; his body's sensation of the needle's sting had completely vanished.

The golden warm flow washed over his body again and again, gradually cleansing, repairing, and reshaping the toxins deeply entrenched in his marrow.

His skin turned from blue-purple to rosy, his chapped lips regained their color, his ashen hair regained its luster.

When the two hundredth dose of [Life Serum] was pushed into his bloodstream, an unprecedented surge of immense vitality finally erupted completely within him!

Boom!

Zhao Tianyang felt like a balloon being fully reinflated; every cell was cheering, rejoicing.

He stood up, moving his limbs.

Strength!

An unprecedented sense of power!

He was healed.

No, better than healed!

He felt even healthier, even stronger than before he had started abusing medicines!

Yet he couldn't feel any joy.

His face showed no delight of having survived a disaster, only a deathly stillness and numbness.

His mind was occupied by just one number spinning wildly, like an endless curse.

Two hundred doses.

One hundred million!

Chapter 40: Pharmacy Plan

Lin Yu examined Zhao Tianyang standing before him.

Not bad.

After being baptized by two hundred doses of [Life Serum], he had undergone a complete transformation. His originally depleted physical foundation from abusing medicines had not only been fully restored but had even been somewhat strengthened under the nourishment of vast life force.

His physique was robust, his blood and energy abundant.

It was clear he had genuine talent, a promising seedling.

Lin Yu mentally sensed the invisible "Master-Servant Brand" again.

Very sturdy.

Zhao Tianyang's current loyalty, mixed with relief after surviving disaster, fear of the unknown, and despair over the enormous one billion debt, had formed an extremely stable emotional shackle that locked him firmly in place.

Excellent.

A qualified tool had been initially forged.

Next was upgrading the tool.

Lin Yu stopped holding back.

He took out the three heavy metal boxes given by Old Ghost from his Storage Ring.

"Thud, thud, thud."

The three boxes were placed on the ground one by one.

"Boss?" Zhao Tianyang looked at these three obviously extraordinary boxes, confused.

Lin Yu ignored him, crouched down, and opened the first box.

A deep red medicine lay quietly inside, the liquid's luster pure and rich.

[Giant Strength Compound-Original].

Lin Yu reached out and activated his skill.

[Card Manifestation]!

This time, he encountered almost no resistance.

Supported by his high five hundred points of Mental Energy, transforming items of this level had become effortless.

A card shimmering with red light appeared in his hand.

He followed the same process, successively transforming [Windrunner's Breath] and [Heart of Stone] into cards.

Three cards representing top-tier attribute medicines for strength, agility, and constitution lay quietly in his palm.

Based on previous experience using [Lucid Potion], to forcibly raise one basic attribute from zero to the five hundred point cap would require at least two thousand doses.

Considering subsequent drug resistance, this number might only increase, not decrease.

So two thousand of each it would be.

Lin Yu focused his thoughts.

[Joker]!

[Doubling Card]!

His current five hundred points of Mental Energy were enough to support maintaining twenty-two [Doubling Cards] simultaneously.

But he didn't need such an exaggerated multiplier.

Eleven [Doubling Cards], two to the eleventh power, exactly two thousand forty-eight.

Sufficient.

Hum—

The space within the Storage Ring began another round of exponential, frenzied proliferation.

The three original medicines, Old Ghost's private [Lucid Potion], and the auxiliary consumable [Life Serum] began rapidly doubling in quantity.

In just a few breaths.

The cycle stopped.

Lin Yu waved his hand.

Whoosh—

The empty bunker was drenched in a rainstorm composed of medicines!

Four small hills and one large mountain appeared out of thin air.

One pile burned with deep red light, representing pure strength.

[Giant Strength Compound-Original] x2048.

One pile swirled with pale cyan air currents, symbolizing ultimate speed.

[Windrunner's Breath-Original] x2048.

One pile emitted a thick, earthy yellow halo, meaning indestructible physique.

[Heart of Stone-Original] x2048.

One pile glowed with a blue, pond-like shimmer—mental power!

[Lucid Potion] x2048.

And the final pile, also the tallest one, golden light almost illuminating the entire bunker's dome.

[Life Serum-Standard Edition] x8192.

Zhao Tianyang stood in place, completely petrified.

His body trembled uncontrollably and violently, his teeth chattering, making "click-clack" sounds.

He looked at the four mountains before him piled with wealth and power, his brain completely ceasing to function.

He remembered Old Ghost's words.

"These three medicines, each has a black market price no lower than eight hundred thousand! And they're practically unavailable at any price!"

Eight hundred thousand... per dose.

Here... how many doses were here?

Two thousand forty-eight doses.

Zhao Tianyang's lips quivered as he used his already malfunctioning brain to attempt math he never dared imagine in his lifetime.

Eight hundred thousand... multiplied by two thousand forty-eight...

One hundred sixty million?

No...

One point six billion?

He couldn't calculate anymore.

This number had exceeded his comprehension.

And this was just one pile.

There were three piles here!

That would be... nearly five billion?

And that golden pile! That was [Life Serum]! The previous two hundred doses were worth one billion!

Here... here were over eight thousand doses!

Four billion?

Added together... that would be... would be...

"Thump!"

Zhao Tianyang's legs gave way, and he knelt down once again.

He didn't kowtow, nor did he beg for mercy.

He cried.

Not from fear, nor from excitement.

He just looked at the four small mountains formed by card piles, and tears uncontrollably streamed down his face.

He had... cried from doing math.

He remembered his life over these past eighteen years.

Born into an ordinary family, to change his fate, to give his parents a better life, he studied and trained desperately.

He thought that if he worked hard enough, he could stand out from the crowd.

Until he encountered those inferior medicines, he discovered that hard work was worthless compared to real shortcuts.

He took a shortcut, then fell into an abyss.

He thought his life was over.

But now, what did he see?

Nearly ten billion in wealth, piled on the ground like garbage.

His outlook on life, values, and worldview were completely shattered at this moment, then reassembled in an extremely distorted way.

So, money really was just a number.

So, power could truly be created from nothing.

So, the gap between people could be greater than the gap between humans and deities.

Lin Yu paid no attention to this mentally dazed subordinate.

He walked to the wall and pressed the communication button.

"Bunker Three, what do you need?"

It was the same cold electronic voice.

"Open another room."

"What level?"

"Same level."

"'Throne'-level spatial expansion, already exists. Opening same-level auxiliary space beside it, cost ten thousand per day, one month deposit required."

"Acceptable."

Lin Yu pressed his Black Card against it.

"Beep. Payment successful, balance seven hundred ninety thousand."

Another twenty thousand had vanished.

"Rumble—"

The metal wall beside them slowly opened another equally thick alloy door. Behind it was another identical, despairingly vast empty space.

Lin Yu pointed at the five medicine piles on the ground.

"Your task."

His voice echoed through the empty bunker, clearly reaching Zhao Tianyang's ears.

"Use all of these."

"Until all four basic attributes reach five hundred points."

After speaking, Lin Yu didn't look at him again, turning and walking toward the newly opened door.

He also needed to begin his own enhancement.

But as the boss, he had to maintain the most basic sense of mystery and pressure.

Sitting side by side with a subordinate, getting injections?

Completely improper.

"Rumble—"

The thick alloy door slowly closed behind him.

The enormous space was left with only Zhao Tianyang alone, and the four medicine mountains worth nearly ten billion before him.

Chapter 41: Double 500!

Lin Yu stepped into the newly opened "Throne" space.

The heavy alloy door closed behind him, completely isolating everything from the adjacent room.

He sat down cross-legged and took out all three authentic medicine cards given by Old Ghost, along with the massive inventory he had replicated, from his Storage Ring.

[Giant Strength Compound-Original].

[Windrunner's Breath-Original].

[Heart of Stone-Original].

And as auxiliary consumables, [Life Serum].

He already had experience.

The enhancement process of the [Lucid Potion] had allowed him to understand the pattern of these attribute medicines.

The first hundred points had the best effect.

From one hundred to three hundred points, the effect diminished.

After three hundred points, the effect would further decrease significantly.

And he possessed nearly unlimited medicine.

This diminishing effect was meaningless to him.

All he needed to do was repeat.

Lin Yu picked up one [Giant Strength Compound], activated it, and injected it.

A surge of scorching energy instantly flooded into his muscle fibers; every cell began to expand, tear, and then reorganize under the stimulation of this power.

Immediately after, he picked up one [Life Serum] and injected it.

Gentle life force soothed the tearing pain and reinforced the newly formed muscle tissue.

[Strength: 9]

Again.

Second [Giant Strength Compound], second [Life Serum].

[Strength: 19]

...

Tenth one.

[Strength: 59]

His Mental Energy was as high as five hundred points, giving him far greater control over his body than Zhao Tianyang had before.

Moreover, his absorption efficiency of the medicine far exceeded that of ordinary people.

And he didn't need to use two hundred [Life Serum] like Zhao Tianyang did to first clear toxins and hidden injuries from his body.

His body, during the previous enhancement process of five hundred points of Mental Energy, had been repeatedly purified and was like a clean sheet of paper.

This saved him a great deal of time.

When the fortieth [Giant Strength Compound] was injected, his strength attribute steadily stopped at 109 points.

The medicine effect began to halve.

Lin Yu continued injecting without any change in expression.

He was like a precise program, constantly repeating the cycle of taking, activating, injecting, and taking again.

Strength, Agility, Constitution.

The three attributes were enhanced alternately by him.

He didn't calculate how much time had passed.

In this isolated Bunker, time lost its meaning.

Only the constantly jumping numbers on the panel proved that his life level was undergoing a earth-shaking leap.

When the last [Heart of Stone] was injected into his body, the feeling of enhancement finally completely disappeared.

All three of his basic attributes, like his Mental Energy, had reached a perfect integer.

Five hundred.

Lin Yu slowly stood up.

He moved his neck, producing crisp "crack" sounds.

He could feel that every corner of his body contained explosive energy.

Muscle density, nerve reaction speed, cell activity... all had been elevated to an inhuman level.

If before, he had vast Mental Energy but his body was just a fragile container.

Then now, this container had been strengthened into an incredibly solid fortress.

He glanced at the empty medicine tubes on the floor.

To push his three attributes to five hundred, he had consumed over six thousand original medicines and an equivalent amount of [Life Serum].

And the time he spent was much faster than anticipated.

He wondered how Zhao Tianyang was doing over there.

Lin Yu walked to the wall, and the heavy alloy door slowly opened before him.

He walked out.

In the equally huge space next door, Zhao Tianyang still maintained that posture.

He sat before the mountain of medicine, mechanically injecting himself.

His movements had become numb, his face showed no expression, only a kind of almost pious concentration.

The floor was already piled with dense, empty syringes, far more in number than on Lin Yu's side.

He hadn't finished yet.

Lin Yu didn't disturb him, just stood quietly in the distance, watching.

This Zhao Tianyang truly had good mental fortitude.

Faced with wealth and power that could drive any normal person to mental collapse, he hadn't lost himself, nor had he slacked off.

Instead, he carried out the boss's orders meticulously.

Very good.

After an unknown amount of time more.

Zhao Tianyang finally picked up the last [Giant Strength Compound] and pushed it into his arm.

The moment the medicine injection was completed.

Boom!

A visible wave of pure blood and energy force, condensed together, erupted from him as the center with a thunderous explosion!

The entire huge Bunker space trembled slightly because of this wave.

Zhao Tianyang slowly stood up.

His originally robust body now appeared more proportionate and filled with a sense of power, every inch of muscle seeming like tempered steel.

He looked down at his own hands.

Feeling the four surging, river-like massive energies within his body.

Strength, Agility, Constitution, Mental Energy.

All four basic attributes had reached the upper limit of five hundred points!

He had been reborn.

He had obtained a new life.

Zhao Tianyang raised his head and looked towards Lin Yu standing not far away.

That figure wearing a cheap cloak appeared so thin, but in his eyes, it was more majestic than a deity.

He felt not a trace of joy or excitement.

His face held only the calmness that follows complete stillness.

He took steps, one by one, steadily walking to stand before Lin Yu.

Then.

"Thud!"

Zhao Tianyang's knees heavily struck the hard metal floor, producing a dull, loud sound.

He deeply lowered his head, his forehead tightly pressed against the cold ground.

This time, it wasn't because of fear, not because of despair, and certainly not because of the unrepayable debt of gratitude.

"Boss."

His voice was hoarse, yet incredibly firm.

"My life was given by you."

"From today onward, Zhao Tianyang is the sharpest blade in your hand, the sturdiest shield."

"Where the blade points, where the shield defends, that is the sole direction of my life."

"If I break this oath, may heaven strike me down, my soul scatter, and I never be reborn!"

He raised his head, and in those eyes that were once gray and defeated, now burned a flame called "faith."

He was completely convinced.

From body to soul, thoroughly submitted.

Lin Yu looked at him calmly.

All of this was within his expectations.

"Get up."

"Yes, Boss." Zhao Tianyang stood up, respectfully standing to the side with his hands lowered, like the most loyal guard.

"There are still three days until this year's Awakening Ceremony." Lin Yu spoke.

Zhao Tianyang's body shuddered.

Awakening Ceremony.

This term he had once eagerly anticipated, and later completely despaired of, was spoken by someone else once again.

"These three days, you follow me." Lin Yu didn't pay attention to his emotional change. "There's an important matter that requires manpower. Three days later, you will undergo the awakening as usual."

Zhao Tianyang, without any hesitation, doubt, or question, immediately lowered his head.

"Yes, Boss!"

Chapter 42: Return to the Old Ghost Hall

The heavy alloy door of "Honeycomb" slowly opened, then closed behind them.

Lin Yu walked ahead, having changed back into that cheap black cloak.

Zhao Tianyang followed closely behind him, not a single step out of place.

He had changed into a well-fitted black combat suit, a spare set that came with the bunker's storage locker.

His body with five hundred points in all attributes made him exude a restrained yet dangerous aura.

He was no longer that dying man trembling in the corner, but rather an unsheathed blade—silent, and sharp.

Even without a profession... he was still ridiculously powerful!

All of his attention was focused on the slender back in front of him.

The two of them moved one after another, merging back into the chaotic crowds of the black market "Junkyard."

The surrounding noise and filth couldn't affect them in the slightest.

The aura around Zhao Tianyang made those foolish thugs instinctively avoid him.

Lin Yu's goal was very clear.

He passed through several alleys and finally stopped before a familiar door.

Old Ghost Hall.

"Ding ling—"

The wind chime rang.

Lin Yu pushed the door open and entered.

The strong herbal scent remained as always.

Behind the counter, Old Ghost wearing his bird-beak mask was organizing a row of test tubes, his movements somewhat distracted.

Those three genuine medicines represented half a lifetime of his effort.

And he had just given them away.

During this time, every second had been spent oscillating between regret and anticipation.

Hearing the wind chime, he didn't even look up.

"Not open for business today, come back tomorrow if you want to buy..."

He stopped mid-sentence.

He saw that familiar black cloak.

It was that madman!

Old Ghost's heart leaped violently, nearly dropping the test tube in his hand.

He's back!

So soon?

Is he here for additional investment, or... to tell me he failed and I've lost everything?

Old Ghost leaned on the counter, forcing himself to calm down.

His gaze passed over Lin Yu and landed on the person behind him.

A young man wearing black combat attire, with an upright posture and steady aura.

Such powerful blood and energy force!

This physique, this mental state... absolutely elite among elites!

How could someone like this be following that madman?

Old Ghost's mind raced rapidly.

A newly recruited bodyguard?

No.

Old Ghost looked at the young man's face and felt it looked somewhat familiar.

Where had he seen him before?

Zhao Tianyang felt Old Ghost's gaze and took a step forward, standing at Lin Yu's side, slightly bowing.

"Boss."

This address was extremely respectful.

Old Ghost's attention was instantly completely captured by this face.

He stared intently at Zhao Tianyang.

This face... this face...

From deep in his memory, a grayish, swollen, death-filled face slowly overlapped with the clearly defined, energy-filled face before him.

Impossible!

Absolutely impossible!

It's Zhao Tianyang!

That Zhao Tianyang he had declared wouldn't last a month, the one even a Great Immortal couldn't save!

Old Ghost's body began to tremble uncontrollably.

As an experienced pharmacist, he could clearly perceive Zhao Tianyang's current life state.

This wasn't simple recovery!

That vitality was vigorous, immense, at least ten times stronger than before Zhao Tianyang had abused medicines!

The energy fluctuations within him... strength, agility, constitution... each had reached terrifying values!

This is... complete transformation!

This is... a miracle!

Old Ghost's mind went "buzz," completely blank.

He understood better than anyone what it would take to pull Zhao Tianyang back from death's door.

Ten [Life Serums]?

That would be a drop in the bucket!

That would just make his death more dignified!

To completely cleanse the medicine toxins that had penetrated deep into his marrow and rebuild his depleted physical foundation would require at least a hundred!

That would be tens of millions!

But now?

Not only was Zhao Tianyang alive, he had become stronger than before! Absurdly strong!

This was no longer a problem that could be solved with tens of millions!

Those three genuine medicines?

Yes! Those three medicines!

But even those three medicines only enhanced attributes—they couldn't possibly have this death-reversing effect!

And how much time had passed?

Less than two days!

Creating a miracle in two days?

Old Ghost's breathing became extremely rapid, his face beneath the bird-beak mask twisted with extreme shock.

He remembered what Lin Yu had said when leaving.

"Don't worry, your good fortune is yet to come!"

Good fortune...

Is this good fortune?

This is heaven-sent wealth!

This is a sky-reaching opportunity!

"Haha... hahahaha..."

Old Ghost suddenly laughed.

He laughed and laughed, then ripped the bird-beak mask from his face and slammed it violently to the ground.

"Bang!"

The mask shattered.

He revealed a face flushed crimson with ecstasy, even somewhat ferocious-looking.

He had bet correctly!

The most correct, most insane, and most brilliant investment of his entire life!

He had staked his entire fortune and obtained a ticket to a new world!

"Boss!"

Old Ghost rushed out from behind the counter in one swift movement, agile beyond belief for an old man.

Hearing Zhao Tianyang's form of address, he immediately changed his own too—even if he had to force his way, he would bind himself to Lin Yu's ship!

He rushed before Lin Yu, his body trembling from excessive excitement.

"You... you've returned!"

He wanted to say something but didn't know where to begin.

All language seemed pale and powerless before the miracle before his eyes.

He could only repeat.

"You've returned... that's good, you've returned, that's good!"

Lin Yu looked at his discomposed state without much reaction.

Everything was within expectations.

If you want the horse to run, you have to let it see the grass.

And it has to be the best grass, the kind nobody else has.

He walked to a nearby chair and sat down, Zhao Tianyang immediately standing behind him like an iron tower.

Lin Yu reached out and placed three genuine medicines on the table.

[Giant Strength Compound-Original].

[Windrunner's Breath-Original].

[Heart of Stone-Original].

Seeing these three medicines, the ecstasy on Old Ghost's face instantly froze, turning deathly pale.

Is he returning them?

Is he giving the investment back?

As soon as this thought appeared, Old Ghost's heart felt as if gripped by an invisible hand, almost stopping entirely.

"Boss! You're..."

Old Ghost's voice trembled, he was flustered and completely lost his composure.

"These three medicines are my tribute to you! You absolutely cannot..."

"I'm not here to return them."

Lin Yu interrupted him.

Old Ghost froze, half of his suspended heart settling, but he still watched Lin Yu nervously.

Lin Yu pointed at the three medicines on the table.

"I'm asking you—if you wanted to crack the formulas for these three medicines, how many would you need as research materials?"

Crack the formulas?

Old Ghost's professional instinct was awakened. He looked at the three medicines, the emotions on his face quickly turning to professionalism and gravity.

He pondered for a moment.

"Boss, you overestimate me. These three are all the highest grade original products on the market. The formulas are the highest secrets of major pharmaceutical companies. Forget cracking them—anyone who could replicate even seventy to eighty percent of their effects could establish their own school."

"Three..." Old Ghost gave a bitter smile, "With three, I don't even have confidence to analyze the basic components. Every attempt would be a consumption, the failure rate is too high, I can't guarantee anything. This is also why I've collected them for so long but never dared to start."

Chapter 43: These are the goods

Lin Yu nodded without speaking.

He waved his hand.

Three identical vials of medicine appeared on the table out of thin air.

Each type now had two vials.

Old Ghost's eye twitched.

"This..."

Lin Yu waved his hand again.

The quantity of each medicine on the table became three vials.

Old Ghost's breathing stopped.

What kind of ability was this? Materializing things from nothing?

No, that couldn't be right—it must be some kind of storage equipment!

But even with storage equipment, where did he get so many top-tier medicines? Could it be... he really was some young master from a pharmaceutical company who had secretly taken company stock?

Before Old Ghost could figure it out.

Lin Yu waved his hand once more.

This time, the quantity of each medicine on the table directly became ten vials!

Thirty top-tier medicines emitted alluring luster, neatly arranged on the table, creating a powerful visual impact.

"What about now?" Lin Yu asked.

"Gulp."

Old Ghost swallowed hard.

Ten vials... ten of each type!

This... this was already thirty million worth of goods!

With so many samples, he... he really had confidence to attempt replication!

"Boss... with... with ten vials, I have thirty percent confidence that within six months, I can produce secondary products with similar effects!"

Old Ghost's voice was distorted with excitement.

But Lin Yu shook his head.

"Too slow, success rate too low."

He looked at Old Ghost and spoke slowly.

As his words fell.

Lin Yu's hand slapped heavily on the table.

Crash—

The tabletop was instantly piled high!

Deep red [Might Potion], pale cyan [Windrunner's Breath], earthy yellow [Heart of Stone].

Each type formed a small mountain!

A rough count showed over a hundred vials of each type!

"These are your funding."

Lin Yu's voice was calm, but to Old Ghost's ears, it was no less shocking than thunder.

"My goal is for you to help me distribute."

"As for cracking the formula, that's just incidental."

"You can use these medicines freely, consume them as you wish. If you feel it's not enough..."

Lin Yu paused, then spoke words that completely shattered Old Ghost's worldview.

"I have as many as you need here."

Old Ghost's mind buzzed and completely shut down.

He stared blankly at the three hundred-plus top-tier medicines on the table, each representing the black market's sky-high price of eight hundred thousand.

Three hundred-plus vials... that was... over two hundred million?

Funding?

Distribution?

As many as needed?

Instantly, all the clues connected in his mind.

Zhao Tianyang's miraculous recovery.

The madness of bidding an additional 300,000 without hesitation to buy the medicine.

Now, these mountains of top-tier medicines worth hundreds of millions.

And that casual "as many as you need."

He finally understood.

He finally understood why Zhao Tianyang had been completely transformed.

"Boss... you... you want to distribute... these?" Old Ghost's voice was hoarse and dry, every word seeming squeezed from his throat.

Two hundred million worth of goods... hiss.

"This place is too small." Lin Yu didn't answer, just glanced around the cramped shop.

Old Ghost instantly woke up.

"Yes! There's space! Boss, please follow me!"

Old Ghost scrambled toward the shop's back door, personally pulling open an inconspicuous hidden door.

"This leads to my private warehouse, absolutely secure! Absolutely quiet!"

Lin Yu stood up and followed.

Zhao Tianyang followed closely like a silent shadow.

Passing through a dim corridor, the three arrived at a spacious underground area.

About two hundred square meters, with thick concrete walls on all sides, miscellaneous items and medicinal materials piled on the floor.

"Boss, what do you think of this place..."

Before Old Ghost could finish speaking.

Crashhhhh—

A sound ten times more intense than before exploded throughout the warehouse!

This time, it wasn't small mountains on a table.

But three genuine mountains made of medicine vials!

Deep red, pale cyan, earthy yellow—three colors of light interweaved, almost illuminating the entire dim warehouse.

Countless medicines poured out from Lin Yu's Storage Ring, piling on the ground into three terrifying treasure mountains.

Each mountain consisted of over a thousand top-tier medicines!

"These are the first batch of goods."

Lin Yu turned back, looking at Old Ghost who had completely frozen in place.

"This is what I want you to help me distribute."

Old Ghost's body trembled violently as he looked at the three medicine mountains before him, his brain unable to calculate their value.

One vial: eight hundred thousand.

One thousand vials: eight hundred million.

Here... there were at least three to four thousand vials here!

That was... thirty billion?

First batch?

"Thump!"

Old Ghost's legs gave way, and he heavily knelt on the ground.

This time, more thoroughly and willingly than when Zhao Tianyang had knelt.

His turbid eyes filled with fanaticism, fear, and the enlightenment of seeing ultimate truth.

He had crawled through the black market his entire life, thinking himself worldly, but the scene before him exceeded the limits of his imagination.

Could someone who could produce so much goods be ordinary?

Would such an existence randomly seek out an old man like him for help?

This was both a heavenly opportunity and a test that could shatter him to pieces!

Fail to grasp it—death!

Grasp it—ascend to heaven in one step!

Old Ghost's very soul trembled.

He made the most important decision of his life.

He heavily kowtowed, his forehead making a dull impact with the cold concrete floor.

"Boss! This Old Ghost is willing to die for you! I beg you to give me a chance! I'm willing to sign a Master-Servant Contract, to be your slave forever, without any disloyalty!"

To prove his loyalty, he proactively proposed the contract.

He wanted to completely bind himself to this divine war chariot!

Lin Yu calmly looked at Old Ghost kneeling on the ground.

Master-Servant Contract?

He thought of Zhao Tianyang.

That invisible thread connecting their souls made him understand that Master-Servant Contract slots were extremely precious.

Each slot represented an absolutely trustworthy core who could be entrusted with life and death.

This Old Ghost was shrewd, mercenary, a qualified businessman, but far from meeting that standard.

"You're not qualified enough."

Lin Yu's voice wasn't loud, but it struck Old Ghost like thunder.

Not qualified?

Not even qualified to be a slave?

Immense disappointment and fear instantly overwhelmed him.

Lin Yu's heart remained undisturbed.

But this Old Ghost was indeed the most suitable distribution channel manager at this stage.

He needed to give him some hope, but couldn't let him overstep.

Just as Old Ghost's heart turned to ashes, a flash of inspiration reminded him of another contract circulating in the black market.

"Boss!" He suddenly raised his head, his face filled with desperate madness, "If the Master-Servant Brand won't work, then... what about a time-limited contract! For three years! This kind of contract doesn't occupy precious permanent contract slots and automatically dissolves when the time expires! I just want a chance! One chance to serve you!"

He looked at Lin Yu, his eyes filled with longing for the future, yearning for power, without the slightest resistance to the contract.

For someone like him who had struggled at the bottom his entire life, freedom was far less important than the chance to ascend to heaven in one step!

Chapter 44: Sales Network

Time-limited contract?

This was Lin Yu's first time hearing about such a thing.

Not occupying a contract slot—that was worth considering.

He needed a loyal and capable tool to handle these illicit assets.

"Acceptable."

Lin Yu uttered two words.

Old Ghost was instantly ecstatic, as if he had been pulled from hell back to heaven.

"Thank you, boss! Thank you, boss!"

He scrambled up from the ground, pulling out that old-fashioned communicator with movements so fast they left afterimages.

"Hello! Seventh Master? It's Old Ghost! Yes! Another job! Time-limited master-servant contract! Yes! Now, at my warehouse... I'll pay double!"

After hanging up, he stood respectfully beside Lin Yu, his posture even more humble than Zhao Tianyang's.

Before long.

"Knock knock knock."

The warehouse's iron door was knocked.

Old Ghost scurried to open it.

Seventh Master, dressed in traditional Chinese clothing, entered expressionlessly carrying a wooden case.

When he saw the three mountains of medicine in the warehouse, even his perpetually stoic poker face showed a crack.

But he quickly composed himself, pretending not to see.

He glanced at Lin Yu and Old Ghost.

"Who is master, who is servant?"

Seventh Master asked hoarsely.

"I am master," Lin Yu answered calmly.

"I am servant!"

Old Ghost rushed to answer, his voice loud and filled with pride and eagerness.

Seventh Master looked at Old Ghost and froze completely.

Having known Old Ghost for decades, he understood how cunning and life-preserving this guy was. Getting him to sign a master-servant contract was harder than killing him. What was happening today?

But when his gaze swept over the three medicine mountains again, and he recalled Old Ghost's near-frantic excitement on the communicator, he instantly understood something.

These three medicine mountains weren't background props.

They were real.

Seventh Master's breathing stopped at that moment.

Having worked as a contract master his entire life, serving countless big shots, he thought he had seen everything. But what lay before him wasn't just waves—it was the sky falling.

This wasn't wealth.

This was power enough to overturn an industry, even the order of an entire region.

And the person possessing such power needed to sign a contract with an old man from the black market?

Why?

Countless thoughts flashed through Seventh Master's mind in an instant.

The next moment.

Under the astonished gazes of Old Ghost and Zhao Tianyang.

"Thump!"

This contract master, who held transcendent status in the black market and whom even many gang leaders addressed respectfully as "Seventh Master," went weak in the knees and heavily knelt before Lin Yu.

Faster and more decisively than Old Ghost had knelt.

"Boss!"

Seventh Master's form of address changed as soon as he spoke.

His forehead pressed against the ground as he spoke in a tone suppressing extreme excitement and awe.

"My name is Chen Qi, people in the black market call me Seventh Master out of respect. My whole life, I've only dealt with contracts, only believed in rules. But today, I've seen something beyond rules."

"I... I want to sign too! I'm willing to sign a permanent master-servant brand! I beg you for this opportunity, boss! I'm willing to work like an ox or horse for you, even if it means dying ten thousand deaths!"

Old Ghost watched dumbfounded from the side.

He had just wanted to help his old friend get a taste of success, but who knew this guy would go even further than him, directly offering to sell himself!

Lin Yu looked at the two men kneeling before him.

One pharmacist, one contract master.

This Old Ghost certainly knew how to play his cards—knowing he couldn't handle this alone, he pulled in his most well-connected old friend.

Fine.

Let professionals handle professional matters.

"Permanent won't do," Lin Yu said. "You're the same as him—three years."

Seventh Master's body trembled, immense disappointment flooding his heart.

Was he not even qualified to be a permanent slave?

But the disappointment lasted only a second before being washed away by ecstasy.

Just being qualified to board the ship was enough!

Three years! As long as he could stay on this ship for three years, his life would be completely transformed!

"Thank you, boss! Thank you for this opportunity!" Seventh Master kowtowed heavily.

Lin Yu looked at him: "You're the contract master, handle it yourself."

"Yes!"

Seventh Master immediately stood up and opened his ancient wooden case.

This time, he didn't approach Lin Yu first. Instead, he took a silver knife and cleanly sliced his own fingertip, dripping blood into a porcelain bowl.

Then he looked at Old Ghost.

Old Ghost also immediately stepped forward, cut his finger, and dripped blood.

Throughout the process, both men wore expressions of near-religious piety.

Using the vermilion liquid mixed with both their blood, Seventh Master quickly drew two complex time-limited contract symbols.

"In my name, I pledge you as master, three years as term, following you through life and death."

The talismans ignited without fire, turning into two piles of ashes that imprinted on Old Ghost's and Seventh Master's foreheads.

"Sizzle—"

Two soft sounds.

Two more invisible threads appeared in Lin Yu's mind.

One connected to Old Ghost's soul, filled with greed, cunning, and fervor.

The other connected to Seventh Master's soul—deep, calm, but currently burning with equal ambition.

The contract was complete.

"Boss."

Old Ghost and Seventh Master stood up, respectfully standing by with hands at their sides, aligned with Zhao Tianyang like three most loyal guardians.

They didn't even dare to think about what would happen after three years when the contract ended, if this boss no longer wanted them. That feeling of falling from the clouds would be more terrifying than death.

"Business," Lin Yu broke the silence.

"Yes!"

Old Ghost immediately stepped into his role, pointing at the three piles of medicine as he began reporting.

"Boss, we'll claim publicly that I finally cracked these three medicines and achieved mass production. My 'Old Ghost' reputation still carries some weight in the black market—this story will hold up."

Lin Yu was coming to the black market, so these things definitely couldn't see the light—it was best to have a cover story in the black market too. Old Ghost would bear this risk!

Seventh Master immediately added: "Boss, I have my own network in seven cities around Ninghai Province. We can combine forces to quickly distribute this batch of goods, covering half of Ninghai Province!"

"However..." Seventh Master's tone shifted, showing some gravity.

"The original manufacturers of these three medicines—'Giant Force Group,' 'Wind Rider Technology,' and 'Bedrock Biotech'—are all giants in Ninghai Province. Once our goods appear on a large scale, they're bound to attract their attention."

Old Ghost also nodded: "Right. So we must be careful. We need to carefully calculate how to distribute these over three thousand medicines—how much to each city, how much through each channel. We need to sell quickly for returns, but not be too conspicuous to trigger their joint suppression."

The two went back and forth, quickly getting into the groove as they began planning a vast and meticulous underground sales network for Lin Yu.

They gestured on the ground, discussing each city's market capacity, each channel's risk assessment.

"Qingzhou City has the largest market—we can allocate five hundred units."

"Yungang has strict inspections—maximum three hundred units, and in batches."

"And Xilin City..."

As he listened, Lin Yu slowly stood up.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master immediately stopped discussing and looked at him respectfully.

"Boss, do you have any instructions?"

Lin Yu didn't speak.

He just looked at the relatively empty area in the warehouse and waved his hand once more.

Chapter 45: Harvest outside the black market

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble——

A pouring sound ten times more terrifying than the previous two times combined exploded thunderously throughout the entire underground warehouse!

This time, it wasn't three small hills.

It was an ocean, composed of countless medicine bottles, stretching as far as the eye could see!

Deep crimson, pale cyan, and earthy yellow—bottles of these three colors madly gushed out from the storage ring, instantly flooding all the open space in the warehouse. The pile's height quickly surpassed a person's knees and was still continuously rising!

Tens of thousands!

Maybe even hundreds of thousands!

Old Ghost and Seventh Master, who had just been eagerly planning the distribution scheme for three thousand medicines, now stood frozen in place, surrounded by an ocean of potions.

Under their feet, they weren't standing on concrete, but on priceless top-tier medicines.

The cool glass bottles clinked against their calves, producing crisp yet heart-palpating sounds.

The "over three thousand" items they had just been discussing now seemed like nothing more than an insignificant wave in this vast ocean.

"This..."

Seventh Master's Adam's apple bobbed, but he couldn't produce any coherent sound.

His usually steady face was now covered in cracks.

Old Ghost was even more rigid, feeling as if his brain had completely shut down.

Five hundred for Qingzhou City? Three hundred for Yungang?

These carefully laid plans appeared so trivial, so laughable, in the face of this wealth sufficient to drown the entire black market.

Lin Yu stood in place, watching until the medicine pile surpassed waist height before stopping.

He turned and looked at the two men who had turned completely to stone.

"Now, how do you think we should distribute this?"

These words hit Old Ghost and Seventh Master's hearts like a heavy hammer.

Distribution?

How can we even distribute this!

This isn't distribution! This is launching a war!

Old Ghost opened his mouth, the biggest worry lurking in his heart almost bursting out.

With so much product flooding the market, those three pharmaceutical giants would go insane! They would use every means possible to crush the source into dust!

But when the words reached his lips, he couldn't utter a single syllable.

He stared fixedly at Lin Yu's unnervingly calm face.

Could this god-like man possibly not have considered problems that even he could think of?

A terrifying, yet fatally tempting thought, sliced through his chaotic mind like lightning.

The boss... simply isn't afraid!

No!

It's not that he isn't afraid, he's doing this intentionally!

He wants to attract the attention of those three companies!

He didn't come to the black market to sneakily pick up scraps of money; he came to flip the table! He came to declare war on the entire medicine industry of Ninghai Province!

"Grah!"

A suppressed low roar escaped from Old Ghost's throat.

He sharply turned his head to look at Seventh Master beside him.

Seventh Master was also looking back at him with an expression mixing extreme terror and manic excitement.

No words were needed.

In that single exchanged glance, both saw the obvious answer written on the other's face.

They understood.

They completely understood!

No wonder... no wonder the boss had so much stock!

This was a premeditated scheme!

Cracked the formula?

No, with this level of production, it must be a technological revolution!

This is a siege targeting the three major companies!

Could this be... the force behind that [Life Serum]?

Regardless of the boss's true identity, regardless of his ultimate goal, in this moment, Old Ghost and Seventh Master were both absolutely certain of one thing.

They hadn't just boarded a ship.

They had latched onto a rocket about to launch into the sky!

"Boss!" Old Ghost's voice rang out again, now devoid of any tremor, replaced instead by a desperate, feverish zeal, "I understand! We'll spare no cost! Use the fastest speed, the most aggressive method, to saturate the entire black market of Ninghai Province with the goods!"

Seventh Master immediately chimed in, his breathing rapid: "Price war! Use our absolute numerical advantage to completely shatter their pricing system! Make their stockpiled inventory become worthless garbage no one wants!"

Lin Yu looked at the two men who had instantly grasped the situation and finally showed a trace of satisfaction.

"Money isn't important."

He spoke slowly, "I want them to come to me, of their own accord."

Indeed! The two men exchanged a glance, both feeling they had seen through the divine plan.

...

After explaining the subsequent details, Lin Yu took Zhao Tianyang and left Old Ghost Hall, exiting the black market.

Back on the surface, the city's hustle and bustle washed over them.

Lin Yu didn't hide or avoid anyone. Right there in an unmanned alley, he removed the bronze mask from his face and the cloak from his body, revealing his true appearance.

A young, clean-cut face, still carrying a hint of student-like youthfulness.

Zhao Tianyang, who was following behind, froze completely the moment he saw Lin Yu's true face.

He had imagined countless possibilities.

This mysterious, unpredictable "boss" who could casually produce unlimited medicines and held control over his life and death—perhaps he was an old monster with white hair and a youthful face, or maybe a middle-aged expert with an unfathomable aura.

But he never would have guessed it would be a young man not much older than himself.

Judging by his age, probably just in his early twenties.

This...

The immense contrast left Zhao Tianyang's mind blank, but the contract branded deep within his soul prevented him from harboring any doubt or disrespect. Still, within that awe, there was now an added layer of inexpressible shock.

Lin Yu paid no attention to his astonishment.

Money wasn't a problem now.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master would continuously transfer the black market profits to him.

But this was only the first step.

His real plan was just beginning.

He had three million in principal capital.

Given by his parents after returning home.

This money needed to be spent legitimately, earned legitimately.

The funds coming from the black market ultimately carried risk. A little was fine, but too much would be troublesome...

Moreover, his true aim was to drag the major medicine companies into the fray, to see if he could revolutionize the technology and create even more effective medicines...

Relying solely on distribution was still a bit slow.

To quickly force them into a corner, he could also start with... medicine futures and the stock market.

Now, it was time to put this money to work.

With the three major medicines being sold off without restraint in Ninghai Province's black market, it wouldn't be long before the news spread to the outside world.

When they discovered the sheer volume of goods being moved.

"Giant Force Group," "Wind Rider Technology," "Bedrock Biotech"—the stock prices of these three listed companies were bound to experience a cliff-like plunge.

What he needed to do was short them.

At the same time, the flooding of these three top-tier medicines would inevitably lead to a large number of professionals abusing the medicines, pushing their bodies to the brink of collapse.

And the [Life Serum], capable of clearing side effects, would definitely see an explosive surge in sales.

His second step would be to go long on "Eternal Life Pharmaceuticals," the company behind the [Life Serum].

One short, one long—a two-way harvest.

His cost for the goods was zero, allowing him to sell off without restraint, even give them away for free, to impact the market.

Those three major companies simply couldn't withstand this kind of overwhelming assault.

He was waiting for the day when the three major companies, finding themselves cornered, would take the initiative to contact him.

But this plan to open an account and trade didn't necessarily require him to appear personally.

Lin Yu looked at Zhao Tianyang beside him.

"There's something I need you to do."

"Please give your orders, boss!" Zhao Tianyang immediately bowed, his posture respectful.

Lin Yu handed him a note with operational details written on it: "Use your identity to open an account at the largest securities company and follow the operations written here. No one can know about this, including Old Ghost and Seventh Master."

Chapter 46: Family

This kind of arrangement involving real identities and financial markets could only be entrusted to Zhao Tianyang, who had signed a permanent master-servant contract, as he was the most trustworthy.

"Yes! I guarantee I'll complete the mission!"

Zhao Tianyang took the note without any hesitation.

Although this seemed like just a trivial errand, far less impressive than Old Ghost and Seventh Master managing portfolios worth tens or hundreds of billions, he harbored no resentment in his heart.

Being able to share his boss's burdens was his greatest value.

"After you finish, go home and prepare properly." Lin Yu added, "Tomorrow is Linzhou First High School's Awakening Ceremony day, don't miss it."

"Yes, boss!"

Zhao Tianyang nodded heavily, then turned and quickly left.

He had originally planned to spend three days resolving these matters, but now with Old Ghost and Old Seventh being so cooperative, his efficiency had increased significantly.

Lin Yu stood alone at the alley entrance. Just before leaving, he had taken over three million from Old Ghost, which had already been withdrawn to his external bank card.

He opened his mobile banking app, found that all-too-familiar debt collection phone number, and transferred all the owed principal and interest, not a single cent missing, to the other party's account.

[Your account ending xxxx has successfully repaid xxxxx yuan.]

Looking at the notification message on his phone, Lin Yu deleted all the debt collection contact information.

The five-year gloom had, at this point, come to an end.

Next, he would wait for the wind to rise.

More than ten minutes later, he returned to that familiar scrapyard filled with the scent of decay and rust.

That solitary shipping container cast a long shadow under the moonlight, like a silent tombstone.

Lin Yu stood before this "tombstone" for a long time.

Here, his five years of youth were buried.

Buried were his honors as heaven's favored son, and buried was the pain of his break with his family.

Those misunderstood days and nights, those hardships of surviving on loans and scrap materials, that loneliness of facing the entire world alone—they were all here.

Now, it was time to make a clean break.

Lin Yu raised his hand.

He didn't summon any magnificent cards.

The most ordinary gray card, without even a grade, materialized in his palm.

[A Small Pebble].

He didn't even use the [Doubling Card].

He simply channeled five hundred points of his mental energy into this insignificant pebble.

Then added another five hundred points of power.

The next second, he flicked his finger.

That gray card transformed into a faint glimmer and gently landed on the container's iron sheet.

There was no explosion, no loud noise.

Only a teeth-grating "buzzing" sound.

Centered around where the pebble landed, the container's thick iron sheet began to decompose and dissipate at a visible rate.

Not shattering into fragments, but directly turning into the most basic metal powder, blown away by the night wind, completely vanishing into the air.

This process lasted less than ten seconds.

When everything settled, only an empty, rectangular imprint pressed by the container remained on the spot.

Along with all the trash he had accumulated over those five years.

Lin Yu glanced at the scattered debris, then turned and left.

An era had ended.

...

When Lin Yu returned home again, the horizon was already showing the first light of dawn.

He had returned faster than he expected.

Because Seventh Master's voluntary surrender and Old Ghost's goodwill had saved him a lot of trouble.

The living room lights were on.

Father Lin and Mother Lin sat on the sofa, neither having slept, their faces showing unconcealable worry.

Seeing Lin Yu push the door open and enter, they both breathed a simultaneous sigh of relief.

"Xiao Yu, you..." Mother Lin started to ask.

"I went out these past few days and cleaned up everything from the past." Lin Yu answered calmly.

Cleaned up everything?

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged glances. Although they didn't fully understand what their son meant, they could sense that something was truly different.

The Lin Yu before them, though still thin and weak, had completely shed the despondency and gloom that had clung to him for five years.

Replacing it was a steadiness and calm they had never seen before.

It seemed that this time, Lin Yu was truly better!

Just then, Lin Yao's bedroom door also opened.

Wearing her rabbit pajamas, rubbing her sleepy eyes, seeing her brother sitting safely in the living room, the stone that had been weighing on her heart for so long finally settled.

She believed her brother's explanation.

Those needle marks might truly have been just the price for becoming stronger.

She ran to Lin Yu's side, carefully sat down, tugged at the corner of his clothes, and whispered with a hint of pleading and great expectation.

"Brother, tomorrow... no, it's today. Today is the Awakening Ceremony, you... can you come with me?"

Lin Yu looked at his sister's small face, both nervous and full of hope, and laughed heartily.

He reached out and, like when they were children, vigorously ruffled her hair.

"What else did you think I came back for?"

That one sentence made Lin Yao's eyes instantly brighten, all her unease and fear transforming into immense joy at this moment.

Father Lin and Mother Lin watched this scene, their faces revealing long-absent smiles.

This was how a family should be.

Mother Lin went smiling to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Soon, the dining table was filled with steaming soy milk and fried dough sticks.

The family sat together around the table, the atmosphere so warm it felt somewhat unreal.

"By the way," Father Lin took a sip of soy milk and suddenly remembered something. He put down his cup, his face showing concern, "Our neighborhood hasn't been very peaceful lately."

"What's wrong, Old Lin?" Mother Lin asked.

"Just a couple of days ago, when I went downstairs to drive, I discovered that the wall in our building's underground parking garage had been punched through with a huge hole!" Father Lin's expression was very serious. "I heard from the security guard that practitioners were fighting over there, the commotion was so big the whole building shook! It's too dangerous!"

Lin Yu's movement of picking up a fried dough stick paused slightly.

Lin Yao also widened her eyes: "Really? That scary?"

"Absolutely!" Father Lin sighed. "In these times, there are more and more practitioners, and they're getting stronger and stronger. If places where ordinary people like us live get caught up in it, there's really nowhere to seek justice."

Mother Lin's face also showed worry.

"Maybe... after Yao Yao takes her college entrance exam and goes to university in another city, and Xiao Yu you find a stable job, we should sell this house and move back to our hometown."

"Our hometown is quiet, without all this fighting and killing. Living a stable retired life would be quite nice too."

Lin Yu listened without saying a word.

He knew his parents were sincere about retiring back home.

But the deeper reason was that this family had no money left.

Originally, with the Lin family's assets, while not extremely wealthy, they were considered middle-class in Linzhou city.

They had a house, a car, and a modest business, living a comfortable and prosperous life.

But now, to gather that three million "loan" for their "unfilial son," they had sold everything they could and liquidated their business.

From middle-class to impoverished overnight.

And the one who caused all this was himself.

The strange thing was, the "dangerous practitioner" they were worried about, the one who could blast through walls with a single strike, was also himself.

Chapter 47: Encounter at the School Gate

No one in the family blamed Lin Yu.

In their hearts, his return was more important than anything else.

Father Lin saw his son hanging his head in silence and thought he was still blaming himself for past events. He sighed heavily and patted his son's shoulder.

"Xiao Yu, don't overthink it. Money lost can be earned again, but if the family is gone, everything is gone."

"Your mother is right. Your return is the best thing that could happen."

Lin Yu lifted his head and looked at his parents' temples already touched by life's hardships, and his sister's eyes filled with trust.

He didn't explain, nor did he make promises.

He simply picked up a steamed bun and placed it in Lin Yao's bowl.

"Hurry up and eat. After you finish, your brother will accompany you to the Awakening Ceremony to get your Epic-level Profession."

"Hmph, I don't want an Epic-level one," Lin Yao snorted proudly, but still happily took a big bite of the bun, "I'm definitely going to awaken a Mythical-level one!"

"Alright, Mythical-level it is." Lin Yu smiled in agreement.

After a warm breakfast, the siblings prepared to leave home.

Linzhou First High School.

A place Lin Yu was extremely familiar with, yet hadn't set foot in for five years.

Strictly speaking, he was still a student of Linzhou First High School.

And since he hadn't taken the College Entrance Exam yet, he technically hadn't even graduated...

Walking this familiar path to school with his sister again stirred complex emotions in Lin Yu's heart.

Five years ago, he had walked this same path, filled with anticipation for the future and a touch of nervousness, to face his own Profession Awakening.

Five years later, the scenery remained but the people had changed.

The road today was more crowded than he remembered it ever being.

Both sides of the road were lined with all kinds of vehicles, and groups of students and parents converged into a human stream flowing toward the same direction.

Every face showed complex emotions—expectation, tension, anxiety.

The Profession Awakening Ceremony was the most critical event determining fate for everyone in this world.

One step could lead to heaven, another to the mundane world.

"Brother, look over there, that's the top student in our grade, named Li Mo. I heard he's already been pre-selected by 'Skyward Spire' and can join no matter what profession he awakens!"

"And that girl in the red dress is our school beauty! The line of people chasing after her stretches from the school gate all the way to the downtown square!"

"Wow, isn't that Teacher Wang? He actually didn't wear his eternal plaid shirt today!"

Lin Yao clung to Lin Yu's arm, chattering nonstop the entire way, her little mouth never resting.

She continuously pointed out the "notable figures" along the way, as if trying to make up for all the campus gossip he had missed over the years in these brief ten-plus minutes.

Lin Yu listened quietly, nodding occasionally.

His sister's vibrant energy diluted the complex emotions in his heart about returning to this familiar place.

This was good.

Like this, it was quite nice indeed.

Soon, the gates of Linzhou First High School came into view.

A huge red banner hung across the entrance—"Warmly Welcoming the Class of 20xx Senior High Students Back to School for the Profession Awakening Ceremony."

The crowd at the school gate was even denser, almost to the point of jostling shoulders and rubbing elbows.

Security guards and teachers were struggling to maintain order, directing the flow of students and parents.

Just then, a small commotion arose from the crowd.

Many people's attention was drawn to a figure who had just stepped out of a car at the school gate.

It was an exceptionally tall and burly male student, standing a full head taller than the adults around him, his solid muscles almost bursting through his school uniform.

Just standing there, he exuded a powerful sense of pressure.

Lin Yu's steps paused briefly.

Lin Yao also noticed the large figure and tugged at Lin Yu's sleeve, introducing in a low voice.

"Brother, see that? That's Zhao Tianyang from the class next door that I told you about!"

"The one I approved the leave slip for!"

Zhao Tianyang was currently surrounded by his parents. His mother was wiping away tears of excitement, while his father vigorously patted his shoulder, his face showing the ecstasy of having recovered something precious that was lost.

"Tianyang, it's good that you could come back, it's so good that you came back!"

"Dad, Mom, I'm fine now, really fine." Zhao Tianyang comforted his parents.

Then, he saw.

He saw that figure standing at the edge of the crowd, calmly watching everything.

Master!

It was Master!

The blood in Zhao Tianyang's body instantly boiled over!

After returning home yesterday, his parents' joy and excitement at seeing him return to normal—that feeling of surviving a disaster—was beyond any words to describe.

He knew who had given him all this.

It was his Master who had given him a second life and given his entire family a new beginning!

This debt of gratitude was heavier than Mount Tai!

Almost instinctively, he was about to push through the crowd and rush over!

He wanted to kneel before his Master, expressing his gratitude and loyalty in the most devout manner!

However, he had only taken one step.

In the crowd, Lin Yu shook his head ever so slightly.

The movement was so minute it was almost imperceptible.

But Zhao Tianyang understood.

His forward momentum froze instantly, as if doused by a bucket of ice water.

Master... didn't want his identity exposed.

Zhao Tianyang's heart raced wildly, and cold sweat immediately broke out.

He had almost caused unnecessary trouble for his Master due to his impulsiveness!

Damn it!

His mind raced rapidly.

No, he couldn't just let it go like this.

His Master was right before his eyes—he had to do something!

He spotted the girl beside his Master.

Taking a deep breath, he forced a simple and grateful smile onto his face and actively walked toward Lin Yao's direction.

The surrounding students all recognized Zhao Tianyang, the special student. Seeing him approach directly, they subconsciously made way for him.

Lin Yao was also stunned, not expecting Zhao Tianyang to come straight for her.

"What... what does he want?" she asked nervously, gripping Lin Yu's arm tightly.

Under the gaze of the entire school, the burly Zhao Tianyang walked up to Lin Yao, then, to everyone's astonishment, bent slightly at the waist.

His attitude carried a genuine respect and gratitude from the heart.

"Classmate Lin Yao, thank you."

"Ah?" Lin Yao was completely bewildered.

"Before... my family had some issues, and I wasn't well. Thanks to the leave slip you approved for me, I could rest peacefully at home." Zhao Tianyang's wording was extremely sincere. "My parents have been saying we should properly thank you, our class president. Today I finally have the chance. Really, thank you so much!"

After speaking, he bowed formally once more.

This scene left everyone around utterly dumbfounded.

Who was Zhao Tianyang?

Although not academically outstanding, he was famously tough in school, relying on his large build to swagger around normally. When had he ever been this polite to anyone?

Especially to a girl!

Lin Yao's mind went completely blank, completely stunned by this sudden expression of gratitude. She could only stammer in response.

"It's... it's nothing, it's what I should do. Between classmates, we should help each other..."

Zhao Tianyang expressed his thanks a few more times before straightening up, explaining something to his parents, and then the family of three entered the school campus.

Even after Zhao Tianyang's figure disappeared, Lin Yao remained in a dazed, floating state.

She felt like the entire school's attention was focused on her.

That feeling was absolutely incredible!

She suddenly turned her head, puffing out her small chest proudly, looking at Lin Yu with an expression that clearly said "praise me now."

"Brother! You saw that, right!"

"I told you! As class president, my power is immense!"

Chapter 48: Before the Ceremony Begins

Lin Yu looked at his younger sister's smug expression, as if she had accomplished some monumental feat, and couldn't help but laugh.

"Yes, our Yao Yao is the most impressive."

The siblings followed the crowd into the campus they hadn't seen in five years.

The large playground, the podium, and that black Awakening Stone standing over a person's height right in the center.

Everything felt so familiar, so familiar it made Lin Yu feel somewhat dazed, as if he had just left yesterday.

The playground was already divided into sections by class, densely packed with students. Below the podium were rows of seats filled with parents who had come to watch the ceremony.

And on the podium itself, the front row positions were particularly weighty.

Leaders from the Municipal Education Bureau, school administrators from Linzhou First High School, and some well-dressed men and women with extraordinary presence.

On their chests, they all wore various types of badges.

Those were the symbols of major corporations, top universities, and powerful guilds.

They were here to "snatch talent."

Every year on Profession Awakening Day, it became a talent war without gunpowder smoke. A single promising seedling was enough to make these major forces fight tooth and nail.

"Brother, look! The first row on the podium!" Lin Yao excitedly tugged at Lin Yu's sleeve, lowering her voice. "That middle-aged man wearing the blue suit with his hair slicked back shiny, do you see him?"

Lin Yu followed her pointing direction.

The man was chatting and laughing casually with the Municipal Education Bureau leader beside him, his demeanor relaxed, clearly indicating his high status.

On his chest, he wore a silver, wing-shaped badge.

Wind Rider Technology.

One of the three major medicine producers in Ninghai Province.

Also one of the targets Lin Yu planned to snipe in his current scheme.

"His name is Feng Rui, he's the vice president of Wind Rider Technology." Lin Yao continued her quiet briefing. "I heard his son Feng Siyuan is also in our grade, awakening today. His visit today serves both public and private purposes - recruiting talent for the company while also watching his son."

Lin Yu nodded.

So that's how it was.

No wonder he could sit at the same table with the city leaders.

Just then, the man named Feng Rui seemed to notice something as his phone vibrated.

He picked up his phone and glanced at it, and the smile that had been on his face instantly froze for a moment before transforming into obvious disdain and contempt.

He quickly typed a reply, his brow slightly furrowed as if very dissatisfied with the person who sent the message.

Lin Yu was too far away to see the content on the screen.

But he could guess.

The wind had already blown here.

...

On the podium.

Feng Rui looked at the emergency message from his subordinate and almost laughed out loud.

[President Feng, it's bad! Massive quantities of 'Windrunner's Breath Medicine' have suddenly appeared in the black markets of Ninghai Province's seven major cities! The quantity is unknown, but preliminary estimates suggest at least equivalent to our monthly shipment volume! The price... the price is only half of ours!]

Massive quantities?

And only half the price?

Feng Rui's first reaction was: counterfeit.

Complete and utter counterfeit!

Every year around Awakening Day, there would be money-crazed scammers like this who would use inferior materials to imitate their medicines, attempting to make a quick profit on the black market.

But these scams could only fool those newcomers without connections.

What experienced Practitioner would fall for that?

Making a mountain out of a molehill.

His fingers flew across the screen.

[You're bothering me with such a trivial matter? Let the black market administrators handle it themselves.]

[Just a bunch of money-crazed fools.]

The moment he sent the message, the other party directly called.

Feng Rui frowned, glanced at the school leader beside him who was smiling at him, nodded apologetically, stood up and walked to the corner of the podium before impatiently answering the call.

"What is it! Didn't I tell you not to disturb me with such minor matters!" His voice was low but filled with anger. "My son is awakening today, that's what truly matters! Do you understand!"

The subordinate's voice on the other end sounded anxious.

"President Feng! It's not counterfeit! Our people have already obtained samples and conducted emergency testing. The medicinal effect... is exactly the same as what we produce! Even the wind element energy inside is more refined than ours!"

"Impossible!"

Feng Rui rejected it without even thinking.

His expression twisted slightly with this certainty.

"Are you joking with me? What's the core material of the medicine? Wind element crystals! Throughout Ninghai Province, no, throughout the entire eastern war zone frontline of the Abyssal Domains, over ninety percent of the wind element crystal channels are monopolized by our Wind Rider Technology!"

"I know exactly how much supply I get every month, it's all clearly recorded in the accounts! What are they using to manufacture it? Thin air?"

This was his greatest confidence.

Technology could be cracked, formulas could be leaked.

But raw materials couldn't be conjured from nothing.

Without sufficient wind element crystals, even if they got a formula from the gods, they couldn't produce a single qualified Windrunner's Breath Medicine.

So this was absolutely impossible!

"But President Feng, the facts are right here! Seven cities' black markets are simultaneously stocking the goods, this is definitely a premeditated assault! We must take immediate action, otherwise..."

"Shut up!"

Feng Rui roughly interrupted his subordinate.

He felt his authority was being challenged.

"I'll say it again, that's absolutely counterfeit! It's using some method to temporarily simulate the illusion of wind element energy! After I finish with my son's matters, I'll deal with you useless lot!"

After speaking, he directly hung up the phone, his face restoring that composed smile as he walked back to his seat.

As if that phone call had just been harmless harassment.

A clown's performance not even worth an extra second of his attention.

...

Among the crowd on the playground.

Lin Yu took in all of Feng Rui's subtle movements.

From the disdain when he saw the message, to the anger when he took the call, to the arrogance after hanging up.

Everything was within his expectations.

Arrogance was the original sin.

Especially for a giant that had monopolized for too long and forgotten the cruelty of the market.

They didn't believe anyone could challenge their authority.

Even less believed that someone could overturn their gaming table.

Good.

Just like this.

By the time they truly realized what was happening, the stock price avalanche would have already begun.

And he only needed to wait quietly, waiting for that moment of harvest.

"Brother, look at that President Feng, his expression is so ugly. Did something happen at his company?" Lin Yao asked curiously.

"Maybe."

Lin Yu casually responded, shifting his attention back to the podium.

The Awakening Ceremony was about to officially begin.

With a burst of impassioned music, the academic director of Linzhou First High School walked up to the podium and began his annual routine speech.

Nothing more than the usual encouraging words for students and prospects for the future.

The students listened drowsily while the parents all paid rapt attention.

Chapter 49: Multiple Adaptations

The long speech finally drew to a close. The Academic Director cleared his throat, his expression turning serious.

"Finally, before the Awakening Ceremony officially begins, I must reiterate one core school and Education Bureau regulation."

"The most important clause concerns deferred exams."

All the students pricked up their ears.

"According to the latest rule, any student who wants to apply for a deferred exam must obtain signatures of approval from their parents, homeroom teacher, Academic Director, principal, and the municipal Education Bureau leadership—all of them!"

When the words fell, a commotion rippled through the student ranks.

"In addition, the school strictly forbids any student from, for any personal reason, giving up taking the College Entrance Exam!"

"If a student has financial difficulties and cannot support subsequent study and career development, the school can assist in applying for interest-free student loans, and can also introduce outstanding companies for sponsored contracts."

"In short, one sentence: deferred exams are not allowed, and skipping the exam is even more forbidden!"

Lin Yao listened, stunned. She instinctively tugged on Lin Yu's sleeve.

"Bro, what kind of oppressive clause is that? If I simply refuse, can they tie me to the exam hall?"

Her voice was low, but the Academic Director on the podium seemed to have ears like a windpipe; he immediately answered.

"I know some of you will have doubts. If you simply refuse to go, what can the school do to you?"

There was not a hint of a smile on his face.

"I can tell you clearly: out of responsibility for every student's future, in such cases the Education Bureau will coordinate with the security office and related units to take necessary coercive measures to ensure every student follows the correct path!"

Coercive measures.

Those four words hit everyone's hearts like a block of ice.

Lin Yao's face turned pale instantly.

Lin Yu snorted coldly.

What a high-minded way to put it.

In other words, it's forced purchase and sale.

In the name of "for your own good," they forcibly package you up and sell you to the capital that has been waiting under the stage for a long time.

Student loans? Corporate sponsorship?

They're nothing but a servitude contract.

Signing this kind of contract means they can control and exploit you in the future for any reason.

How is that different from a Master-Servant Contract?

Worse than a Master-Servant Contract.

With a Master-Servant Contract, your allegiance is to a living person. As long as it's a person, there could be humanity and conscience. A slave owner who values his own skin would at least care about the life and death of his slave, since that's his private property.

But these companies, these powers, will not.

They are cold machines wrapped in capital and countless interests.

They will only calculate everything in the most rational way.

Calculate your value, calculate your output, calculate your remaining lifespan.

When your value is squeezed dry, you will be mercilessly discarded, turned into a scrap part.

Five years ago, he had seen through this clearly, and made that kind of decision...

He would never be controlled by others!

Even if he couldn't change everything, he would control his own life...

Become his own capital.

If he had to die, he'd rather die by his own hand—at least he would accept it!

"Class 3-7, Li Mo, come up to prepare for Awakening!"

The Academic Director's voice rang out from the podium again, breaking Lin Yu's thoughts.

The Awakening Ceremony officially began.

As the first name was read, a bespectacled, refined-looking boy walked onto the stage.

It was the top student Lin Yao had mentioned earlier, Li Mo.

He walked to the black Awakening Stone and placed his hand on it.

Hum!

The Awakening Stone emitted a gentle white light, and within the glow a clear rune slowly appeared.

[White Common Profession · Scholar]

Silence fell across the stands.

Although it was only the most ordinary white profession, no one felt surprised or mocked.

The Scholar profession, while roughly zero in early combat capability, is an essential precursor for all research and support professions. With enough resources invested, future achievements can still be considerable.

The Skyward Spire representative on the podium showed a satisfied expression, obviously pleased with the result.

Li Mo himself calmly accepted the outcome, bowed, and stepped down.

"Next, Class 3-2, Wang Hao."

Another student went up.

Again, white light.

[White Common Profession · Farmer]

Suppressed snickers came from the crowd.

The boy named Wang Hao blushed bright red and nearly ran off the stage.

"Bro, is Farmer really that bad?" Lin Yao whispered.

"Not necessarily," Lin Yu replied lightly. "Any profession can be powerful when taken to the extreme. It's just that he probably won't have the chance."

No resources, no background—awakening into a purely livelihood profession meant his life had been predetermined.

One after another, more than a dozen students went up, and unsurprisingly they all revealed white common professions.

[Woodcutter], [Fisherman], [Weaver]...

The atmosphere on the field grew increasingly heavy; some mothers in the parents' section were already wiping away tears discreetly.

This was reality.

Over ninety percent of people would remain ordinary their entire lives.

Until a girl stepped up, and the Awakening Stone finally shone with a different color.

Green light!

[Green Excellent Profession · Windspeaker]

“Wow!”

The whole field erupted instantly!

“Green! An excellent green profession!”

“Oh my god, from our class! It's Liu Yue!”

“Windspeaker! An element-based profession, so powerful!”

The students chattered excitedly, faces full of envy. Parents craned their necks, trying to get a clear look at the lucky girl.

The big-power representatives on the podium finally reacted, whispering among themselves.

Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, even leaned to his assistant and said a few words; the assistant immediately began flipping through the file on the girl named Liu Yue.

“Next, Class 3-9, Zhang Wei.”

Another student stepped up.

When his hand touched the Awakening Stone, an anomaly instantly occurred!

The Awakening Stone lit up with three separate white lights at once!

Three beams of light entangled, finally forming three different white runes floating side by side in the air.

[White Common Profession · Trainee Knight]

[White Common Profession · Shield Bearer]

[White Common Profession · Weapon Apprentice]

Everyone froze.

“What... is happening? Is it broken?”

“Three? How can there be three professions?”

Students looked baffled; even the school leaders on the podium appeared stunned.

The Academic Director reacted fastest. He hurried to the Awakening Stone, examined it closely, and then loudly explained, “Students, do not panic! This is not a fault with the Awakening Stone!”

“This situation is called ‘multiple adaptation’! It means this student’s talent simultaneously aligns with multiple professions! He can choose one of these three professions as his initial profession!”

Chapter 50: Take a gamble!

So that's how it is!

The students below the stage let out understanding exclamations, their gazes toward the boy named Zhang Wei instantly filling with envy.

Even though they were all white-tier professions, having a choice was always better than having none!

Trainee Knight leaned toward offense, Shield Bearer specialized in defense, and Weapon Apprentice had broader development paths later on.

This was practically a newbie starter pack!

The boy named Zhang Wei himself transformed from initial confusion to ecstatic joy.

He stared at those three runes, rubbing his hands excitedly, when suddenly a bold idea popped into his head.

“Teacher!” he asked loudly, “Since I’m compatible with all three professions, then... can I take all three?”

As these words came out, the entire venue fell silent.

Everyone looked at him with expressions of seeing an idiot.

The Academic Director's face instantly darkened, and he sternly rebuked: "Nonsense!"

"Do you think this is a vegetable market where you can pick and choose? You want all three?"

"Professional Awakening is a process of imprinting on the soul, extremely dangerous! Multiple Adaptation is already one-in-ten-thousand luck! And you still want to force fusion?"

"Let me tell you, the compatibility between these three professions is extremely poor! The success rate of forced fusion approaches zero! Once you fail, your spiritual sea will completely collapse, all three professions will disappear, and you'll become a cripple even worse than an ordinary person! Can you bear that consequence!"

This series of questions poured like buckets of cold water, extinguishing the unrealistic fantasies in Zhang Wei's heart.

His face turned deathly pale, not daring to say another word, and he ultimately obediently chose what seemed the most impressive option: [Trainee Knight].

A small disturbance thus settled.

But everyone remembered that profession fusion was an extremely dangerous thing that should absolutely not be attempted lightly.

The Awakening Ceremony continued.

After more than a dozen people, suddenly, the people on the main platform stirred again.

This time, the Awakening Stone simultaneously lit up with one white light and one green light!

[White Common Profession · Miner]

[Green Excellent Profession · Earth Element Affinity]

The commotion on the main platform grew louder than any previous instance.

Those well-dressed representatives from major organizations could no longer maintain their composure, each leaning forward and whispering among themselves.

"Miner and Earth Element Affinity? The compatibility is just too good!"

"Exactly, one handles basic excavation, the other provides elemental perception and control—they're practically natural partners! As long as resources keep up, transitioning later to [Earth Controller] or [Treasure Prospector] wouldn't be a problem!"

"This seedling is good, foundation very solid, has greater potential than that girl earlier who only had Windspeaker!"

Wind Rider Technology's Vice President Feng Rui also temporarily set aside the company's "minor matter," watching the student on stage with great interest.

His assistant immediately reported quietly beside him: "President Feng, this student is named Sun Yi, ordinary family background, both parents are laid-off workers from our Linzhou Steel Plant, grades average to below average."

"Ordinary is good." A calculating smile appeared at the corner of Feng Rui's mouth. "Such children understand gratitude better and are easier to control. Give him a B-grade contract, sign him first."

"Yes." The assistant immediately nodded and noted it down.

On the sports field, the students' eyes turned red with envy.

"Damn, Sun Yi's luck is just too good!"

"Yeah, Miner is a white profession, but paired with Earth Element Affinity, its value multiplies several times over!"

"He's about to take off now!"

Lin Yao also excitedly shook Lin Yu's arm.

"Brother, did you see that? Sun Yi is usually so quiet in class, who knew he'd be this amazing!"

Lin Yu just watched calmly.

Amazing?

Not enough.

White plus green, no matter how good the compatibility, the ceiling was already locked.

To break these shackles, there was only one method...

On the main platform, the boy named Sun Yi was immersed in immense joy. He stared at those two floating runes, trembling all over with excitement.

He could feel that those once lofty important figures below were now watching him with completely new, appraising gazes.

He could also feel, from the distant parents' seating area, his own parents' expressions so excited they were about to cry.

Was this enough?

Not enough!

He remembered his father who went to construction sites to carry bricks after being laid off; he remembered his mother who worked three different hourly jobs daily to supplement their household income.

One green excellent profession might make their family's life slightly better.

But only slightly.

He wanted more! He wanted his parents to completely escape that kind of exhausting, laborious life!

A crazy idea uncontrollably rose in his mind.

Take everything, fuse!

Just like that classmate Zhang Wei earlier, but he wanted to gamble!

His two professions had such good compatibility—the success probability should be much higher than those three completely unrelated professions, right?

Sun Yi's breathing grew heavy, he raised his head and looked at the Academic Director, his gaze carrying a desperate madness.

"Teacher!"

His voice was somewhat hoarse from tension.

"I... can I try taking everything?"

As these words came out, the entire venue fell into dead silence again.

The topic about "fusion" that had just settled was reignited.

Everyone's gaze focused on this outrageously bold boy.

The Academic Director's expression instantly sank.

"Sun Yi! Do you realize what you're saying!"

He sternly rebuked, even harsher than with Zhang Wei earlier.

"I just warned about the dangers of profession fusion! Didn't you hear? Zhang Wei's three professions just had poor compatibility, but your two professions—one belongs to the physical system, one belongs to the elemental system—they conflict at their very roots! Forced fusion will only cause your soul to be torn apart by two different types of power!"

"Probability of success? Let me tell you, less than one percent! Once you fail, you won't even keep the Miner profession, you'll become a complete cripple! What are you using to gamble!"

One percent!

This number smashed into Sun Yi's heart like a heavy hammer.

The students below also gasped sharply.

"Is he crazy? Daring to gamble with one percent probability?"

"Exactly, wouldn't it be better to obediently choose Earth Element Affinity? It's already a green excellent profession, something countless people beg for but can't get!"

"Too impulsive, if this fails, his entire life is ruined."

In the parents' seating area, Sun Yi's parents anxiously stood up, desperately waving at the stage, their faces filled with terror and pleading.

No! Son! Don't gamble!

Sun Yi saw his parents' expressions, his heart bleeding.

But he understood even more clearly that if he didn't gamble, his entire life would remain just like this.

He didn't want to see his father's hands deformed from years of carrying heavy objects anymore, nor did he want to see his mother's feet covered with cracks from long-term immersion in cold water.

Chapter 51: Calm down!

I'll take the gamble!

Using this one percent chance to fight for my entire family's future!

Sun Yi closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, only determination remained within.

"Teacher, I've made my decision."

He bowed deeply toward the Academic Director.

"I'm willing to bear all the consequences!"

The Academic Director looked at him, opened his mouth, and ultimately all his words of persuasion transformed into a long, heavy sigh.

"Very well."

He waved his hand and stepped aside.

This was the student's own choice—he had no right to interfere.

All eyes in the venue converged on Sun Yi.

Sun Yi placed his hand on the Awakening Stone once more, focusing all his mental energy on those two runes.

Merge into one!

Hum!

White light and green light instantly surged, then violently collided with each other!

Instead of the expected fusion, there was intense rejection and conflict!

The two forces tangled wildly on the Awakening Stone, with the energy fluctuations radiating from them causing the entire stage to tremble slightly.

Sun Yi's body shook violently, his face turning deathly pale in an instant, with beads of sweat the size of peas rolling down his forehead.

Failed?

Everyone's hearts leaped into their throats.

Sun Yi's parents saw black before their eyes, nearly fainting on the spot.

Lin Yao gripped Lin Yu's sleeve tightly, her palms drenched in sweat.

"Brother... is he going to fail?"

"I don't know."

Lin Yu calmly uttered three words.

Just as everyone thought the fusion was about to fail and Sun Yi would become a cripple, a sudden change occurred!

At the center of that violent white and green light, a faint yet incredibly dense earthy yellow halo suddenly appeared!

It was precisely the appearance of this halo that seemed to become a perfect adhesive.

The originally conflicting white and green lights actually began to slowly but firmly merge together, using this earthy yellow as their core!

The conflict disappeared.

The rejection vanished.

Finally, all the light converged to a single point, then...

Exploded with a bang!

A dazzling, noble purple light pillar shot straight up into the sky!

Within the light pillar, a new rune more complex and profound than any before slowly took shape!

The entire sports field fell silent.

Everyone was stunned by this sudden, overwhelmingly spectacular scene.

Succeeded?

He actually succeeded!

On the stage, the Academic Director practically scrambled over to the Awakening Stone, his eyes wide as he stared fixedly at that purple rune, his voice trembling with excitement.

"[Purple · Rare Profession]..."

"[Earth Treasure Seeker]!"

"Heavens! It's purple! A truly purple top-tier profession!"

At this moment, Linzhou First High School completely erupted!

"Sun Yi! Incredible!"

The entire sports field exploded into chaos, all students gazing at Sun Yi on the stage with near-worshipful fervor. He had succeeded—he had gambled with a one percent chance and won his future!

Sun Yi himself, the moment he saw that purple rune, felt his legs go weak and collapsed to sit on the ground. He gasped for breath heavily, his face indistinguishable between sweat and tears, simply grinning widely in silent, wild laughter.

He won! His gamble paid off!

The representatives of major organizations on the stage were also deeply moved.

"Quick! Check all of Sun Yi's information! I want him! S-class contract!"

"Nonsense! With his profession, joining our Bedrock Biotech is the best development! We'll give him the best earth attribute resource allocation!"

Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, also forgot about that "trivial matter" concerning the black market. He stood up directly and commanded his assistant.

"Tell him Wind Rider Technology can sponsor his entire family's relocation to the provincial capital, arrange the best nursing home for his parents! Only one condition—sign with us!"

A fierce battle for talent had already begun before Sun Yi even stepped off the stage.

This scene deeply stimulated every student in the audience who hadn't awakened yet.

A green excellent profession could only attract interest for B-class contracts.

But a purple top-tier profession could make these giants tear off all pretenses and fight for him on the spot!

The difference was crystal clear.

Thus, when the next student who awakened multiple professions stepped onto the stage, everyone's hearts leaped into their throats again.

On the Awakening Stone, a white light and a blue light lit up.

[White Common Profession · Hunter]

[Blue Fine Profession · Eagle Eye]

Another perfectly compatible combination!

"Fuse! Hurry up and fuse!"

"Take the gamble! Turn a bicycle into a motorcycle!"

The students below the stage began frantically egging him on.

That male student, clearly also intoxicated by Sun Yi's success, looked at the two lights, his face full of greed and desire.

"Teacher, I choose to fuse!"

The Academic Director's face turned green; he wanted to stop it, but the boy had already pressed his hand down.

Hum!

The light surged!

But this time, no miracle occurred.

The blue and white lights merely collided, then like punctured balloons, instantly annihilated each other!

The light on the Awakening Stone completely died out.

The boy stood frozen in place, the color draining from his face at a visible rate.

"No... impossible... where's my profession?"

The Academic Director rushed over, checked the Awakening Stone, and finally announced with deep sorrow, "Fusion failed, profession imprints collapsed, awakening failed."

Crippled.

A genius who could have had a blue fine profession had just become a cripple.

The entire venue instantly fell silent, the previously fervent atmosphere doused as if by a bucket of ice water, cooling instantly.

But that wasn't the end.

Next, two more students who had awakened multiple professions, influenced by Sun Yi's success and the first failure's tragedy, chose fusion with wishful thinking.

The result, without exception—complete failure!

A girl who awakened [Cook] and [Flame Control] failed her fusion, suffered spiritual sea burns, and fainted on the spot.

A boy who awakened [Blacksmith] and [Strength Enhancement] failed his fusion, both profession imprints completely disappearing.

The consecutive failures made everyone sober up completely.

The Academic Director seized the opportunity, immediately picking up the microphone, his stern voice echoing across the venue.

"Now! Everyone calm down!"

"Let me say it again—the success rate of profession fusion approaches zero infinitely! Sun Yi's success is one in ten thousand, no, one in a hundred thousand, a million—a miracle rarely seen! It cannot be replicated!"

"Put another way! Whatever profession each of you awakens was determined the moment you placed your hands on the stone! If it's meant to be yours, it will naturally appear in its fused form! Forcing fusion is gambling with your life! Can you afford to gamble like that!"

These words finally shocked everyone into compliance.

No one dared mention fusion again.

Until a boy walked onto the stage.

Chapter 52: Five golden lights!

Chapter 52: Five Golden Lights!

When his hand touched it, the entire stage was drowned in blinding light.

Three!

Three purple beams of light shot up into the sky!

[Purple Top-Tier Profession · Holy Light Affinity]

[Purple Top-Tier Profession · Blessing Warlock]

[Purple Top-Tier Profession · Sacred Codex]

The whole venue fell deathly silent.

Everyone was stunned into thoughtlessness by such a seemingly miraculous sight.

Three!

Three purple top-tier professions!

And their affinity was absolute—practically made for each other!

The big shots on the stage lost their composure; they abandoned decorum and surged straight toward the Awakening Stone.

“My God! If these... if these fuse...”

“It will definitely produce a gold-tier result! It has to be a Legendary-level profession!”

“No! It might even break into something beyond that threshold!”

All eyes fixed on the boy.

His face was written over with shock and ecstasy.

But very quickly that joy turned into struggle and fear.

He thought of the classmates whose fusion attempts had failed earlier and had been left as wrecks.

Should he gamble?

In theory, fusing these three professions would have a very high success rate.

But what if—

What if he was the unlucky one?

If he failed, he would plummet from heaven to hell in an instant and lose everything!

He couldn't do it.

Under the expectant gazes of everyone, he struggled for a full minute before tremblingly speaking.

“I... I choose [Sacred Codex].”

He gave it up.

He surrendered that one-in-a-lifetime chance to skyrocket and took the safest purple profession.

The school leaders and teachers on the stage all exhaled in relief.

Good—no more disasters.

Lin Yu watched the boy step down from the stage with no ripple in his heart.

He didn't know whether, years from now, when he remembered today's choice, he would be grateful for his caution or regret missing the only chance to touch legend.

While everyone was still sighing over those three purple professions, another student stepped onto the stage.

Boom!

A dazzling golden beam, brighter and more piercing than any light before, shot up into the sky!

[Golden Epic-level Profession · Dragonblood Warrior]

“Gol—golden! It's a golden epic!”

“My God! After Lin Yu five years ago, our school produced another golden!”

The field erupted again!

If purple meant genius, then gold meant legend!

Lin Yao grabbed Lin Yu's arm excitedly and shook him hard.

“Brother! Golden! Our school produced gold again!”

Lin Yu only smiled faintly.

Just then, the Academic Director read the next name.

“Class 31, Senior Year, Zhao Tianyang—step up for Awakening!”

Zhao Tianyang walked onto the stage.

His hulking frame and the base attributes soaring to five hundred after the baptism of the Life Serum made him radiate an aura far beyond his peers.

He stood before the Awakening Stone but did not immediately place his hand on it.

A profession Awakening is deeply tied to the awakenee's constitution, spirit, and their deepest inner yearning.

Right now, only one thought occupied him.

Become stronger!

Become even stronger!

He wanted to prove his worth to his benefactor!

His benefactor had spared no expense to save him and to elevate him—pulling him and his entire family out of the abyss of despair!

This debt, he would repay with his life!

He pressed his hand heavily onto the Awakening Stone.

Hum!

A brilliant golden beam, even more dazzling than the Dragonblood Warrior's, shot up into the sky!

[Golden Epic-level Profession · Heart of Fury]!

"Another gold!"

"My God! What is happening to our school today? Two golden epics!"

"Zhao Tianyang! It's Zhao Tianyang!"

The whole field ignited instantly; cheers and astonished cries combined into a tidal roar, nearly overturning the entire campus. The shock brought by the earlier Dragonblood Warrior had not yet fully subsided before a second golden epic followed in quick succession!

The representatives of major powers on the stage could no longer sit still.

"This Zhao Tianyang—isn't he that specialty student? The one with S+ physicality?"

"Yes! It's him! Heart of Fury perfectly matches his constitution! We must recruit him! S+ contract, top salary!"

Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, tossed aside the company's smaller concerns and stared at Zhao Tianyang with shining eyes; this prospect was even better than the Dragonblood Warrior!

However, just as everyone thought they had reached the climax,

Anomalies flared again!

Beside that brilliant golden beam, yet another identical—golden—light flared up!

Boom!

A second golden beam shot into the sky!

[Golden Epic-level Profession · Unyielding War Soul]!

The thunderous roar from the field fell abruptly silent.

Everyone was like a duck whose neck had been gripped—mouths agape but unable to make a sound.

Two?

Two golden epics?

What was happening? Multiple Adaptation? Golden multiple adaptation?

The Academic Director on the stage nearly popped his eyes out; he stared fixedly at the two golden runes hovering side by side, his lips trembling, unable to form a word.

"This... how is this possible..."

"Two epic-level professions appearing at once? Never heard of that! Not recorded in history!"

"Fuse them? Is he going to fuse them? What would two epic professions fuse into? A Legendary?"

The major-power representatives completely lost their composure; they rose from their seats and surged forward heedless of everything to get a clearer view.

Feng Rui's breathing grew coarse; his mind went blank.

One golden epic is already the kind of top-tier talent that major forces would kill to recruit.

Two... this exceeded everyone's understanding!

In the crowd, Lin Yao's small hand clenched Lin Yu's arm so hard her nails nearly dug into his flesh.

"Brother... I... I'm not dreaming, am I?"

"Two... golden ones?"

Lin Yu watched calmly, expressionless.

But internally he had some assessment of Zhao Tianyang's potential.

Two?

This was only the beginning.

While everyone still wallowed in the stupor of the double gold, the Awakening Stone flashed again!

Boom!

A third golden beam shot into the sky!

[Golden Epic-level Profession · Titan's Might]!

The venue fell deathly silent.

If two golds were shocking, three golds were a miracle!

Everyone's minds had stopped functioning; they only stared dumbly at the three golden pillars piercing the heavens and the hulking figure bathing in golden light on the stage.

Madness.

The world had gone mad.

Yet this was still not the end.

Boom!

A fourth golden beam!

[Golden Epic-level Profession · Body of a Hundred Battles]!

Boom!

A fifth golden beam!

[Golden Epic-level Profession · Annihilation Charge]!

Chapter 53: It's Lin Yao's turn

Five massive golden pillars of light, like five divine pillars supporting the heavens, stood erected on the main platform, dyeing the entire Linzhou First High School in a dazzling golden hue.

Those five complex, profound golden runes, radiating terrifying pressure, floated side by side in the air as if mocking the ignorance of everyone in this world.

The sports field fell into deathly silence.

There were no cheers, no exclamations of awe.

Only the collective sound of sharp intakes of breath.

Students, parents, teachers—everyone seemed to have been petrified by magic, frozen in place, completely motionless.

Among the important figures on the main platform, some had legs go weak and directly collapsed into their chairs; others gripped the railings beside them so tightly their knuckles turned white from the strain; while some kept rubbing their eyes, believing they were seeing hallucinations.

The Academic Director stood with his mouth agape, throat making hoarse sounds like a fish out of water. He wanted to say something but found he couldn't produce a single complete syllable.

Five!

A full five golden Epic-level Professions!

This was no longer genius, no longer prodigy—this was monstrous! This was divine descent!

Lin Yao had completely lost her senses. She released Lin Yu's arm and just stared blankly at Zhao Tianyang on the platform, unconsciously murmuring under her breath.

"Five... how can there be five..."

Just when everyone thought this was the limit, the peak of miracles this world could contain.

At the center of those five golden pillars of light, on the Awakening Stone, a different kind of light suddenly appeared.

It wasn't golden.

It was a deep, crimson red that seemed to contain mountains of corpses, oceans of blood, and realms of demons!

The moment that red light appeared, the five previously arrogant golden pillars simultaneously emitted mournful cries, their brilliance instantly dimming as if bowing in submission to their sovereign!

Boom!

A blood-colored pillar of light shot straight into the sky!

Its radiance wasn't blinding, yet it carried a terrifying pressure that made everyone's souls tremble!

Within the pillar, a crimson rune—a hundred times more complex than the five golden runes combined, filled with killing intent, destruction, and ominous aura—slowly took form.

At this moment, time seemed to stand still.

On the main platform, Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, felt his legs give way, unable to support himself any longer as he collapsed onto the ground.

He wasn't the only one.

Over half of the representatives from major powers were similarly distraught, collapsing to the ground.

They stared at that blood-colored pillar of light, at that crimson rune that resembled a demon god's brand, their minds filled with only one legendary term they couldn't believe yet had to accept.

Myth!

That which surpasses Epic, existing only in myths and legends... a Myth-level Profession!

"Red... it's red..."

The Academic Director finally found his voice. He extended a trembling finger, pointing at that crimson rune, and spoke in a nearly delirious tone filled with endless fear and fanaticism, enunciating each word carefully.

"[Red-Myth-level Profession]..."

"[Asura]!"

When the Academic Director used all his strength to shout these six words, the entire world seemed to have been muted.

Myth!

A term that only existed in ancient texts and heroic epics! A realm mere mortals weren't even qualified to gaze upon!

And now, it had appeared alive before everyone's eyes.

On the main platform, those representatives of major powers, those important figures who usually stood high above and decided the fates of countless Practitioners, had all lost their composure.

What did the birth of a Myth-level Profession mean?

It meant that for the next several decades, even centuries, the world's structure would undergo earth-shaking changes because of this youth named Zhao Tianyang on the platform!

The so-called "golden Epics" they had been fighting over earlier appeared as insignificant as dust before this touch of crimson.

The same thought arose in everyone's mind.

Gamble!

What would he choose?

Five golden Epics, one red Myth!

If these were to merge... what would be born? Something surpassing Myth?

No one dared to contemplate further.

Under the silent gaze of hundreds of thousands, Zhao Tianyang on the platform finally moved.

He showed no hesitation, no struggle whatsoever.

If his life were still his own, he might have gambled for that elusive "stronger" possibility.

But now, his life, his soul, everything about him belonged to that calm figure at the alley entrance.

His master had given him new life, and what he needed to repay was absolute loyalty and stability.

Any risk, no matter how small, would be a desecration of his master's grace!

He reached out his hand and, under everyone's expectant, frenzied, greedy gazes, gently tapped on that crimson rune.

[Asura].

Hum!

With his choice, the five brilliant golden pillars, like guards who had completed their mission, instantly transformed into specks of golden light and dissipated into the air.

Only that single blood-colored Myth pillar remained, standing proudly between heaven and earth.

He had given it up.

He had abandoned those five golden Epics, abandoned that possibility of creating history and surpassing Myth!

"Whoosh..."

Someone in the crowd was the first to let out a long exhale.

Then, successive sighs arose throughout.

Half were filled with regret—regret at not witnessing the birth of an unprecedented miracle.

The other half, however, felt relief.

A Myth-level [Asura], while terrifying, still fell within comprehensible boundaries.

But if he had truly succeeded in merging them, what would have been born would be a monster that no one could predict or control.

For the entire world, that might not have been a good thing.

"Good! Good! Good!"

The school leadership on the main platform reacted first. Their faces flushed red with excitement as they repeated "good" three times.

A Myth-level!

For Linzhou First High School, for the entire city of Linzhou, this was an immense achievement! Glory enough to be recorded in history!

"Hurry! Escort student Zhao Tianyang, along with the previous Dragon Blood Warrior and Earth Treasure Seeker, to the VIP lounge for rest!"

The Academic Director immediately arranged loudly. Several teachers quickly stepped forward to carefully guide the still-exhausted Zhao Tianyang and the other prodigies off the platform.

An unprecedented storm had temporarily subsided.

But everyone understood that the real competition had only just begun.

The Awakening Ceremony continued.

However, after witnessing the world-shattering descent of Myth, everything that followed seemed utterly dull.

Blue Elite?

Oh.

Green Rare?

Hmm.

Even when another Purple Premium Profession appeared, it failed to cause much stir.

All the students' spirits had been completely crushed by Zhao Tianyang's terrifying display of five golds and one red.

Everyone's mindset had shifted from initial nervous anticipation to current numbness and resignation.

Until one name was called.

"Class 7, Grade 12, Lin Yao, please come to the platform to prepare for awakening."

Chapter 54: Customizable Purple Genius

Lin Yao's body suddenly stiffened in the crowd.

It was her turn.

She stared at the black Awakening Stone on the platform that had just given birth to a Myth-level profession, her hands and feet turning ice cold.

The pressure was overwhelming.

Before her, there had been Sun Yi's purple supreme grade, an unknown classmate's golden epic, and Zhao Tianyang's god-like red myth.

What about her?

What would she awaken?

What if... what if it was just the most ordinary white profession? How embarrassing would that be?

Would her brother be disappointed in her?

She instinctively turned her head to look at Lin Yu beside her, her face filled with helplessness and panic.

Lin Yu looked at his sister's expression that seemed about to burst into tears and smiled.

"Do you trust your brother?"

Lin Yao nodded vigorously, tears already welling up in her eyes.

Lin Yu reached out his hand, but instead of ruffling her hair like he did when they were children, he gently smoothed a stray strand of hair from her forehead.

His movements were gentle, but his words carried an undeniable authority and confidence.

"Go ahead, don't be nervous."

"Your brother has your back."

"No matter what profession you awaken, your brother can make you the strongest person in this world."

He didn't lower his voice when he said this.

Many students and parents around them heard it clearly.

Instantly, various discussions erupted.

"Who is this guy? Such big talk?"

A boy recognized Lin Yu, his face showing contempt.

"Him? You don't know him? He's that golden epic from five years ago who became obsessed with garbage cards and skipped the exams for five consecutive years—the waste, Lin Yu!"

"So it's him! Lin Yao's brother! No wonder he looked familiar."

"Hah, he's become like that himself, yet he still has the nerve to boast here? Making his sister the strongest in the world? What guarantee does he have? With his garbage cards?"

"Really laughable. His sister is so unlucky to have a brother like him."

The mockery and ridicule were completely undisguised.

But more people, especially some girls, looked at Lin Yao with expressions full of envy.

"Wow, even though I know he's boasting, her brother is so handsome!"

"I wish I had a brother like that, supporting me no matter what..."

"Yeah, that feeling of being unconditionally trusted is amazing!"

Every word of these discussions reached Lin Yao's ears.

She stared blankly at Lin Yu.

Watching him calmly face everyone's mockery, looking into his steady and powerful eyes.

An unprecedented warmth instantly surged through her entire body.

Right.

What am I afraid of?

I still have my brother.

Even if I really fail to awaken and become an ordinary person, my brother would never give up on me.

What he just said wasn't boasting.

He would really do it.

Because he's my brother!

All the tension, fear, and anxiety were completely washed away at this moment by something called "courage."

Lin Yao straightened her small chest and nodded heavily with all her strength.

"Brother! I'm going!"

She turned around without a trace of hesitation, walking with firm steps toward the platform.

Every step was incredibly resolute.

She stood before the black Awakening Stone and gently placed her slender, pale hand on it.

Buzz!

A brilliant purple light shot up into the sky!

[Purple Supreme Profession-Frost Queen]!

"Another purple!"

"Not bad, Frost Queen, a powerful magic profession!"

"Although it can't compare to gold, it's still among the top in our year!"

A small commotion came from below the stage.

Lin Yao looked at the purple rune floating in the air, let out a long sigh of relief, and a bright smile appeared on her small face.

Great!

It's purple!

I didn't embarrass my brother!

She was just about to confirm her selection.

But at that moment, a sudden change occurred!

Beside that purple light pillar, an identical... purple light actually lit up!

Buzz!

A second purple light pillar shot up into the sky!

[Purple Supreme Profession-Storm Spirit]!

"Huh? Two purples?"

"Multiple professions? And both are rare-grade?"

"The compatibility isn't particularly good either, ice plus wind... is she going to fuse them?"

The crowd below hadn't yet processed what was happening.

But some of the important figures on the platform had already straightened up in their seats.

Lin Yao was also stunned. She looked at the two purple runes side by side, not knowing what to do for a moment.

However, this was only the beginning.

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

Third! Fourth! Fifth!

[Purple Supreme Profession-Earth Walker]!

[Purple Supreme Profession-Flame Chanter]!

[Purple Supreme Profession-Shadow Assassin]!

Five light pillars of different colors but all at the purple grade stood side by side, enveloping Lin Yao's small figure.

The entire venue fell silent for a moment.

Then, it completely exploded!

"Holy shit! Five purples?!"

"What's going on? Elementalist plus assassin? How do you fuse that?"

"What kind of constitution does she have?!"

Lin Yu was also stunned.

Five?

Yao Yao has this much potential?

Something's not right.

However, the light from the Awakening Stone showed no signs of stopping.

It was as if a switch had been flipped.

Buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz—!

Purple light pillars surged out from the Awakening Stone like bamboo shoots after rain!

Ten!

Twenty!

Fifty!

One hundred!

On the platform, the Awakening Stone that was taller than a person now trembled violently like boiling water.

Overwhelming purple runes poured out from it, instantly filling the entire space above the platform!

Mages, warriors, assassins, priests, archers...

Combat types, life types, support types, manufacturing types...

All known human purple supreme professions, and even some unheard-of ones, now transformed into runes that surrounded Lin Yao like countless stars in the sky!

Over a thousand!

Dense purple light pillars converged into a vast purple ocean!

The entire Linzhou First High School was completely submerged in this sea of purple light!

Dead silence fell over the venue.

Everyone lost the ability to speak, just staring dumbfounded at this absurd scene.

If Zhao Tianyang's five golds and one red were a divine miracle,

then what they were witnessing now was like a god overturning their entire profession database!

Lin Yu was completely dumbfounded.

Holy shit?

What's going on with Yao Yao?

Is she a succubus reincarnated, born with countless charms, able to adapt to all professions?

Or is she the true master of all professions?

This display, this visual impact, was completely comparable to Zhao Tianyang's five golden lights!

Or perhaps... it really was the effect of that Blessing Card?

On the platform.

Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, who had been disheartened because of Zhao Tianyang, suddenly sprang up from his chair. His breathing was rapid, his face flushed red with extreme excitement!

"This... what does this mean... do you understand?!"

He wasn't asking anyone in particular, more like talking to himself.

"This means she can become any profession! Wind Rider Technology needs wind mages, she can be Storm Spirit! Giant Force Group needs earth warriors, she can be Earth Walker!"

"She is... a customizable purple genius!"

Chapter 55: Everything is calculated!

One sentence woke everyone up!

All the major faction representatives on the podium had unprecedented brilliance bursting from their eyes!

That's right!

Zhao Tianyang's Myth-level profession [Asura] was strong, incredibly strong!

But that also meant his future was filled with the risk of losing control! Such an existence couldn't be easily controlled! Even if major factions signed him, they'd have to treat him like an ancestor!

But Lin Yao was different!

She was only Purple!

Although there were over a thousand Purple professions, fundamentally, the ceiling of each profession was only at the Supreme grade!

What did this mean?

It meant controllable!

A top-tier genius who could be firmly grasped in the hands of capital, and could now be "customized" into any profession according to company needs!

In the eyes of these major corporations, her value was even higher than that uncontrollable Myth-level!

"We can't let her choose! We absolutely cannot let her choose herself!"

The representative from Bedrock Biotech, a fat middle-aged man, roughly pushed his chair aside and charged directly toward the center of the podium.

"We must sign her before she makes her decision!"

"Exactly! Sign the contract first! We'll help her decide which profession to choose!"

"S-grade contract!!"

"Get out of my way! Our Giant Force Group wants her!"

The scene instantly descended into chaos!

Over a dozen big shots who usually wore suits and looked respectable now acted like sharks smelling blood, frantically rushing toward Lin Yao beside the Awakening Stone.

They roughly pushed aside teachers trying to stop them, even completely ignoring the grim-faced education bureau leaders standing nearby!

"Stop! What are you doing!"

The Academic Director roared, trying to maintain order.

"The Awakening Ceremony isn't over yet! Everyone step back!"

However, no one listened to him.

Faced with the enormous temptation of a "customizable genius," all rules and decorum were torn to shreds!

Feng Rui was the first to rush to the front. Looking at Lin Yao, who was surrounded by thousands of purple runes and looked completely bewildered, he shouted with all his might.

"Student Lin Yao! I'm Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology! I now represent the company in offering you a top-tier SS-grade contract! As long as you sign! We..."

Before he could finish speaking, he was roughly shoved aside by a fat arm, staggering and almost falling.

The Bedrock Biotech representative squeezed to the front like a mountain of flesh.

"Feng Rui, get lost! Wind Rider Technology wants mages! Having her choose Storm Spirit would be a waste of talent?!"

The fat man turned around, his face plastered with what he thought was a kind smile.

"Student Lin Yao, come to our Giant Force Group! We'll give you an SSS-grade contract! As long as you choose [Earth Walker]! In the future, you'll be our group's chief warrior!"

"Bullshit! Having a girl choose Earth Walker? Are you stupid? Does your Giant Force Group have no shame!"

"You don't understand anything! This is called making the best use of talent!"

Arguments, threats, and promises exploded around Lin Yao's ears.

Surrounded by these maddened important figures, she could almost feel their spittle flying toward her face.

She wanted to speak, to tell them this was her profession, that she wanted to decide for herself.

"I..."

She had just opened her mouth.

Feng Rui glared at her fiercely, cutting her off.

"You what? What does a little girl like you understand? You decide for yourself? Do you know how to choose to maximize benefits? If you choose wrong, you'll ruin your entire life!"

"Exactly!" Another company representative chimed in, "Listen to us! We have the most professional teams to plan your future! You just need to follow orders!"

Lin Yao was scolded until she felt utterly humiliated.

You decide?

You don't understand anything!

She felt like she wasn't a person, but a commodity placed on a shelf.

Soon, this frenzy of interest exchange no longer had room for her to speak.

These people's arguments were no longer directed at her, but at each other.

"Feng Rui, I'll offer fifty million! Withdraw now! This girl belongs to our Bedrock Biotech!"

"Fifty million? Are you treating me like a beggar? Wind Rider Technology is willing to pay one hundred million to make all of you get lost!"

"One hundred million to buy out a customizable genius's future? Dream on! We offer two hundred million!"

The monetary figures rapidly climbed.

But this money had nothing to do with Lin Yao.

This was the "exit fee" they were paying to make competitors give up.

A representative from another company sneered coldly and began calculating Lin Yao's value, completely quantifying her.

"A top-tier Purple-grade Practitioner can create at least five billion in value for a company within ten years! With proper operation, reaching ten billion isn't impossible!"

"And she can become any top-tier Practitioner we need! This value is immeasurable!"

"Have her choose Storm Spirit, coordinate with our company's medicine development, and in ten years! No! Five years! We can monopolize the entire wind-element medicine market of Ninghai Province! By then, forget ten billion, we could earn back one hundred billion!"

"Provided she absolutely obeys!"

Another representative added, his words filled with cold calculation.

"If we sign her, she can't have any private life! Working twenty hours daily is basic! 007 is her blessing! All her time must be used to create value for the company!"

"No vacations, no friends, and definitely no relationships!"

"Exactly! Her genes are also precious wealth! In the future, her marriage must be arranged by the company! For business alliances to maximize benefits!"

"Even her eggs can be cultivated through high-tech means to mass-produce more potential descendants for the company!"

They were calculating how much it would cost to make other companies give up.

But would the company bear this cost themselves?

No.

Ultimately, all costs would be extracted from Lin Yao herself, a hundredfold, a thousandfold!

These words were like the sharpest knives, stabbing into Lin Yao's heart one by one.

Her entire body froze.

So... this is how it was?

This was how they saw her?

A commodity that could be priced? A tool that could be squeezed dry of all value? A breeding machine whose future and descendants were all arranged?

The sky full of purple light was no longer glory, but had become a huge cage flashing with price tags.

She felt the world spinning and almost suffocated.

Just when she was about to break down.

She saw it.

In the chaotic crowd on the sports field, she saw that familiar figure.

Brother.

Lin Yu stood up.

He just stood there calmly, but all the noisy discussions and mockery around him seemed to fade away.

He was walking step by step toward the podium.

Lin Yao remembered.

What her brother had said to her before she went on stage.

"Go ahead, don't be nervous."

"Big brother will back you up."

"No matter what profession you awaken, big brother can make you the strongest person in this world."

Yes.

What am I afraid of?

I still have big brother!

Chapter 56: !! Don't! Choose!

An indescribable courage surged from the deepest part of Lin Yao's body, washing away all fear and despair.

Don't you want a controllable genius?

Don't you want to treat me like a commodity?

Don't you think you can arrange everything about me?

Fine.

Then I'll give you something you can never control!

Lin Yao abruptly closed her eyes, shutting out all the ugly faces and dirty deals from the outside world.

She sank her entire consciousness into that purple ocean of professions.

Then, resolutely and decisively, she made her choice.

Fusion!

But just as she reached out her hand, before she could touch any of the countless runes filling the sky, a large hand suddenly grabbed her wrist!

"She wants to fuse!"

A sharp, piercing shout shattered Lin Yao's determination.

It was Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology!

He gripped Lin Yao's wrist so tightly his face twisted with excitement and anger, the force almost crushing her bones.

"Stop right there!"

This shout instantly halted the mad scramble among all the powerful figures who had been fiercely competing.

They turned their heads in unison, dozens of greedy green eyes all focusing on Lin Yao.

Their gazes no longer held any appreciation or admiration, only naked greed and cold possessiveness.

"How dare she!" roared the obese representative from Bedrock Biotech, his plump cheeks trembling.

"A little girl! How dare she make her own decision!"

"Fusion? Does she know how much her value will drop if she fuses? Does she know how much loss this means for us?"

In just those few dozen seconds of argument, they had gained an even more terrifying understanding of Lin Yao's value.

Her worth had long transcended her as an individual.

"This constitution... we must find a way to replicate it!" one representative whispered urgently to the person beside him. "Control her parents! Study her genetic sequence! See how we can create another, no, an entire batch of Lin Yaos!"

"Exactly! Breeding! We must conduct optimal genetic breeding! Her offspring must be in our control!"

These powerful figures who had always stood high above, controlling countless people's destinies, had now completely torn off their masks.

Faced with a controllable "commodity" with limitless potential and infinite profits, they revealed their truest, ugliest faces.

And now, this "commodity" actually wanted to decide her own attributes?

What an absolute joke!

Dream on!

"Stop this!"

The school leader on the podium finally reacted, rushing forward to try and pull Feng Rui's hand away, his face filled with rage.

"What are you doing! Let go of my student! She has the right to choose freely!"

The Education Bureau leader also stepped forward, his face ashen.

"President Feng! According to the law, no one has the right to interfere with an Awakened's autonomous choice! Your actions are seriously illegal!"

However, his warning only earned him Feng Rui's utterly contemptuous cold laugh.

"Freedom? Director Wang, you're talking to me about freedom?"

Feng Rui released Lin Yao, but he and over a dozen others formed an even tighter circle, trapping Lin Yao, the school leader, and the Education Bureau leader in the center.

The obese representative from Bedrock Biotech took a step forward, his massive body bringing intense pressure.

"Director Wang, let me calculate something for you."

"Her one 'free' choice will cause over a dozen companies here to lose at least hundreds of billions in total output value over the next ten years!"

"Her one 'free' choice will cause the economic structure of seven cities around Ninghai Province to regress five years due to setbacks in our industries!"

"Her one 'free' choice might even affect our material supply at the Abyssal Domains frontline!"

The fat man extended a finger, almost poking Director Wang in the face.

"Now, tell me, is her personal freedom worth that price?!"

Director Wang's lips moved, but no words came out.

He was completely stunned by these words.

"Freedom my ass!" another company representative cursed roughly. "In the face of absolute profit, rules are meant to be broken! Today, she must choose one profession from what we need! No one can change this!"

"Exactly! She has no right to decide for herself!"

"Her future is ours to determine!"

The school leader trembled with anger. "You... you're nothing but robbers!"

"Robbers?" Feng Rui laughed, straightening his disheveled tie as he spoke slowly. "Principal, don't be so harsh with your words. We're just optimizing resource allocation. Letting a genius like her contribute to Ninghai Province's economic development is her honor."

"As for her..."

Feng Rui's gaze fell on Lin Yao, cold as if looking at an inanimate object.

"She only needs to obey. That's enough."

Lin Yao stood at the center of the encirclement, her entire body cold.

Looking at these people's faces, listening to them dividing up her future, she felt nauseous.

So this was the world her brother had faced?

Her brother had a golden epic profession, and he was a Card Creator!

It was a very comprehensive profession... with high economic value too!

Would the pressure he faced be any less than hers?

The loneliness of being misunderstood, of being treated as an outsider.

The despair of being abandoned by rules and interests.

She thought she was beginning to understand.

Why her brother would rather bear five years of criticism than walk his own path.

Because if you don't resist, you'll be devoured until not even bones remain.

If it were truly for contributing to the world, that would be one thing.

But was that really the case?

She raised her head, stubbornly looking at these "sharks" surrounding her.

She remembered her brother's calm, determined back as he walked toward the podium.

Her brother was coming toward her.

She couldn't lose.

She couldn't kneel down before her brother arrived.

Lin Yao straightened her slender back, using all her strength to speak word by word.

"I. Will. Not. Choose."

"I choose fusion!"

"What did you say?!" Feng Rui's expression instantly turned ferocious. "Say that again!"

"I said, I want to fuse!" Lin Yao's voice wasn't loud, but it clearly echoed throughout the deathly silent podium.

"Looking for death!"

One representative completely lost his patience. He directly reached out to cover Lin Yao's mouth, trying to forcibly control her!

But his hand stopped mid-air.

A stronger hand had grabbed his wrist.

Outside the crowd, someone had appeared without anyone noticing.

Lin Yu.

He stood there calmly, gripping the representative's wrist, his face expressionless.

"Who are you! Let go!" the representative roared.

Lin Yu ignored him, looking only at his sister in the encirclement—pale-faced but still standing straight.

Then he looked at Feng Rui, at the obese representative, at all the people surrounding his sister.

His voice was very calm.

"Let her go."

Chapter 57: A bright future, a bright future!

Lin Yu did not respond to the representative's roar.

His wrist gave just a slight flick.

Crack!

A crisp sound of bone breaking was especially jarring on the deathly silent stage.

"Ah—!"

The company representative let out a shrill, miserable scream. His entire body flew backward like a discarded sack, tumbling seven or eight meters through the air before crashing into a row of chairs and coming to an ungainly stop.

The entire venue erupted in uproar!

Lin Yu shook his hand slightly, as if merely flicking off a bit of dust.

He pulled the pale-faced Lin Yao behind him, using his own body to completely separate her from those dozen-plus pairs of greedy eyes.

Hiding behind her brother's broad back, breathing in that familiar, reassuring scent, Lin Yao's heart—which had been pounding wildly in her chest—miraculously calmed down.

All her fear, grievance, and anger transformed in that moment into infinite reliance.

With her brother here.

There was nothing to fear.

"You dare attack someone?!"

Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, was thoroughly enraged.

He never expected that this waste in his eyes would dare to attack them—these important figures—right in front of everyone!

"Security! Where the hell is security! Seize him!"

"A piece of trash abandoned by the school, and you dare run wild here!"

The fat representative from Bedrock Biotech also roared, veins bulging on his plump face.

However, they did not charge at Lin Yu again.

The strength this young man had just displayed made them wary.

But they couldn't let Lin Yao fuse!

A customizable purple-tier genius was of immeasurable value! Once fusion occurred, it meant this greatest point of value would completely vanish!

"Go around him!"

A flash of ruthlessness crossed Feng Rui's eyes as he signaled to the people beside him.

"He's only one person! We'll split up! Grab the girl! We absolutely cannot let her fuse!"

Instantly, four or five representatives, as if receiving a command, immediately moved to flank Lin Yao from another direction!

They planned to bypass Lin Yu, this tough obstacle, and directly control their "merchandise"!

School leaders and teachers tried to block them but were roughly shoved aside.

"Get out of the way! Don't block us!"

Just as those filthy hands were about to reach Lin Yao.

Lin Yu prepared to move.

But an even more massive figure, like an iron tower, suddenly blocked the path of those representatives.

It was Zhao Tianyang!

He had rushed onto the stage at some unknown time, his enormous frame completely blocking the passageway.

"Move aside!"

a representative roared.

Zhao Tianyang remained silent, simply standing there. The oppressive, slaughter-filled aura belonging to the [Asura] profession was released without restraint.

The usually pampered company representatives, hit by this imposing pressure, immediately felt their legs go weak and their breathing become labored.

They were Practitioners, but their levels were too low, and they all had auxiliary professions. They had never experienced such a situation.

"Zhao... Zhao Tianyang?"

Feng Rui recognized this fierce individual who had just awakened a Myth-level profession, his heart sinking violently.

Why was he here?

Why was he helping Lin Yu?

"Student Zhao! This is none of your business! Wind Rider Technology is willing to pay five million for you to step aside!" a representative hastily offered.

Zhao Tianyang ignored him completely, remaining unmoved.

During this brief moment of stunned hesitation.

The Academic Director on stage seized the opportunity. He rushed to Lin Yao's side, using his own body to shield her, and shouted loudly.

"Lin Yao! Don't mind them! Choose! Choose according to your own wishes!"

Lin Yao nodded firmly.

Without any further hesitation, protected behind the dual fortress formed by her brother and Zhao Tianyang, and under her teacher's guardianship, she stretched out her slender finger and resolutely pointed toward the center of that purple starry sea!

"Fuse!"

Hum—!

Thousands of purple light pillars, in that instant, as if obeying some supreme command, all converged toward that central point!

A radiance of ten thousand lights!

The entire world seemed to be left with nothing but that ultimate purple!

When the light faded.

A brand new, crimson rune, emanating infinite mystery and majesty, hovered quietly before Lin Yao.

Its glow was deeper, more ancient, than any of the professions Zhao Tianyang had displayed before.

Another... Myth-level profession!

[Omni-Arcanist]!

However, looking at this crimson rune representing supreme glory, none of the people on the stage felt even a trace of joy.

Lin Yao herself didn't either.

She had succeeded. She had awakened a Myth-level profession beyond her wildest expectations.

But she couldn't feel happy at all.

The ugly faces of those people just now, the words treating her as merchandise and a breeding tool, had been deeply driven into her heart.

This honor had come with too much humiliation.

"Bastard!"

Feng Rui stared at the golden rune, feeling as if his heart was bleeding. His face contorted as he let out a roar of sheer frustration.

"It's over! It's all over!"

The fat representative from Bedrock Biotech plopped down onto the floor, the fat on his face trembling wildly.

A customizable purple-tier genius, gone!

Their grand blueprint to carve up the future, monopolize the market, and mass-produce genius offspring had completely collapsed!

Hundreds of billions in losses!

How were they going to explain this to the board of directors!

The dozen-plus representatives from major companies all looked ashen-faced, their expressions toward Lin Yu and Lin Yao filled with venom and hatred.

Lin Yu shielded his sister behind him, already prepared for an intense battle.

However.

Something strange happened.

Feng Rui, who had just looked ready to devour someone, after his initial rage and loss of composure, slowly calmed the expression on his face.

He stared fixedly at the [Omni-Arcanist] rune, the venom in his eyes gradually replaced by another, even more fervent emotion.

Still greed!

He suddenly stood up, straightened his suit, and actually forced a stiff smile onto his face.

The other company representatives also began to catch on.

Right!

The customizable genius was gone.

But the one before them was still a genuine Myth-level Practitioner!

Even if she wasn't controllable, a Myth-level was still a Myth-level! Her future potential was equally immeasurable!

Sign her!

Once they grasped this point, the atmosphere on the stage underwent a peculiar transformation instantly.

Feng Rui was the first to step forward. He directed what he thought was a kindly smile at Lin Yao, even giving a slight bow.

"Student Lin Yao, congratulations on awakening a Myth-level profession."

"Just now... we were too excited, our attitude was poor. I hereby offer you a formal apology on behalf of Wind Rider Technology."

These words left the school leaders and teachers utterly dumbfounded.

An apology?

How could their expressions shift so naturally?

The fat man from Bedrock Biotech also scrambled up, dusted off his clothes, and crowded forward with a beaming smile.

"Yes, yes, Student Lin Yao, we were wrong. We were just overly eager for talent, momentarily confused. Please don't take it to heart."

"Myth-level profession [Omni-Arcanist]—boundless future, truly boundless future!"

Chapter 58: We need to think about it for a while

A tense conflict that could have erupted at any moment was brushed aside by them as if it were nothing.

It was as if all those vicious words and rough actions had never happened.

They offered insincere apologies, and then, once again, surrounded Lin Yao.

Only this time, their attitudes had become countless times more respectful.

"Student Lin Yao, our Wind Rider Technology SS-level contract remains valid! Moreover, we're willing to add an additional five percent of the company's original shares on top of the original terms!" Feng Rui couldn't wait to throw out his bargaining chip.

"Nonsense! Feng Rui, have you no shame?" The representative from the fat man's side directly cursed, "For a Mythical-grade, you're only offering five percent shares? Are you treating her like a beggar? Student Lin Yao, come to our Bedrock Biotech! We'll give you an SSS-level contract! Plus ten percent shares! One billion in annual training funds! With no upper limit!"

"Our Giant Force Group offers two billion!"

"Our Skyward Spire is willing to list you as a Saintess candidate!"

A new round of even more frenzied bidding began.

Only this time, the commodity they were fighting over had changed from "a customizable purple-level genius" to "an uncontrollable Mythical-grade Practitioner."

They presented various sky-high contracts to Lin Yao like falling snowflakes.

"Student Lin Yao, you choose!"

"As long as you nod, we can give you everything you want!"

Lin Yao stood there in a daze.

She looked at the faces of these people before her.

Each face was filled with eager, sincere smiles.

As if they were genuinely concerned for her, genuinely excited about her future.

Yet, just minutes ago.

These very people were using the most vicious language to plan how to squeeze every last drop from her.

These very people viewed her as a commodity, a tool, a breeding machine.

These very people showed their most ferocious expressions when she wanted to make her own choice.

Her stomach churned violently.

Lin Yao felt intensely nauseous.

She couldn't understand.

How could they?

How could they act as if nothing had happened?

How could they transform in just one second from robbers who wanted to devour her alive into kind, benevolent philanthropists?

She wanted to vomit.

"You..."

Lin Yao's lips trembled as she wanted to question them, to curse them angrily.

But she couldn't utter a single word.

Because she discovered that there wasn't the slightest trace of guilt on these people's faces.

Their enthusiasm, their smiles, their promises—all were incredibly genuine.

So genuine that it made her doubt whether everything that had just happened was just a nightmare of her own.

"You... do you people have any sense of shame left!"

The school leader standing nearby finally couldn't take it anymore. Trembling with anger, he pointed at this group of people and roared.

"How could you treat a child like that just now! How do you have the face to stand here now!"

The smile on Feng Rui's face stiffened for a moment but quickly returned to normal.

He didn't even glance at the school leader, continuing to focus on Lin Yao.

"Principal, you don't understand."

A middle-aged man who had been relatively quiet, wearing gold-rimmed glasses and looking quite refined, suddenly spoke up.

He was the representative from another large corporation called "Heavenly Craft Group."

He adjusted his glasses and spoke slowly, as if explaining the most basic common sense.

"We're doing this not because we want to do it."

"Shame? That kind of thing might have existed before we climbed to these positions."

The middle-aged man looked around at his "colleagues," his face wearing an expression that was both self-mocking and matter-of-fact.

"Which one of us here wasn't a normal person with flesh and blood, with joys and angers when we were young?"

"But now, we're not."

"What we represent are corporations. Behind me are tens of thousands of employees waiting for their salaries, hundreds of shareholders waiting to see financial reports and dividends, and countless upstream and downstream industry chains."

"Every decision we make must, and can only, be responsible for the corporation's interests."

These words caused the noisy podium to fall into an eerie silence.

The middle-aged man looked at Lin Yao, his expression very calm, even carrying a trace of... apology?

"Therefore, Student Lin Yao, we apologize for what just frightened you."

"But that was merely a matter of stance, not personal animosity."

He paused, then said something that completely shattered Lin Yao's worldview.

"Let me put it this way—even if you had just stabbed me to death with a knife, as long as I wasn't completely dead, the first thing I would do upon getting up from the ground would still be to smile and ask you, Student Lin Yao, are you still interested in our Heavenly Craft Group's SSS-level contract?"

"Because that's my job."

"My personal life, death, honor, and disgrace are worthless in the face of the corporation's interests."

Boom!

Lin Yao's mind went completely blank.

This was the kind of people her brother had faced back then.

A group of emotionless, profit-only... machines.

In their eyes, there was no right or wrong, no good or evil—only value.

If you have value, you're a god.

If you have no value, you're garbage.

All warmth, all morality, all rules—in the face of absolute profit—were just worthless paper that could be torn up at any moment.

This was even more despairing than pure evil.

Because you simply couldn't defeat them.

If you killed them, new people would take their place, continue to smile at you, continue to ask you, are you still signing the contract?

A bone-chilling cold shot from the soles of Lin Yao's feet straight to the top of her head.

She felt like she could barely stand.

Just then, a warm, dry hand gently rested on her shoulder.

It was Lin Yu.

He had been standing silently behind his sister, watching everything.

He wasn't angry, nor was he surprised.

Because he had experienced all this five years ago.

"But that was merely a matter of stance, not personal animosity."

The warmth from that palm transmitted through the thin school uniform fabric to Lin Yao's shoulder.

A stable and powerful force traveled along her spine, dispelling that bone-invading chill.

Lin Yu didn't look at the middle-aged man who claimed to be the Heavenly Craft Group representative. He just calmly looked at this group of well-dressed "machines" that had surrounded them again.

Lin Yu's voice wasn't loud, but it made all the chaotic bidding sounds cease abruptly.

"We need some time to consider."

As soon as these words were spoken, complete silence fell over the venue.

The smile on Feng Rui's face froze for an instant before becoming even more enthusiastic.

"Of course! Of course! That's only right! A Mythical-grade profession is a lifetime matter—you should definitely consider it carefully!"

The fat representative from Bedrock Biotech also nodded repeatedly, the fat on his face squeezing together as he tried hard to appear kind.

"That's right, that's right, we were being abrupt. Student Lin Yao, Student Lin Yu, take your time considering, no rush at all—we have plenty of time to wait."

Chapter 59: I'm Taking the College Entrance Exam!

They behaved with utter reasonableness, overflowing with understanding.

As if the men who had just wanted to tie Lin Yao up and force her to sign a contract were not the same people.

The middle-aged man with gold-rimmed glasses pushed his spectacles up and added a sentence. His tone remained measured, but carried an icy, non-negotiable sense of protocol.

"Of course we respect your right to choose, and we will give you ample time to consider."

"However, there is one thing we must remind you two about."

He extended a single finger.

"All the contracts we offered today, whether SS-level or SSS-level, are based on the highest value assessment as of 'today.'"

"From today until the college entrance exam one month from now, for each day that passes, the contract's value will be adjusted downward accordingly."

"This is the market's rule; it is not something any one company can change. After all, geniuses have a shelf life too, don't they?"

He said it casually.

But the threat contained within those casual words made the school leaders and teachers—who had only just relaxed—change color again.

This was not just a threat; this was an open strategy.

They were using time and money to put an invisible shackle on Lin Yao.

Every day your value decays.

Every day you become "cheaper."

A month from now, after your college entrance exam is over, if you want to sign a contract, you may not even get half of today's price.

They intended to force Lin Yao to decide quickly through this method.

No expression crossed Lin Yu's face.

He was far too familiar with such tactics.

He took his sister's hand and turned to leave.

"We understand."

Feng Rui and the others immediately stepped aside, still wearing enthusiastic smiles as they watched them go.

But at that moment, a heavy voice sounded.

"I need time to consider as well."

It was Zhao Tianyang.

He still stood like an iron pillar.

The company representatives turned toward Zhao Tianyang; their smiles stiffened.

Another one!

A Myth-level profession, Asura!

"Zhao, your situation is different from Lin Yao's..." a representative hurriedly began.

Before he could finish, several voices rose from the crowd.

"Um... I'd like to think it over as well."

That voice belonged to the boy who had awakened the gold Epic-level profession, Holy Light Knight.

Beside him, the girl who had awakened the purple Rare-level profession, Elementalist, also murmured agreement.

"Me too..."

A stone had been thrown into still water, causing a thousand ripples.

Several students who had awakened high-quality professions—already pre-targeted by the companies and expected to sign on the spot—suddenly hesitated.

They had seen what happened to Lin Yao.

They had seen Lin Yu and Zhao Tianyang's hardline stance.

A thought they had never entertained before sprouted in their minds.

Maybe... we don't have to rush?

Maybe... we can fight for ourselves a bit?

On the dais, the faces of the dozen or so company representatives finally grew completely dark.

Their smiles vanished.

They could wait for one Lin Yao, force her with time if necessary.

But now, all the best prospects were adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

That meant they might not sign a single contract today!

This was a scene Linzhou First High School had never seen before!

It was also an unprecedented defeat for these "talent traffickers"!

As the atmosphere once again grew tense and electric, the school leader seized the moment and stepped forward to address the company representatives.

"Everyone, today's Awakening Ceremony is over. Thank you for coming. As for signing contracts, please let the students go home and discuss it properly with their parents!"

He was, in effect, issuing a dismissal.

Feng Rui shot the principal a cold glance, then looked at Lin Yao, who was being shielded behind Lin Yu, before fixing his gaze on Lin Yu's calm face.

He said nothing, his chest burning with anger and unwillingness, and turned to walk down from the dais.

Others left in succession, each casting a long, heavy look at Lin Yu as they departed.

That look was unbearably complex.

But they were not in a hurry; there are not many well-off families at Linzhou First High School, and these few students were not among them.

They could wait—the students would be the ones anxious to decide.

Only after all the company representatives had left did the atmosphere on the dais genuinely relax.

The principal exhaled deeply, feeling as though he had fought a battle; his whole body was soaked with sweat.

He walked up to Lin Yu and looked at the student he had once championed and regretted losing. A hundred emotions warred across his face.

"Lin Yu..."

He had so many questions.

Where had he been these five years?

Why had he become like this?

Where had the courage and strength come from to confront those dozen corporate behemoths?

In the end, all those questions condensed into a single heavy sigh.

Lin Yu recognized the principal with graying temples immediately.

When he had been a student at Linzhou First High School, Principal Zhang had shown him a great deal of concern.

"Principal Zhang. Long time no see."

Lin Yu's greeting made Principal Zhang even more emotional.

"Yes... long time no see... you..."

He wanted to say, "You finally came to your senses," but that felt wrong. He wanted to say, "Welcome back," but that seemed too flippant.

Finally, he could only pat Lin Yu's shoulder.

"Good to have you back. Good to have you back."

Lin Yu nodded. He looked at the playground regaining order, at the underclassmen who were either excited or disappointed.

Then, he suddenly spoke.

"Principal Zhang, I need to trouble you with one thing."

"Say it. If it's something I can do, I will," Principal Zhang answered immediately.

Lin Yu's tone was calm, but it stirred a tidal wave of reaction in everyone who heard him.

"Could you help me print an admission ticket for the exam."

"I'm taking this year's college entrance exam."

Those words left Principal Zhang dumbfounded.

They also made Lin Yao, who was only just recovering from that nightmare, snap her head up and stare at her brother in disbelief.

Her mouth dropped open; shock painted her eyes.

Brother... is taking the college entrance exam?

The brother who had given up the college entrance exam for five straight years and even cut ties with his family over it—now he said he would take the exam?

"Lin Yu, what... what did you say?" Principal Zhang took a step forward, wondering if his age had caused auditory hallucinations.

"I said I'm taking this year's college entrance exam." Lin Yu repeated calmly, as if stating the most ordinary fact.

This time everyone heard him clearly.

Dead silence fell over the dais.

Principal Zhang's facial muscles twitched as he stared at Lin Yu, his expression impossibly complicated.

"Are you sure you've thought this through? This is no joke!"

"You've postponed the exam for five years. Your difficulty will be thirty-two times that of an ordinary candidate!"

Chapter 60: Go home!

Chapter 60: Going Home!

Principal Zhang's facial muscles twitched violently as he looked at Lin Yu. His expression could no longer be described as complex—it was more like the horrified look one gives a madman.

"Lin Yu, do you think... it's just thirty-two times?"

His voice was dry, filled with helplessness.

"Do you have any idea how much the overall difficulty of the College Entrance Exam has increased over these five years? The battles at the Abyssal Domains frontline are getting increasingly intense, and the demands on Practitioners are growing higher! The exam questions from five years ago and the current ones are completely different concepts!"

Principal Zhang extended five fingers, waving them in front of Lin Yu.

"The most conservative estimate is that the overall difficulty is at least five times what it was five years ago!"

"Your thirty-two times punitive difficulty is stacked on top of this foundation! What you're facing isn't thirty-two times—it's close to one hundred and sixty times the difficulty! Do you understand!"

One hundred and sixty times!

When this number came out, even Lin Yao, who had just recovered from her shock, felt the world spinning and nearly lost her balance.

She desperately clutched her brother's sleeve, shaking her head frantically.

No way!

Absolutely not!

This wasn't going to take an exam—this was going to certain death!

The other teachers on the dais also showed expressions of pity.

They all remembered Lin Yu.

This former brightest genius of Linzhou First High School, the future star who had awakened an Epic-level Profession.

Was he now going to end his Practitioner career in such a tragic way?

Facing everyone's shock and dissuasion, Lin Yu's face still showed no extra emotion.

He just looked calmly at Principal Zhang.

"I know."

"So, I'll trouble you with this, Principal Zhang."

Two simple sentences, yet they felt like two massive mountains pressing down on Principal Zhang, making it hard for him to breathe.

From Lin Yu's face, he couldn't detect the slightest trace of hesitation or any sign of false bravado.

Only calmness.

A terrifying calmness born of absolute confidence.

This student was either completely insane.

Or... he truly had the capability.

Principal Zhang looked at Lin Yu for a very, very long time, so long that the surrounding air seemed to freeze.

Finally, as if all strength had been drained from him, he heavily slumped his shoulders.

"Fine."

He only said one word.

"Come with me to the office."

...

The siblings followed Principal Zhang down from the dais under countless complex gazes.

The crowd on the playground hadn't dispersed yet.

All the students were discussing everything that had just happened.

The birth of a Myth-level profession, the ugly faces of the major corporations, and that crazy senior who hadn't taken the exam for five years only to return and challenge hellish difficulty.

Today's events were enough for them to talk about for an entire month.

As they descended the steps, a burly figure still stood waiting like an iron tower.

It was Zhao Tianyang.

When Lin Yao saw him, she immediately released her brother's hand, quickly walked over, and bowed deeply to him.

"Classmate Zhao Tianyang, today... thank you."

Her gratitude came from the bottom of her heart.

When everyone else had treated her like merchandise, it was her brother and this classmate she'd only met a few times who had stood in front of her.

"Don't! Please don't!"

Zhao Tianyang was so frightened by Lin Yao's gesture that he stepped back repeatedly, his honest face turning bright red.

He waved his hands flusteredly.

"Lin... Class President, please don't humble me like this! I... I didn't do anything!"

This panicked demeanor made Lin Yao somewhat bewildered.

Was this still the fierce person everyone in school knew? He seemed more nervous than she was.

Just then, Lin Yu walked past her.

As he passed by Zhao Tianyang, his steps didn't pause. He just quickly said in a volume only the two of them could hear:

"After you get home, immediately notify your parents to leave Linzhou City."

Zhao Tianyang's body stiffened abruptly.

"Find a remote small city and hide for one month. For this month, Linzhou, even Ninghai Province, won't be peaceful."

Not just because of his situation.

But also because of the emergence of two Myth-level professions...

After saying this, Lin Yu continued walking forward.

Zhao Tianyang stood in place, neither turning around nor speaking.

But if anyone could see his face, they would discover that all the honesty and nervousness had vanished in an instant.

Replaced by absolute obedience and gravity.

He nodded heavily.

Yes, Master!

...

After everything was settled, on the way home.

Lin Yao kept her head down, not saying a word.

She had been close enough to vaguely hear some of the conversation between her brother and Zhao Tianyang.

Leave Linzhou City?

Hide for a month?

Won't be peaceful?

Each word felt like a needle piercing her heart.

She vaguely sensed that this wasn't a game.

This was a war where people could die.

And her brother stood alone at the very center of the storm.

She suddenly remembered the pile of brand new, identical hundred-yuan bills she saw in the container.

Remembered the dense needle marks covering her brother's body.

She had previously thought her brother was just counterfeiting money, but now it seemed things were infinitely more serious than she had imagined.

Those major corporations, those greedy faces—they wouldn't let this go easily.

And the College Entrance Exam...

One hundred and sixty times the difficulty.

Did her brother really have confidence in this?

Countless thoughts churned in her mind, making her heart restless and confused.

She felt a heavy pressure in her chest, as if a giant rock was weighing on her.

She grabbed Lin Yu's arm, holding on tightly.

"Brother..."

She started to speak, but didn't know what to ask.

Ask where he was going?

Ask what he was going to do?

Ask if he was in danger?

But she knew that even if she asked, her brother wouldn't tell her.

Lin Yu stopped walking. He didn't turn around, just reached back and patted the hand his sister was using to grip his arm.

"Don't be afraid."

He said.

"Let's go home. Mom and Dad must be waiting anxiously."

Lin Yao looked at her brother's back—still thin but incredibly solid.

She bit her lip, ultimately swallowing all her questions.

She nodded forcefully.

"Mm, let's go home."

...

When they arrived home, the living room lights were still on.

Father Lin and Mother Lin sat upright on the sofa. The TV was on, but neither was watching it.

Hearing the door open, both of them practically sprang up from the sofa simultaneously, quickly rushing to the entrance.

"Xiao Yu, Yao Yao, you're back!" Mother Lin forced a smile, but her nervousness was impossible to conceal.

Father Lin followed behind, rubbing his hands, also looking like he wanted to say something but couldn't.

Their eyes immediately fell on their daughter Lin Yao's face.

Then, both their hearts sank simultaneously.

Lin Yao hung her head, her face pale, her whole person listless like frost-bitten eggplant.

How could this appearance resemble a heaven's favored child who had awakened a powerful profession?

It clearly looked like... someone who had suffered a major blow.

It's over.

Chapter 61: Eight Parties Under One Roof

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged a glance, both seeing the same thought reflected on each other's faces.

Their daughter's profession awakening had failed!

Or rather, the awakened profession was far from ideal.

Yao Yao had always been lively and cheerful since childhood, and she had never been this dejected except when Lin Yu had his episodes.

Mother Lin's heart felt like it was being squeezed by an invisible hand, the pain intense. She quickened her pace, grabbed her daughter's hand, and felt it was ice-cold to the touch.

"Yao Yao, what's wrong? Is it... is the result not good?"

She asked cautiously, afraid that any single word might upset her daughter.

"It's alright, Yao Yao, no matter what profession you awakened, you'll always be our pride." Father Lin also hurried over to comfort her, his voice trembling slightly. "At worst, we just won't pursue the practitioner path! You can go to an ordinary university, find a stable job, and live a normal life!"

Five years ago, when their son awakened an epic-level profession, they were overjoyed, thinking the Lin Family would soar to new heights.

Instead, it became a five-year-long nightmare.

Now, with their daughter's awakening results seeming unsatisfactory, they actually felt a sense of "as expected" steadiness.

Perhaps plain and ordinary was the true way?

Lin Yao raised her head, looking at the genuine worry and heartache on her parents' faces. Her mouth opened and closed, but no words came out.

How could she say it?

That she had awakened the myth-level profession [Omni-Arcanist]?

This result wasn't just ideal—it was absolutely explosive! A top-tier talent that could shake the entire city of Linzhou!

But she couldn't feel happy about it.

The moment she thought about those greedy, ugly faces on the dais, how they treated her like merchandise to be appraised, even planning out her reproductive duties for decades to come—

She felt waves of nausea.

What did a myth-level profession matter?

Before those true giants, she remained pitifully insignificant, at least for now.

She didn't even have the ability to share a fraction of her brother's burden.

This achievement that should have brought immense joy now felt like a massive boulder, weighing heavily on her chest, making it hard to breathe.

"I... I..."

Lin Yao's eyes reddened, teardrops the size of beans swirling in her eyes, yet she still couldn't speak.

This appearance only confirmed Father and Mother Lin's suspicions.

"Ah..." Father Lin heaved a heavy sigh. He reached out to pat his daughter's shoulder, but his hand dropped powerlessly halfway.

He turned to look at Lin Yu, who had been silent, his face carrying a trace of pleading.

"Xiao Yu, talk to your sister. You... you have experience in this. Don't let her get stuck in a dead end too."

As soon as the words left his mouth, Father Lin felt his face burn with shame.

Asking a son who had been stuck in a dead end for five years, nearly destroying the family, to persuade someone else not to do the same?

It was the height of irony.

But now, he could only pin his hopes on Lin Yu.

After all, Lin Yao had always listened to her brother most since childhood.

Mother Lin was already holding her daughter, beginning to sob quietly.

"My Yao Yao, why is your fate so bitter..."

"It's okay, it's okay, Mom's here. The sky won't fall..."

The atmosphere in the living room had become unbearably oppressive.

Just then, a gentle woman's voice cut in.

"Oh dear, sister-in-law, don't cry yet. The child just got back, and your crying will only make her feel worse."

Lin Yu's gaze shifted toward the voice.

Only then did he realize the living room contained far more than just their family of four.

Several people were sitting and standing around the sofa and corners.

The one who had spoken was his aunt.

Sitting next to his aunt was his second uncle.

And in the single armchair on the other side sat a well-maintained middle-aged woman—Su Qingxue's mother, Mother Su.

Su Qingxue stood behind her mother, head bowed, hands twisting the hem of her clothes, not daring to look in Lin Yu's direction.

Mother Su clearly didn't know about what happened in the parking lot yet. Seeing Mother Lin crying, she also stood up and came over, patting Mother Lin's back.

"That's right, sister. The child is still young, what's one failure? Our Qingxue didn't awaken a combat profession either. For girls, these things aren't that important."

His aunt also came over, taking Lin Yao's other hand.

"Yao Yao, don't be sad. We girls don't necessarily need to fight and kill. Look at your aunt—I've lived an ordinary life, and isn't it quite fine too?"

Second uncle also stood up, hands behind his back, putting on an elder's air.

"Alright, everyone stop crowding around. Awakening is ninety percent fate, ten percent effort. Since the result isn't ideal, accept reality sooner rather than later. Yao Yao's academic performance has always been good, right? Getting into a good theoretical or cultural university would be nice too."

They spoke one after another, their words filled with "concern" and "consideration."

As if they were all genuinely thinking about Lin Yao's best interests.

But under Lin Yu's [Eye of Analysis], all disguises were stripped away.

When his aunt said "isn't it quite fine too," the corner of her mouth showed a brief micro-expression—the classic suppressed joy. Her hand on Mother Lin's back unconsciously patted with extra force twice; that wasn't comfort, it was celebration.

When second uncle said "accept reality," his chin lifted slightly—a typical contemptuous gesture stemming from his belief that he stood above others.

And Mother Su, when she mentioned her own daughter, her orbicularis oculi muscle didn't contract—that was a standard social fake smile. Her true emotions were pride and pity.

These subtle movements, undetectable to ordinary people, were magnified infinitely under Lin Yu's 500-point mental attribute and the enhancement of [Eye of Analysis].

Instantly, these relatives' true thoughts appeared clearly in Lin Yu's mind like scrolling bullet comments.

Aunt: "Excellent! The Lin family girl failed too! Let's see how she brags about her daughter's good grades in front of me now! My son might not be promising, but at least he hasn't been outshone!"

Second Uncle: "I knew it—the Lin family's generation is finished. First a crazy son, now a useless daughter. Good thing I didn't lend them money back then, or it would've all gone down the drain."

Mother Su: "Ah, how pitiful. But that's fine—this makes our Qingxue appear even more outstanding. Maybe Yao Yao will need to ask our family for help finding a job in the future."

One by one, the masks of hypocrisy were torn away, revealing the most genuine, yet ugliest desires beneath.

Not a single one of them genuinely felt sorry for Lin Yao.

They were either relieved, contemptuous, or calculating how to extract the last bit of superiority from the Lin family's misfortune.

This was even more nauseating than the company representatives' blatant greed during the Awakening Ceremony.

Because those people were enemies.

But the people here now were "family."

Su Qingxue seemed to sense Lin Yu's gaze, her body trembling almost imperceptibly as she buried her head even lower.

She was utterly terrified of Lin Yu now.

Chapter 62: Leave some space for their family!

That man in the parking lot who casually disabled Chen Rui's arms and destroyed half the parking lot with a single move was completely different from the destitute, dejected Lin Yu in Su Qingxue's memory.

She couldn't imagine what kind of scene it would be if these elders, who were still holding forth with their opinions, learned about Lin Yu's actions and true strength.

Just then, Aunt shifted the conversation focus to Lin Yu.

"Speaking of which, Xiao Yu is the same. With such good talent back then, he had to be stubborn. Yao Yao, you absolutely must not follow your brother's example. Look at him now..."

She didn't finish her sentence, but that sigh and the look filled with pity and reproach said everything.

All eyes instantly focused on Lin Yu.

Some held sympathy, some mockery, some thought he deserved it.

"Yes," Second Uncle picked up the thread, looking at Lin Yu and shaking his head, "Talent can sometimes be a curse. Ambitions soaring to the heavens, fate thin as paper. Xiao Yu is the perfect example. Yao Yao, remember this - mediocrity is a blessing."

Mother Su chimed in at just the right moment.

"Xiao Yu, don't blame us elders for speaking bluntly. Look at you now - twenty-three years old, no job, no education, what will you do in the future? You can't have your parents support you forever, can you? How about having Aunt Su find you a security guard job? It might be tough work, but at least it's honest employment."

Relatives took turns, one after another.

The entire living room was filled with their nauseating "concern."

Lin Yu leaned in the corner of the sofa, head bowed, fingers rapidly swiping across his phone screen.

He was making arrangements, fully preparing for the upcoming storm.

He didn't even bother looking up at his relatives' faces.

Because he didn't need to.

Under the gaze of his Eye of Analysis, every subtle movement they made, every muscle twitch, completely exposed their true inner thoughts.

When Aunt said "absolutely must not follow your brother's example," the corners of her eyes shifted downward and outward - a typical expression of contempt mixed with schadenfreude.

When Second Uncle said "mediocrity is a blessing," he crossed his arms and leaned back slightly - a defensive yet status-declaring posture, psychologically placing Lin Yu's family as people he needed to "look down upon."

And when Mother Su "kindly" offered the security guard job, her lips tightened briefly - an uncontrollable signal of smugness. She felt genuine satisfaction at the stark contrast between her daughter's future and the "miserable state" of the Lin family's children.

Lin Yao couldn't take it anymore.

She broke free from her parents' embrace and softly retorted.

"That's not true... my profession... actually isn't that bad..."

She wanted to say she had awakened to a myth-level profession.

She wanted to say her brother wasn't crazy, he had his own plans.

But she didn't know how to say it.

All the words were stuck in her throat.

The glory brought by that myth-level profession now only felt like heavy pressure.

"Oh, Yao Yao, you child..."

Aunt immediately cut her off with an "I saw through you long ago" expression.

"I know you're feeling bad inside, unwilling to accept it. But facts are facts, avoiding them is useless."

"Your brother back then refused to accept reality, that's why..."

Second Uncle also shook his head and sighed.

"Yes, desperately trying to save face is the most meaningless thing. Look at how devastated you were when you came in - everyone's eyes are sharp. Yao Yao, listen to your Second Uncle's advice - recognizing reality early will do you good."

They gave Lin Yao no chance to explain.

Or rather, they simply didn't believe any explanation.

They only believed what they saw, only believed what they wanted to believe.

Which was that the Lin family's genius daughter had failed her awakening!

The Lin family, with their pair of outstanding children, had now both rotted away.

What could be more satisfying than this?

This gave them a sick, heartfelt pleasure.

Lin Yao's face flushed bright red, tears welling in her eyes - from anger and from hurt.

She felt like she had fallen into a large net woven from "care," and no matter how she struggled, it was futile.

Mother Su, seeing Lin Yao's "stubborn" appearance, deepened the "pity" on her face. She cleared her throat, preparing to "instruct" this immature child from the perspective of someone with more life experience.

"Yao Yao, I'm not criticizing you, but your attitude is just wrong. The most dangerous thing for people is not recognizing themselves. Do you think being a Practitioner is that easy? Look at your brother..."

She turned the conversation back to Lin Yu again, with a condescending, judgmental tone.

"Even if he awakened an epic-level profession, so what? In the end, he still..."

"Mom!"

Su Qingxue couldn't hold back any longer.

She grabbed her mother's arm and pulled hard backward.

Her movements were quick and urgent, carrying a trace of unconcealable panic.

Everyone present was stunned.

Mother Su was also confused by her daughter's sudden action and turned back displeased.

"Qingxue, what are you doing? I'm just teaching your Yao Yao sister..."

"Stop talking!"

Su Qingxue's voice trembled.

Her eyes were fixed intently on the man sitting in the sofa corner who hadn't spoken a word from beginning to end, just constantly scrolling through his phone.

Lin Yu.

The elders present only saw a destitute, dejected, silent young man.

A failure.

A cautionary tale.

But only Su Qingxue, only she alone, had witnessed it with her own eyes.

She had seen the power of Practitioners, witnessed their cruelty, and equally witnessed Lin Yu's formidable strength.

"Mom, say less! Brother Yu, he..."

Mother Su, baffled by her daughter's nervous appearance and feeling embarrassed in front of everyone, couldn't maintain her composure.

"What's wrong with you today? Brother this, brother that - the way he is now, what's wrong with me saying a few words? I'm doing it for his own good!"

"I..."

Su Qingxue was so anxious she was about to cry.

Only she knew that Lin Yu only needed to lift a finger to turn this entire room of noisy ordinary people into paste.

Mother Su, completely angered by her daughter's panicked state, tried hard to shake off Su Qingxue's hand, but found her daughter's grip surprisingly strong.

"Have you gone crazy, child! Let go! I'm doing it for his good too! If I don't say something, his whole life will be ruined!"

Ignoring her mother, Su Qingxue suddenly turned to all the elders in the living room and spoke rapidly in a near-pleading tone.

"Aunt Lin, uncles, aunts..."

"It's getting late, Yao Yao just finished awakening, she must be tired. Uncle and Aunt Lin have been worried all day too, should we... should we let their family have some space to talk privately?"

Her mind was racing.

Space.

Yes, leave space for their family.

This was the only reason she could think of to pull these clueless elders back from the brink.

This reason was perfectly reasonable, full of "consideration."

While Su Qingxue was desperately trying to persuade everyone...

Outside the residential complex, it had somehow become noisy.

That buzzing sound that only appears when large crowds gather.

Lin Yao's profession rarity was even higher than her brother's - how could it not cause an external sensation?

This scene was exactly like five years ago.

Chapter 63: Pharmaceutical Executives Meeting

Linzhou Garden Residential Complex, entrance.

Dozens of media vans emblazoned with various company logos, like sharks smelling blood, completely blocked the residential complex entrance.

Countless reporters carrying cameras and equipment swarmed out of the vehicles, creating a scene that briefly spiraled out of control.

Inside the security booth, two security guards stared in stunned disbelief.

They had worked here for over a decade, and this was only the second time in their lives they'd witnessed such a spectacle...

No, this commotion was even bigger than the previous one!

"What... what's going on? Are they filming a movie?" the younger security guard stammered.

The older guard, more experienced, pushed open the door and stopped a reporter rushing at the front.

"Hey hey hey! What are you all doing? This is a private residential area, you can't just enter!"

The stopped reporter looked impatient and directly slapped his press credentials in front of the guard.

"Linzhou Daily! We're here for an interview! Major news!"

"Interview?" The guard was dumbfounded. "Interview who?"

"Lin Yao! This year's newly awakened Myth-level profession holder! She lives in your complex!" a female reporter who squeezed through from the side shouted loudly, afraid of falling behind even one step.

Myth-level profession!

Lin Yao!

The two guards in the security booth felt their minds go blank with a buzzing sound.

Of course they knew Lin Yao - that quiet and sensible girl from the old Lin family, whose grades had always been at the top, the pride of their residential complex.

But a Myth-level profession? What did that even mean? They had no idea...

Linzhou had never produced one before!

They only knew it was absolutely earth-shattering news!

"The... the Lin Yao household?" The older guard came to his senses and instinctively started to give directions. "Oh right, her family lives in Building B, Unit 7..."

Before he could finish speaking, he suddenly remembered something and forcibly swallowed the rest of his words.

Wrong.

Why did this scene feel so familiar?

"Building B, Unit 7! Thank you, uncle!"

The frontmost reporters who heard the key information immediately charged toward the depths of the complex like unleashed wild dogs.

The remaining large group followed closely behind.

Only one intern reporter who had just entered the industry ran slower. After running for a while, he suddenly saw several senior veterans stop in their tracks, strange expressions on their faces. Curious, he approached them.

"Brother Wang, why aren't we running? If we don't hurry, all the good spots will be taken!"

The veteran reporter called Brother Wang didn't answer him.

He just stared blankly in the direction of Building B, Unit 7, muttering to himself.

"Building B, Unit 7... why is it this address..."

"What's wrong with this address?" The intern reporter was even more confused.

Beside Brother Wang, another female reporter from a television station forced a bitter smile and took over the conversation.

"Xiao Li, you're new so you don't know. Five years ago... we also came to this address once."

"Ah?"

"For another person."

"Who?"

Brother Wang slowly uttered two words.

"Lin Yu."

Lin Yu!

As soon as this name emerged, the complex, hard-to-describe expressions appeared on the faces of several other veteran reporters who had also stopped.

There was regret, there was mockery, and a trace of lingering memories from those years.

Intern reporter Xiao Li was completely baffled.

"Who's Lin Yu? Was he famous?" "Famous? More than just famous." Brother Wang lit a cigarette, took a deep drag, his gaze becoming distant. "Five years ago, Linzhou City's most dazzling genius, the supernova who awakened the gold Epic-level profession [Myriad Forms Card Crafter]. When we came to interview him back then, the scene wasn't any smaller than today!"

"Epic-level profession? What happened later?" Xiao Li pressed.

"Later?" Brother Wang blew out a smoke ring and sneered. "Later, the genius turned into a madman. Obsessed with some bullshit cards, delayed exams for five consecutive years, broke with his family, became the laughingstock of the entire Linzhou City."

"Ah? This..." Xiao Li was so shocked he couldn't speak.

The story of a fallen genius was always so lamentable.

"Wait!" The television station female reporter suddenly thought of something, her expression instantly freezing. "Lin Yu... Lin Yao..."

The cigarette in Brother Wang's hand fell to the ground.

"Holy shit!"

"They're siblings!"

"I remember now! When we interviewed Lin Yu five years ago, his little sister was right there beside him! Timid, didn't even dare to speak!"

"That's right! It's her! Unbelievable! After five years, she actually awakened a Myth-level profession!"

This discovery might be even more explosive than the Myth-level profession itself!

In one family, the older brother was once the epic-level genius who attracted everyone's attention, but now he's become a laughingstock madman.

The younger sister, five years later, soared to the heavens and awakened a Myth-level profession that surpasses the epic level!

What dramatic fate was this!

The news angles that could be dug up from this were simply explosive!

"Let's go! Hurry!"

Brother Wang instantly stamped out his cigarette butt, his entire person seeming reinvigorated as if injected with adrenaline.

"The other Myth-level [Asura] from the Zhao family turned up empty - the place was deserted! Now all our bets are on Lin Yao! This is the exclusive of exclusives!"

All the reporters went wild.

They no longer hesitated and charged toward Building B, Unit 7.

...

Linzhou City, top floor of the Global Financial Center.

Inside a conference room that overlooked the entire city, smoke filled the air, and the atmosphere was so oppressive you could wring water from it.

"Slap!"

A test report was violently thrown onto the conference table made of rosewood, making the expensive bone china teacups jump.

Wang Teng, chairman of Giant Force Group - a burly middle-aged man - had his chest heaving violently, veins bulging on his neck.

"Genuine! The test results show it's genuine!"

"The efficacy, ingredients, molecular structure - no difference whatsoever from our company's [Might Potion]!"

His eyes bloodshot, he scanned the other three people present.

"Can someone tell me what the hell is going on!"

Sitting opposite him was Feng Rui, vice president of Wind Rider Technology.

He adjusted his glasses, pointing at the virtual screen in front of him showing a green curve that had plummeted off a cliff.

"Three days."

"In just three days, our stock price evaporated by thirty percent. Those [Windrunner's Breath] of unknown origin on the black market have already seized nearly forty percent of our market share... It's terrifying."

"And this number is still expanding wildly."

"Our distributors' phones are about to be blown up, all demanding to know why our competitors can slash prices to thirty percent!"

"Thirty percent! They can't even recover their costs! This is suicidal dumping!"

In the corner, Manager Shi of Bedrock Biotech wiped cold sweat from his forehead. His body was obese and trembling all over.

"It's not just dumping... those wolves smelling blood are already preparing to enter the market."

"They're frantically shorting our stocks! The snowball has started rolling - if we don't find a solution soon, all three of our companies... will face forced liquidation!"

Bankruptcy.

This word hung over the three of them like a cold sword of Damocles.

Three pairs of bloodshot eyes simultaneously turned toward the other end of the conference table.

There sat a man who seemed completely out of place in the tense atmosphere.

Li Mo of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals.

Chapter 64: I'm Just a Worker

Among the four major medicine suppliers in Linzhou, it was the only company primarily specializing in mental-type medicines.

Li Mo picked up his teacup, gently blew away the floating tea leaves, and took a slow, deliberate sip.

He didn't even glance at the report, nor at the chart showing the plummeting stock prices.

"Chairman Wang, President Feng, President Shi."

He set down the teacup, producing a crisp, light sound.

"Panicking is useless."

Wang Teng slammed his fist on the table.

"Li Mo! Stop talking bullshit here!"

"You're not the one getting screwed over right now, of course you're not in a hurry!"

Feng Rui also spoke coldly.

"President Li, this batch of black market medicines strangely doesn't include your [Lucid Potion]. Don't you find that odd?"

President Shi's voice was even more desperate, bordering on tears.

"President Li, our four companies are closely linked, you can't just stand by and watch us die! Think of something, please think of something!"

Hearing this, Li Mo finally lifted his head.

He scanned the three utterly distressed men. For him, this matter was optional to help with... but their current attitude undoubtedly annoyed him greatly.

"Odd? Not odd at all."

"The medicines circulating on the black market are all potions for the three basic attributes: Strength, Agility, and Constitution. These potions have high demand, but low technical barriers and strong replaceability."

"As for my [Lucid Potion], it affects the mental attribute. This stuff is basically useless for ordinary people; only those spellcasting Practitioners trying to break through bottlenecks, or Scholars engaged in research would buy it."

"The market is small, the audience is niche, so naturally no one is interested in touching it."

He paused, then added another sentence.

"Moreover, because your three companies' potions have dropped in price, many Practitioners have more disposable income, and instead have spare money to buy my [Lucid Potion] to boost their Mental Energy a bit."

"Our sales have actually increased by five percent over the last three days."

Boom!

This statement was like throwing a lit match into a powder keg.

Wang Teng abruptly stood up, an immense sense of pressure radiating from him.

"Li! What do you mean by that?!"

"Are you saying that while the three of us are suffering, you're actually benefiting?!"

"Don't forget, we largely share the same group of shareholders! We rise and fall together!"

Li Mo smiled.

He leaned back in his chair, spreading his hands open.

"Chairman Wang, don't get excited. Shareholders are shareholders, business is business."

"We definitely rise together... but when we fall... it's every man for himself."

"Besides, this situation clearly targets your three companies. What good would it do me to get involved? Bring trouble upon myself?"

Heartless.

Ruthless.

The barefaced nature of a merchant.

Behind Feng Rui's glasses, a cold glint flashed.

"Li Mo, are you tearing up our alliance, betraying us?"

"Hardly a betrayal." Li Mo shook his head. "It's just about not making a losing deal. Your troubles are yours to solve. My Qingyun Pharmaceuticals respectfully declines to participate."

Having said that, he actually stood up directly, straightened his suit lapel, and prepared to leave.

"You dare leave!" Wang Teng roared.

"Watch me." Li Mo didn't even look back.

"Is there... is there really no way out?!" Feng Rui's voice turned shrill with agitation. He leaned on the table with both hands, staring intently at Wang Teng and President Shi.

President Shi, unnerved by his stare, felt a surge of irrational anger rush to his head.

"What good does yelling at me do!"

He was like a cat whose tail had been stepped on, instantly bristling, and began shouting incoherently.

"If you have the ability, go find Chen Ao!"

"Isn't Chen Ao known as the King of Linzhou's underworld?! Can't he handle such a small matter?!"

Chen Ao.

The moment this name was uttered, the entire meeting room fell silent instantly.

Even Li Mo, who was about to pull the door open, stopped, his hand resting on the doorknob.

Chen Ao, a legendary figure entrenched in Linzhou's gray areas.

No one knew his true origins. They only knew that all of Linzhou's illicit businesses—the black market, information brokering, fencing stolen goods...—had his shadow behind them.

He was a behemoth lurking in the shadows.

A spark of hope simultaneously ignited in the eyes of Feng Rui and President Shi.

Right!

Chen Ao!

For turmoil stirred up in the black market, going to him was the most direct solution!

Feng Rui immediately turned to Wang Teng, his attitude doing a complete one-eighty.

"Chairman Wang! I remember... you know Chen Ao, right?"

"I recall you mentioned at the last banquet that you and Brother Ao are sworn brothers!"

President Shi also scrambled over, his face plastered with an ingratiating smile.

"Chairman Wang! Brother Wang! You can't hold back now! If Brother Ao is willing to step in, forget thirty percent discounts, even if he dumps all that merchandise into the river, no one would dare say a word against it!"

Wang Teng's face instantly turned the color of liver.

He... he had indeed boasted about this after drinking.

But that was just drunken bragging!

He had only seen Chen Ao from a distance once at an auction, hadn't even exchanged a single word with him!

Now, being put on the spot publicly by Feng Rui, he was caught in a dilemma.

"I..."

Wang Teng stammered, sweat pouring down his forehead.

Feng Rui, watching his demeanor, felt his heart sink bit by bit.

He let out a cold laugh.

"Well? Chairman Wang, why don't you give Brother Ao a call?"

"Tell him to break the legs of those scumbags disrupting the market and throw them to the fishes!"

"I..." Wang Teng made a guttural sound in his throat, unable to form a single word.

His behavior made the situation perfectly clear to everyone.

The three men sighed.

"Li Mo! Stop right there!"

Feng Rui's voice was sharp. He slammed the table and stood up, pointing at Li Mo's retreating back.

"Do you really think you can walk out that door today?"

"Our four companies have cross-shareholdings, our interests are deeply intertwined! If we fall, your Qingyun Pharmaceuticals will also be severely wounded! When the board investigates, you can forget about keeping your CEO position!"

President Shi scrambled to the door, his portly frame almost blocking the exit. His face was a mix of pleading and desperate, feigned ferocity.

"Yes! President Li! Brother Li! We're all grasshoppers tied to the same string! You can't leave! If you leave, we're all finished! The shareholders won't let you off!"

Wang Teng didn't speak. He just stared fixedly at Li Mo, his heavy breathing echoing in the silent meeting room. His bloodshot eyes held a final trace of madness and threat.

However, faced with the blockade by the three men, Li Mo merely turned around slowly.

His face showed no panic, no anger, not even a flicker of emotion.

There was only a kind of... mocking amusement, as if watching clowns.

These people had never considered him one of their own... because...

"Cross-shareholdings?"

Li Mo let out a light laugh, the sound particularly jarring in the oppressive atmosphere.

"President Feng, are you mistaken about something?"

He extended a finger, pointing first at Wang Teng, then at Feng Rui.

"Chairman Wang is the Chairman of Giant Force Group, and also a major shareholder in Wind Rider Technology. President Feng, you are also one of the founders of Wind Rider Technology. President Shi, Bedrock Biotech is your family business."

"Your companies are your lives. If the companies go bankrupt, you'll have to jump from the top floor of this building."

He shifted his tone and pointed at himself.

"And me?"

"I am merely the Chief Executive Officer of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals. Just an employee drawing a salary and a small bonus."

The smile on Li Mo's face widened, carrying a kind of condescending cruelty.

"You are correct, the four companies suffer together. But what suffers is the company's assets, the shareholders' money."

"What does that have to do with me, Li Mo?"

"The worst-case scenario is simply an angry board firing me, the CEO. I'll take the severance pay, move to another city, and can still make a comeback."

He spread his hands open, his posture relaxed and casual.

Li Mo watched all this coldly, straightened his tie once more, turned around again, and walked towards the door.

This time, no one dared to stop him.

Just as his hand was about to touch the doorknob.

"Wait."

A hoarse, low voice sounded.

It was Wang Teng.

His voice no longer held the previous fury and despair, only a strange calmness.

Li Mo's steps halted.

He didn't turn around, just stood quietly, as if granting this defeated dog a final shred of dignity.

"I just received a piece of information."

Wang Teng slowly raised his head. A peculiar light flickered in his bloodshot eyes.

"We found the source."

"All the low-priced medicines come from one place in the Linzhou black market."

He enunciated each word clearly, spitting out four syllables.

"Old Ghost Hall."

"President Li."

Wang Teng's voice carried a hint of vindictive cruelty.

"This fellow called Old Ghost... he shouldn't be unfamiliar to you, should he?"

Chapter 65: Li Mo's Plan

Old Ghost.

This name was certainly not unfamiliar to Li Mo.

One could even say he was quite familiar with it.

Qingyun Pharmaceuticals being able to reach its current position, emerging from countless small workshops to become one of Linzhou's four major medicine suppliers—this man called "Old Ghost" had played an indispensable role.

No.

Back then, he wasn't Old Ghost yet.

He was Little Ghost.

A passionate tech fanatic who treated the laboratory as his home, sporting two panda-like dark circles under his eyes, yet capable of extracting gold from piles of discarded data.

Unlike the other three companies.

Giant Force, Wind Rider, Bedrock—these three built their foundations through monopolies.

They monopolized the material drops from specific monsters.

Without those core materials, no one could produce their flagship medicines.

This was both their barrier and their lifeline.

As for Qingyun Pharmaceuticals' Lucid Potion, its raw material drops were extremely difficult, production had always been sluggish, and the company teetered on the brink of bankruptcy.

It was Little Ghost who spearheaded the formula improvements.

He pulled countless all-nighters, lost clumps of hair, watched his health deteriorate day by day, until he finally forced out a weakened version of the Lucid Potion.

Although the effectiveness was reduced, the most crucial point was that it completely broke free from dependence on rare materials!

Production increased.

Qingyun Pharmaceuticals survived.

Back then, Little Ghost had a relatively good life at the company, respected by everyone as the technical backbone.

Until Li Mo took the helm.

As the new CEO, Li Mo's goals were very clear.

Help the company optimize revenue, reduce costs, and improve efficiency.

When he opened the personnel files, the name "Little Ghost" jumped out at him.

Oh, no, it was "Old Ghost" by now.

Bald, health broken, surviving on medication daily, unable to produce any new results in the laboratory—he had become a pure cost center.

What was the point of keeping a half-dead old man who could collapse at any moment?

Waiting to pay his pension and death benefits?

Li Mo employed some methods—legal, but not ethical.

Soon, Old Ghost was "optimized" out.

Rumors said his wife left him afterward, his children disowned him, abandoned by all—he became a laughingstock.

Li Mo felt nothing about this.

He was an employee.

He was just completing his KPIs.

Facts also proved his decision absolutely correct.

All these years after being kicked out, Old Ghost hadn't caused any significant trouble.

At most, he sold some self-brewed counterfeit medicines in the corners of the black market, barely clinging to life.

That pitiful production capacity wasn't even enough to scratch Qingyun Pharmaceuticals' itch.

But now...

Wang Teng said those three medicines causing such chaos all came from Old Ghost Hall?

Interesting.

Li Mo's movements froze.

Slowly, he removed his hand from the door handle.

Had this old ghost gained enlightenment? Been touched by divine inspiration?

How could he possibly have cracked the medicine formulas of the other three companies?

This wasn't scientific.

This wasn't even mystical.

He knew perfectly well that those three companies' medicine formulas couldn't be unlocked—without the raw materials, production was impossible...

As for how he knew, never mind that.

For the first time, Li Mo's curiosity was genuinely piqued.

Wang Teng's information had truly made him stay.

He turned around, the mocking expression of watching clowns completely gone from his face.

Replacing it was a pure, technocratic scrutiny.

"Old Ghost Hall..."

He repeated the name, as if tasting an unfamiliar dish.

"By himself?"

Seeing Li Mo's reaction, Wang Teng felt a surge of morbid satisfaction.

He knew he had gambled correctly!

There must be history between Li Mo and this Old Ghost!

And Li Mo was also thinking.

These three idiots thought they had caught his weakness.

At best, they could attribute Old Ghost's motives to revenge against Qingyun.

At worst, they could even claim this was Qingyun's scheme—having Old Ghost endure humiliation to plan this attack!

They believed that since Old Ghost came from Qingyun, this matter would inevitably drag Li Mo into the mud.

Even if investigation proved he was uninvolved, this dirty water would be enough to keep him busy, with inevitable questioning from the board of directors.

Ridiculous.

They simply didn't understand.

For him, this wasn't trouble.

It was an opportunity.

A business opportunity.

The only thing he wanted to do now was contact that Old Ghost and figure out the reason.

While also seeing if cooperation was possible...

Of course, in a personal capacity.

As for personal grudges—in the face of money, what grudges mattered?

Feng Rui, watching Li Mo's reaction, thought his speculation was confirmed. He stepped forward, voice sharp.

"Li Mo! Old Ghost is someone who came from your Qingyun Pharmaceuticals! Now he's caused this huge incident, specifically targeting our three companies while sparing you alone! You say this has nothing to do with you—who would believe that? Would the board believe it?"

President Shi also found his backbone, scrambling to chime in.

"That's right! President Li, you must give us an explanation for this matter! Otherwise, we'll have no choice but to report all the details to the board of directors! With cross-shareholding, if we suffer, you won't get off easy either!"

Threats.

Bravado-filled threats.

Li Mo actually found it somewhat amusing.

Because, to put it bluntly, these three incompetents tied together couldn't compete with one of his fingers.

They had run out of options.

In terms of timing, efficiency, vision... and that pathetic sense of superiority as people in power.

They couldn't consult others, much less lower themselves to contact an "Old Ghost" in the black market.

So they could only cling desperately to him.

The only person who could help them, and the only person they thought they had "leverage" over.

It seemed that even just to buy time, he really needed to "analyze" things for them.

Otherwise, if these three idiots truly went crazy, who knew what they might do.

Li Mo's expression remained unchanged as he walked back to the conference table, but he didn't sit down, instead looking down at the three men from his standing position.

"No need to beat around the bush. If you want my help, fine."

He spoke calmly.

"But before that, I need you to answer a few questions for me."

Wang Teng and the other two were taken aback.

"First, have there been any abnormalities in the production areas of the specific monsters that provide your three companies' core raw materials for survival? Has any new force intervened?"

Wang Teng answered instinctively: "No! In the Abyssal Domains, the Fire Mane Lion territory has always been under my Wang family's control! Outsiders can't get in at all!"

"Second, have you received any warnings or hints from higher-ups, whether from official or military channels?"

Feng Rui also immediately shook his head: "No! Wind Rider Technology's cooperation with the military has been very stable! My younger brother works in the procurement department—I'd know immediately if anything happened."

"Third, have any of you recently offended someone you shouldn't have offended?"

President Shi's fat face squeezed out a smile uglier than crying: "President Li, we're all businesspeople. Harmony brings wealth—why would we..."

"Very good."

Li Mo cut him off.

He extended his hand.

"So that means the opponent's attack comes entirely from the market level. No intervention from higher powers, no cutting off your raw material supply. This is a pure commercial war."

Chapter 66: The Three Companies Joint Plan

Li Mo paused, scanning the three men with his gaze.

"And you... are losing."

These three words struck Wang Teng and the other two like three sharp slaps across their faces.

Li Mo didn't give them a chance to retort as he continued speaking.

"Since this is war, panic and internal conflict are the most amateurish behaviors. Now, I'm giving you a solution. Whether you listen or not is up to you."

He extended one finger.

"First, secure the top. Stabilize your foundation. I don't care what connections or methods you use, immediately reconfirm whether your monopoly on raw materials remains unshakable. I want one hundred percent certainty that no other faction can access those core materials. This is our confidence in waging a price war."

He extended another finger.

"Second, address the external. Boost market confidence. With the stock market panicking and short sellers running rampant, the snowball effect has already begun. You must immediately step forward and hold a joint press conference—posture must be firm, must be high-profile. Announce what? Announce that the three companies will jointly inject funds to launch the 'Rising Star Project,' signing large-scale contracts with Linzhou's newly emerged outstanding Practitioners."

Feng Rui frowned. "Signing newcomers? What's the use of that?"

"Idiot."

Li Mo didn't hold back.

"This is for the market to see! Especially those two mythical-level ones! Spare no expense to reach out to them! Offer them the best contracts, the most favorable terms! Even if you can't sign them, make the gesture abundantly clear! Let everyone see that your three companies aren't just surviving the blow—you're financially robust and expanding against the trend! This minor market fluctuation isn't even as important as your efforts to sign newcomers. This is called painting a grand vision, understand? Use an enormous vision to stabilize investor confidence and pull up the stock price!"

"On the other hand, let everyone know your three companies are united as one. With the three companies bound together, market confidence will be sufficient to prevent further turbulence."

Finally, he extended the next finger, three fingers pointing straight at the three men.

"Third, deal with the bottom. Dimensional reduction strike."

"If I remember correctly, to maintain high profits, your three companies have strictly controlled the circulation of Medicine on the market. The stockpiled inventory in your warehouses must be astronomical, right?"

Wang Teng and the other two's expressions shifted slightly.

This was their biggest commercial secret.

"Now, it's time to let this inventory see the light of day."

Li Mo's voice carried a trace of icy cruelty.

"Starting tomorrow, the three companies will jointly run an 'Awakening Season Mega Feedback' event. All mainstay Medicines, combined, will be sold at a seventy percent discount!"

"What?!" President Shi shrieked. "Seventy percent off?! We'll be losing money hand over fist!"

"Strictly limited quantities," Li Mo added. "Our battlefield is the legitimate market. Old Ghost Hall operates in the black market. Our advantage lies in massive inventory and brand effect. When everyone in the market believes they can buy genuine Medicine at seventy percent off, who would still go to the black market to buy their products?"

"Once their products can't sell and pile up in their hands, we'll send people to the black market to buy up all their inventory!"

"As long as we're certain our raw material supply is secure, their production capacity and inventory must have limits. We can strangle them to death with our endless inventory! After they go bankrupt, we end the event and restore prices. Not only do we eliminate the competition, but we also recover a batch of products at low prices that we can resell for a steady profit!"

Secure the top, consolidate barriers.

Address the external, create a powerful front.

Deal with the bottom, pull the rug out from under them.

This was a perfect Closed Loop.

But...

"This plan... the cost is too high," President Shi was the first to hesitate, wiping sweat as he muttered quietly. "Just the seventy percent discount alone means daily losses reaching astronomical figures..."

Feng Rui also adjusted his glasses. "Moreover, buying his products on the black market carries too much risk. What if... his supply sources are extensive? Wouldn't we just be giving him money for nothing?"

Li Mo didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Then wait until the black market prices are pressed down to cost before making your move. No matter how strong he is, his costs can't possibly be lower than yours, right? That way you won't lose money regardless."

Wang Teng didn't speak, but his tightly knitted brows said everything.

They were still worried about those petty profits.

Li Mo was truly on the verge of laughing in frustration.

Looking at these three fools sitting on gold mines but lacking the courage to fight desperately, he felt like he was casting pearls before swine.

"Hundreds of billions."

He softly uttered three words.

The three men froze.

"The opponent is using products worth hundreds of billions to smash your positions. They're smashing your companies, your personal fortunes, your very lives."

Li Mo's voice suddenly rose sharply.

"And you're here haggling with me over inventory depreciation losses?!"

"Have you forgotten that if your companies go bankrupt, your only way out will be jumping from the top of this building!"

He deliberately made his words frightening precisely to make these three think only about fighting rather than considering contacting Old Ghost and reconciling with him.

Although reconciliation was impossible—what difference was there between such behavior and begging for mercy?

But he didn't mind giving a little guidance, just in case.

The door closed behind Li Mo with a soft click.

"Thud."

A light sound that nevertheless stirred thousand-layer echoes in the deathly silent conference room.

Li Mo was gone.

With that condescending attitude, he left cleanly and decisively.

He had left behind a plan.

A plan that sounded perfect yet reeked of bloodshed everywhere.

"Seventy percent off... seventy percent off..."

President Shi's lips trembled, his plump face devoid of color as he repeatedly muttered this number like a mantra.

"That's not just cutting our flesh! That's stabbing our hearts with knives!"

"Every day... how much money would we lose daily... oh heavens..."

Feng Rui adjusted his glasses, his fingers behind the lenses rubbing his aching temples.

"It's not just about losing money. This plan is too risky."

"Once launched, there's no turning back—the arrow has left the bow. Whether our cash flow can last until we exhaust that Old Ghost Hall to death is unknown."

"How could it be... if our three companies join forces and go all out, even Chen Ao would have to think twice! What makes Old Ghost Hall so special? Their Medicine can't be infinite, right?"

"Enough!"

Wang Teng roared explosively, his large hand like a palm leaf slamming down on the conference table!

"BANG!"

"Li Mo is right, we do it!"

The entire rosewood conference table shook, teacups jumping up and shattering on the floor into pieces.

Feng Rui's breathing became rapid. He straightened his glasses, the last remnants of hesitation completely washed away by survival instinct.

"Do it!"

He squeezed the word through clenched teeth.

President Shi, seeing the desperate madness on Wang Teng and Feng Rui's faces, knew he too had no way back.

Slumping in his chair, his face ashen, he murmured, "Do it... let's do it..."

Better than jumping off a building.

"Good!"

Wang Teng sat down heavily. The atmosphere in the conference room finally shifted from despairing silence to the exhilaration of desperate gamblers.

"Since we're doing it, we do it thoroughly!"

Feng Rui's mind raced rapidly, soon finding a blind spot in Li Mo's plan.

"Old Wang, Li Mo's plan is an open strategy. It uses our scale advantage to crush him in the legitimate market."

"But Old Ghost Hall operates in the shadows, in the black market. We can't just fight on the open front."

Wang Teng understood immediately.

"You mean... Chen Ao?"

"Right." Feng Rui nodded. "We were previously forced to desperation, wanting to confront Chen Ao head-on. But now that we have a plan, our purpose in approaching him is different."

"Getting him to take action and wipe out Old Ghost Hall isn't realistic. We don't have that much influence, and he wouldn't break black market rules for our minor issues."

"But..." Feng Rui lowered his voice, "Spending money to buy information should be possible, right?"

"What exactly is Old Ghost's background? Does he have backing? Where are his products actually coming from? Chen Ao must know these things, right?"

President Shi also leaned in, hope rekindling in his eyes.

"Yes, yes, yes! Know yourself and know your enemy, and you will never be defeated! As long as we figure out his details, we won't be fighting blind like we are now!"

Wang Teng pondered for a moment, then slapped his thigh.

"Not just buying information!"

"Ultimately, aren't we going to the black market to buy up Old Ghost's inventory at low prices? This matter can't bypass Chen Ao. No matter what, we need to pay our respects first and get his nod of approval."

"Alright! It's settled!"

Wang Teng stood up and began assigning tasks, the authority of a group chairman finally returning to him.

"I'll handle the Chen Ao side! Even if I can't reach him personally, I should be able to talk to those managers under him! Spend money—keep spending until they talk!"

His gaze turned to Feng Rui.

"Old Feng, you're responsible for Li Mo's 'Rising Star Project'! Immediately! Right now!"

"Those journalists following the trend probably haven't dispersed yet—perfect! We'll even save on promotion costs! Create momentum for me! The bigger, the better! Make sure everyone in Linzhou knows our three companies aren't just fine—we're planning major moves!"

"Old Shi, you, return to your company immediately! Take inventory of the warehouses! Coordinate with all channels!"

"Have the operations department work overtime tonight to create a plan. First thing tomorrow morning—official websites, all offline stores—our three companies' mainstay Medicines, seventy percent off! Limited supply!"

"Remember, make the gesture abundantly clear, but don't open the floodgates too wide. The goal is to pull customers back from the black market and suffocate Old Ghost's products right in his hands!"

"Understood!"

The two men responded, and the three set to work.

Chapter 67: Journalism Has Profound Knowledge!

Lin Family residence.

Su Qingxue's suggestion created a crack in the suffocating atmosphere of "concern" filling the living room.

Indeed, it was getting late.

Lin Yao had just returned from her Awakening, physically and mentally exhausted, and needed proper rest.

Aunt and Second Uncle exchanged glances—their purpose for visiting today had been accomplished.

They had personally confirmed Lin Yao's "failed awakening," verbally "comforted" the Lin Family, fulfilled their "responsibility" as elders, and gained immense satisfaction from their sense of superiority.

It was time to bid farewell and share this "bad news" with other relatives.

"Yes, yes, look at us, we've been talking nonstop." Aunt was the first to stand up, wearing a hypocritical smile. "Yao Yao must be exhausted, we won't disturb any longer. Old Lin, sister-in-law, don't take it too hard—the child did her best."

Second Uncle also rose, straightening his collar. "Xiao Yu, you too, stop worrying your parents. Find yourself a proper job."

He couldn't resist delivering a final admonishment to Lin Yu from his position as an elder.

Mother Su also prepared to leave, pulling Su Qingxue along. "Sister, we'll be going now, we'll visit another day. About Yao Yao's situation... try to accept it."

Just then, the faint buzzing sound from outside the window suddenly grew louder.

It was no longer vague background noise but clearly distinguishable crowd commotion, mixed with several sharp shouts, though the specific content remained unclear.

"What's happening outside? So noisy?"

Aunt, who had been heading toward the door, stopped and curiously looked toward the window.

Linzhou City's public security had always been good, and their old residential community hadn't experienced any major incidents in decades.

This commotion seemed more like the arrival of some important figure.

"Could something have happened?" Second Uncle also approached the window. More impatient than Aunt, he directly pulled back the curtains to look downstairs.

After just one glance, he froze.

The residential garden below was packed with a dense crowd of people.

Cameras of all sizes, microphones bearing logos of major media outlets, and countless flashing phone screens completely surrounded the building entrance.

"Reporters? Why so many reporters?" Second Uncle voiced his confusion.

"Reporters?"

Everyone in the living room was drawn to the window.

Father Lin and Mother Lin temporarily set aside their sorrow, gathering by the window with bewildered expressions.

Mother Su directly pushed her way to the front.

"Heavens, there must be over a hundred people! Did all of Linzhou's media come? Did someone's child top the college entrance exams?" Mother Su exclaimed in amazement.

"That doesn't make sense. Even if someone topped the exams, it wouldn't warrant this kind of scene, would it?" Aunt muttered.

In their understanding, only city-shocking criminal cases or visits by top-tier dignitaries could attract such media attention.

Su Qingxue's heart skipped a beat.

Looking at the familiar media logos outside the window, a terrifying thought surged through her mind.

It couldn't be...

Could it be...

"As long as it's not related to us, let's go, let's go." Second Uncle pulled his head back inside, reassuming his elder's posture of being above worldly concerns, and led the way toward the door.

"Exactly, other people's business is none of our concern." Aunt chimed in, urging everyone to leave.

Father Lin and Mother Lin were currently too distressed to see them out.

Lin Yao remained immersed in her own emotions.

Lin Yu still leaned in the corner, the light from his phone screen reflecting on his impassive face.

The relatives filed out one by one. Before leaving, Mother Su glanced back at the Lin Family with a complex expression—both pity and relief.

Su Qingxue, being dragged along by her mother, paused at the doorway. She moved her lips toward Lin Yu's direction but ultimately said nothing before being forcefully pulled away by her mother.

The door clicked shut.

The world became quiet.

But the world outside the door was just beginning to boil.

...

Downstairs.

The reporters were being firmly blocked at the building entrance by several property management staff, but the barrier was ineffective.

Security guards had been called in, but they couldn't simply let the reporters swarm upstairs!

Such an overwhelming crowd could easily cause an accident!

The crowd surged like turbulent tides, wave after wave crashing against the fragile defense line.

"Let us in! We have the right to interview!"

"Building B, Unit 7! This is the place! Charge!"

The first reporters who had received the news had already pushed to the front, with the larger force following closely behind, creating complete chaos.

Yet, amidst this turmoil, several veteran journalists simultaneously stopped and gathered together.

It was Brother Wang and his colleagues who had been discussing at the community entrance earlier.

"Stop fucking crowding!" Brother Wang roared at the crowd behind him. With his seniority, he carried considerable prestige in Linzhou's media circles. "What's the point of charging up now? Everyone talking at once—what useful information could we possibly get?"

A female TV reporter also chimed in: "Exactly! If we scare them and they hide inside refusing to come out, we'll all have come for nothing today!"

These words indeed calmed the restless crowd considerably.

Everyone understood this logic.

Interviewing wasn't like robbery—especially when dealing with this kind of top-tier genius who had skyrocketed to fame. First impressions were crucial.

Seeing the situation under control, Brother Wang pulled out a cigarette case from his pocket, offering cigarettes to his veteran colleagues around him.

"Everyone, today's matter isn't simple," he said, lighting a cigarette and taking a deep drag.

"More than just not simple," a bespectacled colleague next to him adjusted his glasses. "One family, first Epic, then Myth. This subject—you won't find a second one nationwide, or even throughout the entire world!"

"I've been thinking about how to write this news report," the female TV reporter blew a smoke ring. "'Fallen Genius, Siblings on Divergent Paths'? Or 'Dragon and Phoenix Pair, Two Prodigies from One Family'? However you write it, it's explosive!"

"The key point isn't Lin Yao," Brother Wang pinpointed sharply.

Everyone's attention focused on him.

"Myth-level professions are impressive, but there's always one nationwide every couple of years. Reporting on a new genius is standard procedure." Brother Wang flicked his cigarette ash. "But Lin Yu is different."

"A former Epic-level genius, Linzhou City's once promising star, silent for five years, reduced to a laughingstock."

"Now, his younger sister has awakened to a stronger Myth-level profession than his."

"Think about it—what must he be feeling now? Jealousy? Relief? Or numbness?"

"Digging him out from the historical records, contrasting him with his sister—this kind of dramatic conflict, this level of topic engagement, is ten times higher than simply reporting on Lin Yao alone!"

The veteran reporters around him nodded repeatedly, their breathing growing heavier.

They were all masters of manipulating words and public opinion, instantly understanding Brother Wang's meaning.

A perfect genius girl might attract attention, but it paled in comparison to the impact of a "beautiful, strong, tragic" figure paired with a "fallen genius brother."

This journalism industry—the knowledge runs deep indeed!

Chapter 68: Let's interview first!

"I just pulled some strings and asked my old classmate from Linzhou First High School." A journalist who had been silent the whole time, head buried in his phone sending messages, suddenly looked up, his face showing an almost manic excitement.

"What did you find out?" Everyone immediately crowded around him.

The journalist swallowed hard and spoke with difficulty.

"It's confirmed, Lin Yu and Lin Yao are indeed biological siblings."

"That's stating the obvious!" Brother Wang urged impatiently. "Get to the point!"

"The point is..." The journalist raised his phone, the chat history clearly visible on the screen, "My classmate said that Lin Yu... that Lin Yu who wasted five years... is taking the College Entrance Exam this year too!"

Boom!

This news exploded like thunder in all the journalists' minds.

"What?!"

"He's taking the College Entrance Exam too? Didn't he give up long ago?"

"Five years! What is he going to use to take the exam?"

"He's insane! This is even more unbelievable than his sister awakening a Myth-level profession!"

If the previous news had only excited them, this news was enough to drive them crazy.

A "madman" who delayed the exam for five years is returning to take it?

This was practically a massive headline delivered right to their doorstep!

"There's even more explosive news." The journalist who broke the story was starting to tremble. "Don't forget, the difficulty doubles for each year of delay. If Lin Yu takes the exam this year..."

"It's... it's the hell mode with thirty-two times the difficulty!"

"Hah!" Brother Wang spat out the cigarette smoke he had just inhaled.

Thirty-two times the difficulty!

This number plunged all the media professionals present into deathly silence.

They understood better than anyone what this number represented.

That was true hell!

A trial ground specifically prepared for the absolute monsters among top monsters! Since Linzhou City was established, the highest record was only eight times the difficulty!

Thirty-two times?

This wasn't an exam—it was suicide!

A waste who had been stagnant for five years wants to challenge a difficulty that even top geniuses wouldn't dare imagine?

This wasn't just news anymore.

This could be reported as a legend!

"Holy shit..." Brother Wang's cigarette butt fell to the ground, but he didn't even notice.

He abruptly snatched the journalist's phone, staring intently at the line of text on the screen as if trying to see through it.

"It's true... it's really true..."

"Quick! Hurry, hurry, hurry!" Brother Wang reacted fastest, stomping out his cigarette butt as if injected with adrenaline. "Revise the interview questions! Rewrite everything!"

"All questions, shift the focus entirely to Lin Yu!"

"First question, ask him why he's challenging thirty-two times the difficulty!"

"Second question, ask him about his views on his sister awakening a Myth-level profession!"

"Third question, ask him what he's been doing these past five years!"

"And Lin Yao! Ask her about her views on her brother challenging hell mode! Does she support him? Does she have confidence?"

Several veteran journalists snapped out of their daze, immediately pulling out their work terminals, fingers frantically tapping on virtual keyboards, trembling with excitement.

The conventional questions they had prepared for the genius girl were instantly thrown to the winds.

Questions about awakening feelings, future plans—they all seemed so pale and weak compared to the explosive headline of "Former Genius Challenges Thirty-Two Times Hell College Entrance Exam."

"Everyone, let's discuss." Brother Wang lowered his voice, but his excitement was impossible to hide. "When we go up later, don't rush, take turns one by one. First get the core questions answered, obtain the first-hand material. As for follow-up in-depth interviews, we'll each rely on our own abilities, how about that?"

"Agreed!"

"Let's do it that way!"

Faced with enormous benefits, these usual competitors rarely formed a united front.

They knew that today's matter wasn't just about snatching an exclusive anymore.

They were about to witness the birth of a super news story that could be recorded in Linzhou City's history.

After revising their interview outlines, the veteran journalists exchanged knowing looks.

They straightened their collars and equipment like generals about to head to battle.

Brother Wang took the lead, heading toward the stairwell entrance of the residential unit.

Behind him were senior journalists from several of Linzhou's largest media outlets, each well-equipped with a steady presence.

"Fellow colleagues, quiet down!"

Brother Wang's voice wasn't particularly loud, but it carried an undeniable weight that clearly spread throughout the noisy garden.

The restless crowd actually slowly quieted down.

The journalists from smaller media outlets pushing forward with their equipment, and the self-media bloggers livestreaming with their phones, all stopped and looked at Brother Wang.

"Today's matter is a big event for Linzhou, and a grand occasion for us journalists." Brother Wang scanned the crowd. "But precisely because of that, we can't let things get chaotic. If we scare the genius, no one will get any news."

He paused before continuing.

"Our major mainstream media outlets have discussed it. Later when we go up, we'll ask first. We'll ask the questions everyone most cares about. Once we obtain the core material, we'll come down immediately and share the first-hand information."

"For follow-up interviews, everyone can then compete fairly based on their own abilities. How about that?"

As soon as these words were spoken, ripples of discontent immediately appeared in the crowd.

"Why should you ask first?"

"Exactly, is news divided into classes?"

A young journalist couldn't help protesting.

The female journalist beside Brother Wang sneered.

"Because we're Linzhou Daily, because we're Linzhou Television. Our reports will be directly pushed to every citizen's phone in the entire city tomorrow. And you? How many people will see your reports?"

This was the crushing power of industry status.

The young journalist's face turned bright red, but he couldn't utter a single word in rebuttal.

The others from smaller media outlets were angry but didn't dare speak out, silently lowering the microphones they had extended forward.

Faced with absolute channel advantage, all resentment seemed pale and powerless.

Seeing that order had been forcibly established at the scene, the several property managers who had been overwhelmed finally breathed a huge sigh of relief.

They wiped the sweat from their foreheads and gave Brother Wang a grateful look.

Finally, someone who could take charge had arrived.

...

Meanwhile.

In the hallway of Unit 7, Building B.

"Click."

The Lin family's heavy security door closed behind them, cutting off the oppressive atmosphere inside.

The world instantly became quiet.

But the mood of Mother Su's group didn't quiet down in the slightest.

"Oh my, I'm so angry! That Lin Yu! Has no manners at all!"

As soon as they entered the hallway, Aunt could no longer hold back, complaining in a lowered voice.

"Did you see Old Lin and his wife's faces? Looked like their parents died! Serves them right! Who told them to be so proud before!"

Second Uncle adjusted his glasses, walking leisurely ahead as he added.

"This is fate. Some people are born to enjoy good fortune. Others, no matter how high they're lifted, will eventually fall. Xiao Yu was like that, and now it seems Yao Yao is too."

Chapter 69: Let's have less contact from now on!

"Hmph, such ill-mannered trash." Mother Su's voice carried undisguised contempt. "Qingxue, stay away from him from now on. Don't let him corrupt you."

"Exactly." Aunt immediately chimed in, pressing the elevator down button while curling her lip. "He used to look somewhat presentable before, but now? He's like some street loafer, mooching off his parents at home with no prospects whatsoever."

The elevator doors slid open slowly, and the group stepped inside.

In the cramped space, their complaints sounded even more distinct.

"Old Lin and his wife must have had the worst luck in eight lifetimes." Second Uncle adjusted his glasses, adopting a worldly-wise expression. "A perfectly good genius goes mad just like that. Now his sister fails her awakening too. This family's fortune has run dry."

Hearing these words, Mother Su felt considerably more comfortable. She pulled Su Qingxue's hand and shifted the topic, beginning to boast.

"Speaking of which, our Qingxue is truly blessed. She's capable herself and found an excellent boyfriend too."

Aunt's attention was immediately captured, her face breaking into a wide smile. "Oh my, yes, sister-in-law! Qingxue's boyfriend is Chen Rui, right? My husband mentioned him - young and accomplished!"

"Well, when children achieve young, it's mostly because their parents taught them well!" Mother Su's chin lifted several degrees higher. "His father is the director of the logistics department at Wind Rider Technology, and he himself is a key cultivation target with limitless future prospects. Once they marry, our Qingxue will be a wealthy lady, more blessed than her own mother."

"That's truly remarkable!"

"Qingxue has always had good judgment since she was little!"

The elevator filled with cheerful atmosphere as Aunt and Second Uncle's flattery made Mother Su's pride practically overflow.

Only Su Qingxue, standing amidst the crowd, felt as if she'd fallen into an icy abyss.

Wealthy lady?

Limitless prospects?

What echoed repeatedly in her mind were Chen Rui's arms twisted at grotesque angles in the underground parking garage, and his face contorted with agony.

And Lin Yu.

That Lin Yu who stood motionless, relying only on recoil to cripple Chen Rui.

If someone like Chen Rui counted as "young and accomplished" with "limitless prospects"...

Then what about Lin Yu?

What about that Lin Yu who could summon thunder with a flick of his finger, who could destroy an entire parking garage?

A monster?

Or a deity?

Su Qingxue didn't dare think further. She felt her understanding of reality being torn apart, enveloped by a tremendous sense of absurdity.

"Ding."

The elevator reached the basement level, doors sliding open slowly.

But outside wasn't the familiar parking area—instead, a yellow "Under Maintenance" caution tape blocked the way, alongside a standing sign.

[Underground Parking Garage temporarily closed due to accidental incident caused by circuit malfunction. Please use the main lobby entrance/exit.]

They had instinctively come to the basement, forgetting the residential complex's parking garage was undergoing major repairs.

"What nonsense is this?" Second Uncle was the first to complain loudly. "What's wrong with this rundown complex? Problems every day. Can't even manage parking properly."

"Exactly, the management is terrible." Aunt joined in complaining. "Paying property fees every year, but getting no services."

Mother Su frowned even deeper. "I've been saying the Lin family should move out long ago. Living in a place like this, how could they have any good fortune?"

As she spoke, she pressed the button for the upper floor.

Su Qingxue stared at the "accidental incident" sign, feeling a chill shoot from the soles of her feet straight to the crown of her head.

Accidental incident?

Circuit malfunction?

She had seen it with her own eyes.

That was no malfunction.

That was the overwhelming electrical light Lin Yu summoned with a snap of his fingers! The terrifying scene of purple lightning snakes instantly devouring the entire parking garage!

He used just one move.

And created destruction so severe that officials had to cover it up as an "accidental incident."

This man...

After five years apart, what had he become?

Su Qingxue's heart pounded wildly. She didn't even dare glance toward the direction of Lin Yu's home, as if a primordial beast that preyed on humans resided there.

"Ultimately, it's still Lin Yu's fault." As the elevator ascended, Aunt brought the topic back around. "If he hadn't gone mad, with that epic-level profession of his back then, the Lin family would have bought a large apartment in the central wealthy district long ago. Why would they need to hole up in this dump?"

"Absolutely right." Second Uncle sighed, shaking his head. "One wrong step leads to many. Even if he's back now, look at that half-dead appearance of his. His life is set like this—what prospects could he possibly have?"

"Such a pity about Yao Yao that child. Originally so promising, but now also..."

Mother Su didn't finish her sentence, but the meaning was clear enough.

In her view, the Lin family was finished.

The older brother was a waste who'd been mad for five years, the younger sister failed her awakening.

The parents were getting old too, and the family savings had probably been depleted by Lin Yu long ago.

Even if Lin Yu had returned now, so what?

A young man who'd wasted five years, long disconnected from society—what use could he be besides adding burden to this already precarious family?

Listening to her mother and relatives' discussion, Su Qingxue's lips moved as if to refute, but no words emerged.

What could she say?

That the waste in their eyes just crippled my supposedly promising boyfriend?

That the "accident" in this rundown complex was caused by one move from him?

Who would believe it if she said it?

They would only think she'd gone mad like Lin Yu.

An unprecedented sense of powerlessness gripped Su Qingxue.

For the first time, she realized she and her mother, these relatives, seemed to be living in two completely different worlds.

"Alright, enough talk." Second Uncle waved his hand, delivering the final verdict.

"Everyone has their own destiny. Can't force what isn't meant to be."

"The only certain thing is..."

"The Lin family has reached its end."

"Ding."

The elevator reached the first floor.

The metal doors slid open gradually to both sides.

"Hmph, the whole family is hopeless." Second Uncle adjusted his glasses, offering the final conclusion to their elevator chatter, stepping out first.

"Exactly, their fortune has run dry." Aunt followed closely behind.

Mother Su pulled Su Qingxue along, still muttering: "Qingxue, you must remember, don't think I'm nagging, but interact less with their family from now on. They bring bad luck."

However, the next moment.

All three of them froze simultaneously at the elevator entrance.

The entire first-floor lobby was brilliantly lit, bright as daylight.

But the light didn't come from the ceiling lamps—it came from countless camera fill lights and the madly flashing magnesium lights.

A dense crowd of people packed the modest-sized lobby to capacity.

Long and short lenses, various microphones bearing media logos, and countless raised phones formed an impenetrable steel jungle.

A wave of noise mixed with sweat, dust, and the heat of electronic equipment washed over them.

"Oh my god!"

Aunt was the first to let out a short scream, instinctively stepping back and nearly stumbling into the elevator.

"This... what is this?" Second Uncle was also stunned, his hand frozen mid-air as he adjusted his glasses.

Mother Su was so shocked her mouth hung open, unable to speak for a long moment.

Chapter 70: Being surrounded before leaving

When they stepped out of the first-floor elevator, the group was genuinely shocked.

They had originally only known that people had come to the residential complex, but from the upstairs window, they had only seen people gathered in the garden below.

Who would have thought that these people had actually all crowded into the lobby of their building!

What was going on?

Su Qingxue's face instantly turned deathly pale.

As she looked at the scene before her, a chill crawled up her spine to the back of her head.

They had come.

They had indeed come after all.

Her mind uncontrollably flashed back to the electric sparks filling the parking lot and Lin Yu's completely expressionless face.

"What's going on? Where's the property management? How could they let all these people in!" Mother Su was the first to complain as she regained her composure, "What if there's a stampede accident? They have no safety awareness at all!"

"Something's not right." Second Uncle pushed up his glasses, the lenses reflecting the flickering lights, "Look at them, why aren't they going upstairs, and why aren't they leaving?"

The group looked more carefully and only then noticed the even more bizarre aspect.

These reporters indeed showed no intention of going upstairs.

Nor did they show any signs of leaving.

They were blocking the center of the lobby, forming a circle, as if... holding a meeting?

In the center of the circle, several reporters who looked quite experienced were talking animatedly, engaged in a heated argument.

The junior reporters and self-media bloggers on the periphery carrying equipment were all craning their necks, ears perked up, faces full of indignation yet too intimidated to step forward, looking thoroughly frustrated.

"What... what are they doing? Do they need to have internal conflicts before conducting interviews?" Aunt was completely baffled.

"Let's go take a closer look." Second Uncle's curiosity was thoroughly piqued, and he lowered his posture, trying to squeeze through gaps in the crowd.

"Hey, be careful! Don't get bumped by their equipment, we can't afford to pay for it!" Aunt reminded him quietly from behind.

Mother Su also pulled Su Qingxue along, following curiously.

Only Su Qingxue moved with steps as heavy as if filled with lead.

She didn't want to go over.

She had a strong premonition that once she got close to that circle, she would hear what she least wanted to hear.

But her mother's grip was so tight that she had no strength to resist.

"...Why should you! Brother Wang, we're legitimate media too, why should you get to ask questions first?"

A young reporter's dissatisfied voice came from the crowd, carrying barely suppressed anger.

"Because we're Linzhou Daily!" a sharp female voice immediately retorted, "Our article can make the front page tomorrow morning, what about yours? How many people will read your article?"

"Everyone is equal when it comes to news! With such big news, whoever gets it first is their capability!"

"Equal? Then go talk about equality with the editor-in-chief! Right now, it's several mainstream media outlets conducting a joint interview to ensure maximum information dissemination - this is the optimal solution! Don't cause trouble here!"

The group had squeezed to the periphery of the crowd just in time to hear these arguments clearly.

Aunt and Second Uncle exchanged glances, both seeing shock and excitement in each other's eyes.

"Big news?" Second Uncle's breathing grew heavier, "Joint interview? Could it be that some reclusive big shot lives in our building?"

"Must be!" Aunt lowered her voice, guessing excitedly, "Could it be that retired veteran cadre upstairs was found to have embezzled billions?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" Mother Su shot her a glare, but her expression was equally animated, "I think it's good news! Didn't you hear them? They want to make a big splash! Must be that some neighbor's child has made it big, soaring to great heights!"

When she said "soaring to great heights," she subconsciously puffed out her chest slightly, as if she were talking about her own Chen Rui.

"Everyone, quiet down!"

The middle-aged reporter called Brother Wang finally lost his patience. He shouted to forcibly suppress all the noise.

"I've already explained the rules! We go up first, get the core material, and share it when we come down! If anyone dares to break the rules and act independently, don't blame us several outlets for joining forces to make sure they can't survive in Linzhou's media circles!"

These words carried heavy, blatant threats.

The young reporters who had been shouting moments ago instantly fell silent, their faces full of humiliation and resentment.

"Alright, now let's finalize the draft!" Brother Wang ignored them and turned to his veteran colleagues, "Simplify the questions, no useless chatter!"

"..."

The rest became hard to hear clearly.

But judging by the situation, they seemed to be preparing to move out.

Brother Wang waved his hand grandly, and the matter was settled just like that.

"Let's go, upstairs!"

He took the lead, with several mainstream media reporters following closely behind, marching menacingly toward the staircase.

The remaining people in the lobby could only watch longingly.

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle finally understood what was happening.

So these people weren't having internal conflicts - they were dividing interests, discussing how to carve up the news.

"What kind of big shot warrants such a grand scene." Aunt clicked her tongue in amazement.

"Who cares, it's none of our business." Mother Su pulled Su Qingxue, "Let's hurry up and leave, don't stick around this commotion, it's troublesome."

Second Uncle also nodded in deep agreement: "Exactly, better to avoid trouble than invite it. We can't afford to offend the people in this building anyway."

Having reached consensus, the group stopped crowding toward the people and instead chose to press against the wall, carefully inching toward the main entrance through the gap between the crowd and the wall.

The crowd was simply too dense.

They were practically being pushed along by the human tide.

Various metal edges of camera equipment occasionally bumped against them, while the smell of sweat and heat emitted from electronic devices mixed together, making people feel dizzy and muddled.

"Ouch, my clothes!" Aunt cried out in distress after being brushed by a camera lens.

"Hurry up, hurry up!" Mother Su urged impatiently, using one hand to protect her branded bag while tightly pulling Su Qingxue with the other.

Su Qingxue followed passively, her face growing even paler.

Right now, she just wanted to quickly leave this troublesome place.

"Speaking of which, this scene is much bigger than when we interviewed Lin Yu five years ago." Second Uncle remarked while struggling to push forward, adjusting his glasses with a sigh.

His voice wasn't loud, but it was clear enough in the noisy environment.

"Absolutely!" Aunt immediately chimed in, her voice full of schadenfreude, "Back then Lin Yu was so glorious, Linzhou's genius! And now? He's just trash now. I think today's matter must be much more explosive than his situation back then!"

They chatted among themselves, completely unaware that a young reporter carrying a camera nearby abruptly froze when he heard the name "Lin Yu."

The young reporter, already frustrated about being excluded by mainstream media, had been straining his ears to eavesdrop on some core information when he unexpectedly caught a key phrase.

Lin Yu?

Suspiciously, he turned his head to look at this group of people who were struggling to move through the crowd while complaining constantly.

Their clothing and appearance were relatively decent, unlike ordinary residents of this building.

And they had just mentioned Lin Yu.

Could it be...

"Wait a moment!"

The young reporter spoke up as if possessed, grabbing Second Uncle who was walking at the back.

"Hey, what are you doing!" Second Uncle was startled, almost falling, and turned back with an angry glare.

"You... were you just talking about Lin Yu?" The young reporter sounded somewhat nervous, but more excited.

This question, though not loud, sounded particularly abrupt next to the reporter team that was about to depart.

Brother Wang and the others who were preparing to go upstairs all stopped in their tracks simultaneously.

Everyone's movements came to a halt.

"Yes, so what?" Second Uncle frowned, looking displeased, "Who we talk about is none of your business?"

He still hadn't realized the severity of the situation.

"You... know Lin Yu?" The young reporter's breathing began to quicken.

"Of course we know him, we just came from his home." Aunt rushed to answer, feeling inexplicably excited facing the camera.

"His home?"

"That's right, Lin Yu is my nephew, is it strange that we came from his home?"

Boom!

The news people instantly transformed into hungry wolves and swarmed around them.

Chapter 71: Didn't she fail to awaken?

The moment those words fell, it was like a depth charge detonating violently in the crowded lobby.

"What?"

"His house?"

"701?"

Countless gazes, "whoosh," all focused on Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle.

Those looks were no longer the casual observation of bystanders watching a spectacle, but rather hungry wolves spotting fresh meat, vultures catching the scent of carrion.

The previously somewhat restrained reporters instantly went insane.

"Whoosh!"

The crowd that had been forcibly suppressed by Brother Wang earlier, like a bursting dam, instantly shattered the invisible barrier, surging madly toward the small space around the elevator entrance.

"Move aside! Move aside!"

"Stop pushing! My equipment!"

Long lenses, short mics, various microphones, and countless raised smartphones, like frenzied piranhas, lunged toward Mother Su and the others.

"Ah!" Aunt was jostled by a charging cameraman, stumbling with a sharp cry.

"What are you doing! Have you gone mad!" Mother Su instinctively pulled Su Qingxue behind her, shouting shrilly, but her voice was instantly drowned in the roaring tide of people.

Second Uncle adjusted his glasses, face deathly pale. Having lived half a lifetime, when had he ever witnessed such a scene? He stood frozen in place, unable to move.

"Excuse me! Are you relatives of Lin Yu and Lin Yao?"

"You just came from their house? Then you must know the inside story!"

"Lin Yao awakened a Myth-level profession! As family members, how do you feel right now?"

"Lin Yu announced he will challenge the thirty-two-fold hellish College Entrance Exam! Do you support him?"

One question after another slammed into them like cannonballs, leaving the three dizzy and disoriented.

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were completely bewildered.

Lin Yao awakened a Myth-level profession?

Lin Yu challenging the thirty-two-fold College Entrance Exam?

What was all this nonsense?

They wondered if they had misheard, or if these reporters had collectively lost their minds.

"What Myth-level profession?" Aunt, being closest to one microphone, instinctively retorted, her face full of utter disbelief. "You must have it wrong! That child Yao Yao failed her Awakening!"

As these words left her mouth.

The entire noisy lobby fell into an eerie silence for one second.

All the reporters, all the bloggers holding up their phones, their expressions froze solid.

Even the previously aggressive Brother Wang stopped his forward push, standing dumbfounded in place.

The silence lasted only a second.

The next second brought an even more frenzied explosion!

"What?!"

"Awakening failed?!"

"Impossible! The official announcement is out! Red Myth-level profession [Omni-Arcanist]! Pushed to the entire city!" A young reporter held up his phone, almost shoving it into Aunt's face.

Aunt, frightened, stepped back and bumped into Mother Su.

Mother Su steadied her and also saw the words on the screen. Her entire mind went blank.

Red Myth-level?

Omni-Arcanist?

How... how was this possible?

Echoing in her mind were Mother Lin's ashen face and Lin Jiahou's heavy sighs from just moments ago in the Lin residence.

And Lin Yao, that child looking utterly devastated, silent and unresponsive.

Did that look like someone who had successfully awakened a Myth-level profession?

"You definitely have it wrong!" Mother Su finally found her voice, refuting with absolute certainty. "We just came down from upstairs! We saw it with our own eyes! That child was crying like a waterfall, her parents' faces were pale! If she had succeeded in awakening, would that be their reaction?"

"Exactly!" Aunt also snapped back to reality. Feeling tricked by these reporters, her anger flared up instantly. "You people, daring to fabricate any lie for a story! Their family is grieving right now, and you're here spreading rumors! Have you no conscience!"

Second Uncle also adjusted his glasses, frowning as he added: "Facts speak louder than words. What we saw is the fact. As for this Myth-level nonsense you speak of, it's utterly ridiculous."

The three of them spoke one after another, stating their case with absolute conviction.

Now, it was the reporters' turn to be bewildered.

On one side was the officially released system announcement, which absolutely could not be wrong.

On the other side were relatives who had just come from the scene, stating their case with absolute certainty.

Who was lying?

What... what in the world was going on?

Everyone felt their brains were insufficient for processing this.

Brother Wang stared intently at Mother Su and the others, trying to find any trace of deception on their faces.

But he failed.

Their expressions showed pure conviction and the anger of being wronged, completely unlike people who were lying.

Could it be... the official announcement was wrong?

The moment this thought emerged, he dismissed it himself.

Then where exactly was the problem?

Just as everyone was plunged into immense confusion, at the outskirts of the crowd, a bespectacled, scholarly-looking reporter suddenly raised his hand. His voice carried a tremor of excitement.

"I've got it!"

All eyes converged on him once again.

"I've been reviewing all the detailed replays of the Awakening Ceremony!" The bespectacled reporter pushed up his glasses excitedly. "Lin Yao's awakening itself was an anomaly! She didn't awaken directly; she first attracted over a thousand purple profession runes, and finally underwent 'Fusion!'"

Fusion!

These two words struck like a bolt of lightning, instantly clearing the fog in everyone's minds!

Brother Wang's eyes suddenly lit up, shining terrifyingly bright!

He understood!

He understood everything!

"So..." another female reporter also caught on, her breathing becoming rapid. "The official announcement means Lin Yao successfully fused the Myth-level profession! That's the result!"

"But!" Brother Wang took over, his voice filled with uncontrollable fervor. "Her family says she failed, says she's heartbroken! This means something went wrong in the process!"

"Fusion... failed?"

"No! Not fusion failure!" The bespectacled reporter was practically shrieking. "She successfully fused the Myth-level profession, but this profession might have, for some reason... collapsed at the final step of fusion! Or, developed a fatal flaw!"

Boom!

This deduction was a hundred times, a thousand times more explosive than "Awakening failure" itself!

A prodigy girl, heavenly phenomena descending, obtaining the qualification to step into myth!

Yet at the final moment, plummeting from the clouds!

What a tragedy!

And what a... captivating super news story!

"Oh my god..."

"Two geniuses in one family? The brother wasted five years, the sister's myth shattered?"

"Is this family cursed?"

"This... this is practically the year's best tragic script!"

All the reporters went insane. The way they looked at Mother Su and the others was no longer just viewing news sources, but rather gazing upon a freshly unearthed, glittering gold mine!

"Excuse me! Is this speculation true? Did Lin Yao's Myth-level profession encounter problems?"

"How is she doing now? Has her spirit suffered a massive blow?"

"What about Lin Yu? Does he know about his sister's situation? Is his challenge of the thirty-two-fold difficulty due to being stimulated by his sister's failure?"

Chapter 72: I announce the Rising Star Project!

The questions became more intense, sharper, and more... cruel than before.

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were completely bewildered by the reporters' wild speculation.

What fusion? What collapse?

They didn't understand.

But they understood one thing.

Lin Yao seemed to have truly awakened a Myth-level profession.

But it also seemed she had truly failed.

The huge contrast and information shock completely overloaded their brains, leaving them only able to instinctively follow the reporters' lead in their responses.

"Yes... yes, it failed..."

"The child... the child was hit hard..."

Their brains could no longer process such complex information.

They could only rely on instinct to cater to these crazy reporters.

"Yes... yes, hit very hard..." Mother Su nodded woodenly, her mind completely blank.

"When we saw her, she didn't say anything, just kept crying." Aunt added, feeling she was just stating facts.

"Her parents are going crazy with worry!" Second Uncle adjusted his glasses, his voice trembling.

These words, falling into the reporters' ears, were instantly processed into the perfect story material.

Brother Wang's eyes shone with excitement as he practically dictated his article on the spot to the camera beside him.

"What are we witnessing? A family tragedy!"

"Genius girl Lin Yao, under everyone's watchful eyes, triggered Myth-level phenomena, only to fail at the final fusion step, falling from the clouds!"

"Her family, her parents, are now immersed in immense grief!"

The female reporter beside him immediately followed up, adding to another camera: "And what's even more heartbreaking is her brother, Lin Yu!"

"That former genius, the 'Myriad Forms Card Crafter' who wasted five whole years!"

"After witnessing his sister's tragedy, the chains in his heart seem to have been broken! He transformed grief into strength, resolutely declaring he would challenge that unprecedented, hellish..."

"Not thirty-two times!" In the crowd, the bespectacled reporter who had checked the information earlier suddenly screamed, interrupting her. "Latest news! The authorities just updated the announcement! Lin Yu's assessment difficulty is based on this year's standards, and calculated comprehensively... it's... it's one hundred sixty times his original difficulty!"

Journalists, media people, are naturally more sensitive to higher numbers.

One hundred sixty times!

Boom!

If the previous news was a bomb, then this number was a precision-guided nuclear warhead, detonating in everyone's minds!

Thirty-two times was already uncharted territory for humanity.

One hundred sixty times?

What kind of concept was that?

"He's crazy! He's completely lost his mind!"

"For his sister, he's betting his life for a future!"

"How tragic! How resolute! The deep bond between siblings is evident here!"

The reporters went completely wild.

A perfect story filled with tragedy, twists, struggle, and sacrifice was being woven right before their eyes, crafted by their own hands.

Two geniuses in one family - the brother fell, the sister rose only to fall again.

The brother burns himself upon the ruins of his sister's fall, trying to illuminate the family's future!

It's so inspiring!

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were completely swept up in this fervent atmosphere. Hearing words like "tragic," "resolute," and "deep sibling bond," then thinking of Lin Yu's indifferent face and Lin Yao's devastated state, they actually started to feel... that this seemed to be the case.

An absurd sense of identification rose in their hearts.

Yes, that child Lin Yu must have been deeply stimulated.

With Yao Yao so pitiful, as her older brother, he had to do something.

Although one hundred sixty times sounded like suicide, his determination was commendable!

Just as the lobby atmosphere reached its peak, with everyone immersed in this self-woven tragic epic they had created.

"Make way!"

A cold, sharp command came from the direction of the main entrance.

The voice wasn't loud, but carried an undeniable penetrating force.

The crowded crowd seemed pushed aside by an invisible force, automatically parting to create a pathway.

Everyone turned to look.

Outside the main door, several black-suited, sunglasses-wearing bodyguards cleared the way as a middle-aged man in a silver-gray custom-tailored suit, his hair meticulously combed, walked in slowly surrounded by a group of assistants.

The man had a powerful presence, each step steady and forceful. He scanned the chaotic lobby, his brows slightly furrowed but showing no impatience.

The reporters were stunned.

Who was this?

What impressive entourage!

"It's... it's Feng Rui from Wind Rider Technology! Vice President Feng!" A reporter who covered finance screamed out from the crowd.

Wind Rider Technology!

Feng Rui!

These two words made all media professionals hold their breath for a second.

Who in Linzhou didn't know Wind Rider Technology? That commercial giant covering multiple fields including energy, materials, and medicine!

Primarily focused on medicine.

And Feng Rui, although holding the title of Vice President, was well known in the industry - with Wind Rider Technology's directors mostly holding multiple positions or semi-retired, this Vice President Feng was the true helmsman of Wind Rider Technology!

This kind of heavyweight who could make Linzhou's business world tremble with a single stomp - why would he personally come to this shabby residential area?

The reporters' minds instantly started racing.

Could it be...

Also because of the Lin family matter?

There seemed to be no other possibility.

Everyone's hearts began racing wildly.

They had a premonition that the biggest news of the night might just be beginning.

Feng Rui ignored the surrounding commotion. Under his bodyguards' protection, he walked directly to the center of the lobby, to the circle that the reporters had spontaneously cleared.

He stopped, his gaze sweeping over the faces twisted with excitement and confusion.

Finally, he revealed a formal yet powerfully confident smile.

"Good evening, friends from the media."

His voice, amplified by some device, clearly spread throughout the entire lobby, instantly suppressing all noise.

"I came here today for only one thing."

Feng Rui paused, enjoying everyone's breathless attention.

"Wind Rider Technology will officially launch a talent strategy called the 'Rising Star Project.'"

"We will spare no cost, mobilizing all corporate resources, to cultivate this era's most outstanding, most promising young people."

"And tonight, we are very honored to have found here the first, and most important, member of the 'Rising Star Project.'"

His words were like massive stones thrown into a lake, creating huge waves.

All the reporters went wild, desperately pushing forward, aiming their microphones and cameras at Feng Rui.

The first member?

Here?

Could it be... Lin Yao?

But didn't she... fail?

Chapter 73: Don't you know their situation?

Amidst everyone's most fervent speculations, Feng Rui slowly raised his hand and pointed toward the upstairs direction.

"This genius is none other than the one who just awakened the red Myth-level profession [Omni-Arcanist]..."

"Miss Lin Yao!"

The moment the name landed, the entire hall fell dead silent.

Everyone was dumbfounded.

The journalists looked at each other, their faces filled with absurdity.

What was going on?

The helmsman of Wind Rider Technology personally came to sign a "failed awakening" genius?

Was this a business investment or charitable poverty relief?

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were struck as if by lightning, standing frozen in place.

They had just been lamenting Lin Yao's "failure" and sighing over the Lin Family's "tragedy," yet in the blink of an eye, the president of a hundred-billion corporation came saying he wanted to sign her?

What was wrong with this world?

However, Feng Rui's next words truly made them understand what madness meant.

"We believe in Miss Lin Yao's potential and firmly trust her future is limitless."

Feng Rui's voice was filled with mesmerizing power.

"Therefore, Wind Rider Technology's Board of Directors unanimously decided to provide Miss Lin Yao with a special maximum-tier contract!"

He extended one finger.

"Including a one-time signing bonus of eighty million!"

Eigh...

Eighty million?!

"Boom!"

Mother Su's mind exploded; she felt the world spinning and nearly lost her footing.

Aunt's mouth hung wide open, unable to utter any sound.

Second Uncle's glasses slid off his nose bridge, falling to the ground with a "crack" and shattering to pieces.

The entire hall, all the journalists, all the onlookers, lost their ability to think at this moment.

Eighty million!

That wasn't eight hundred thousand, not eight million!

It was eighty million in cash!

For someone they had just defined as a "fallen genius"?

"Additionally," Feng Rui seemed quite satisfied with this shocking effect, smiling as he dropped the final and most explosive bomb.

"The contract will also include a resource treatment bias fifty times that of traditional S-tier contracts!"

"This is the highest specification Wind Rider Technology has ever offered!"

Fifty times!

If eighty million was a monetary impact, then fifty times the resource treatment was an absolute affirmation of future potential!

This wasn't signing a rookie!

This was clearly welcoming a future deity!

All the journalists were stunned.

They had just been weaving a tragic story of "genius fallen, siblings' deep bond."

Before they could even finish crafting the story, the helmsman of a hundred-billion corporation jumped out, tearing their freshly written script to shreds with an unprecedented astronomical contract.

What... what exactly was happening?

Amid the chaos, a young journalist, probably new to the profession and not yet fully processing the situation, raised his microphone and shakily voiced the question in everyone's hearts.

"Pre... President Feng, are... are you sure it's Miss Lin Yao?"

His voice wasn't loud, but it was exceptionally clear in the dead-silent hall.

"Do... do you know about her family's situation?"

This question was extremely skillfully phrased.

He didn't directly say "Lin Yao's awakening failed," but used the vague term "family situation."

This was both probing and leaving himself an escape route.

Feng Rui's smile faded slightly as he glanced at the journalist.

"Of course I'm certain. Wind Rider Technology conducts the most thorough investigations before making any decisions."

His response was flawless, filled with the confidence of someone in power.

"As for her family's situation, what does that have to do with us signing a genius with Myth-level potential?"

Boom!

The last shred of hope in the journalists' minds shattered.

He didn't know!

Feng Rui truly didn't know!

He didn't know about Lin Yao's "failed awakening"!

He didn't know that the family upstairs was currently shrouded in "immense grief"!

Once they realized this, all the media professionals' blood ignited instantly!

Relatives who just came from the scene, swearing the awakening failed, heartbroken and devastated.

A business magnate with extensive connections, personally arriving with an eighty-million and fifty-times-resource maximum-tier contract to sign her.

If these two things collided...

What kind of earth-shattering scene would that create?

A timid journalist instinctively wanted to speak up and warn him.

"President Feng, actually..."

He had only uttered four words when a colleague beside him immediately jabbed him hard with an elbow while blocking him with his body.

The look in his eyes was icy and sharp.

Shut up!

The journalist who wanted to speak instantly understood.

Looking around, he realized all his colleagues, whether Brother Wang from mainstream media or those marginalized journalists from smaller outlets, had reached a bizarre consensus at this moment.

Everyone had shut their mouths.

Their faces bore an almost cruel excitement.

Couldn't say it!

Absolutely must not tell Feng Rui!

If they revealed this news, its news value would drop significantly.

But if they let Feng Rui go upstairs himself, full of sincerity and carrying an astronomical contract, to personally face that "grief-stricken" family...

What expression would the Lin family wear when they learned they had missed out on eighty million cash and a contract that could change their destiny?

What expression would Feng Rui wear when he learned that the "rising star" he personally pursued with absolute determination was actually a "failed product"?

This was no longer just news.

This was top-tier material worthy of being recorded in Linzhou's annual news history!

It was a god-tier plot twist! An earth-shattering exposé!

Realizing this, Brother Wang was the first to react, immediately switching to an enthusiastic smile and thrusting his microphone forward.

"President Feng's foresight is remarkable! Truly worthy of being Wind Rider Technology's helmsman!"

"Exactly! Heroes aren't measured by their origins! How can family situation become a standard for evaluating genius?"

"President Feng, could you elaborate on this 'Rising Star Project'? Why did you choose Miss Lin Yao as the first candidate? Which traits of her [Omni-Arcanist] profession attracted you?"

The journalists instantly changed their tune, questions flooding in like tides, but all skillfully avoiding the topic of "failed awakening," instead frantically praising Feng Rui's project.

What they needed to do was elevate Feng Rui as high as possible, inflating the value of this contract to the maximum.

The higher he was lifted, the louder the crash when he fell!

Feng Rui clearly reveled in this kind of attention.

He thoroughly enjoyed being pursued by media and becoming the center of focus.

He cleared his throat and began speaking eloquently.

"The 'Rising Star Project' is Wind Rider Technology's core strategy for the next decade. Our goal is to find and cultivate this era's most exceptional geniuses, building reserves of power for humanity's future."

"As for why we chose Miss Lin Yao..."

A confident smile appeared on Feng Rui's face: "Because the potential of [Omni-Arcanist], this profession, exceeds all your imaginations! What it represents is limitless possibility!"

Chapter 74: Feng Rui, you have no martial ethics!

Feng Rui's words were filled with inflammatory rhetoric.

The journalists frantically took notes, camera flashes never ceasing.

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were completely bewildered by this frenzied atmosphere.

They didn't understand anything about "limitless possibilities."

They only knew that Lin Yao, the "failure" in their eyes, had now become someone else's prized catch.

A prized catch worth eighty million.

Mother Su's heart felt like it was being squeezed by an invisible hand, each beat accompanied by excruciating pain.

Eighty million...

If... if they had been a bit more polite upstairs earlier...

Just then, from the crowd, the bespectacled journalist who had earlier pointed out that Lin Yu's assessment difficulty was one hundred sixty times normal spoke up again.

His question was sharper than anyone else's.

"President Feng, we've noticed that Wind Rider Technology's stock price seems somewhat volatile recently, and there are market rumors about internal issues within the group. Are you launching the 'Rising Star Project' with such high profile and personally coming to the frontlines at this time to boost market confidence and respond to external doubts?"

This question instantly froze the atmosphere on site.

Everyone looked at Feng Rui.

This was practically questioning Wind Rider Technology face-to-face about whether they had problems.

Feng Rui's smile remained unchanged, but his sweeping gaze across the room carried an additional sense of pressure.

"Doubts?"

He retorted, then laughed.

"If Wind Rider truly had problems, do you think I would still be standing here today?"

"If the rumors were true, do you think I would have the leisure to personally launch a massively expensive 'Rising Star Project'?"

He didn't answer directly, but his counter-questions were more powerful than any answer.

Indeed.

If a hundred-billion corporation truly had major problems, how could its helmsman have the mood to come to such a place and make a public appearance for a single contract?

His very presence here was the most powerful rebuttal to all rumors!

"Everyone," Feng Rui raised his voice, drawing everyone's attention, "I can promise you one thing here."

"To give back to society, and to celebrate the launch of the 'Rising Star Project.' Soon, our Wind Rider Technology will jointly launch an unprecedented promotional event with the other two major medicine giants."

"As for the specific content, you'll find out in a couple of days!"

Another bombshell announcement!

The three major medicine giants jointly organizing an event?

What scale would that be?

The journalists went completely wild, knowing that tonight's headlines would keep coming one after another, impossible to cover them all!

Feng Rui was very satisfied with the on-site effect.

The purpose of promoting the "Rising Star Project" had been achieved.

The purpose of responding to market doubts had been achieved.

He had even conveniently warmed up the market for the upcoming promotional activity.

Three birds with one stone.

Perfect.

He straightened his suit, no longer paying attention to the swarming journalists.

"Alright, everyone."

"I'm going upstairs now to meet the first member of our 'Rising Star Project.'"

After speaking, protected by his bodyguards, he turned and walked toward the elevator entrance of Building B, Unit 7.

Behind him, a large group of journalists carrying their equipment followed closely like sharks smelling blood.

Everyone's faces bore the fervor of witnessing history in the making.

The elevator entrance was within reach.

Feng Rui's assistant had already pressed the up button.

That earth-shattering "signing farce" seemed about to begin any second.

However!

Just as Feng Rui was about to step into the elevator car with one foot!

"BANG!"

The already old glass door of the community lobby was violently pushed open from outside!

The force was so great that the entire door groaned under the strain.

Immediately after, another large group of people surged in!

Similarly dressed in uniform black suits, similarly with well-trained bodyguards clearing the way.

But unlike Feng Rui's composed team, this group arrived more urgently, faster, and with even more... overwhelming momentum!

They practically charged in!

The leader was a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, a large belly, and sweat beading on his forehead. The moment he entered, his gaze accurately locked onto Feng Rui at the elevator entrance.

"Feng Rui! You fucking have no martial virtue!"

A furious roar echoed throughout the entire lobby.

Everyone was stunned.

The journalists' cameras instinctively swung away from Feng Rui and sharply toward the entrance.

"Is that... President Qian from Baisheng?"

"Why is he here too? And cursing at Feng Rui?"

Before anyone could react, a second wave, then a third wave of people arrived in quick succession!

"Move aside! Everyone move aside!"

"Heaven's Pillar Group conducting business!"

"Eastern China Heavy Industries! Uninvolved personnel step back!"

One thunderous company name after another from Linzhou burst from the mouths of these newcomers.

Each name represented a giant in its field!

Their people now crowded into this shabby community lobby like they were rushing to a market.

The entire lobby was instantly packed with a dense crowd of people.

The atmosphere instantly shifted from the earlier fervor to a suffocating gravity and absurdity.

The journalists were completely dumbfounded.

Brother Wang's mouth hung open wide enough to fit an egg.

The bespectacled journalist nearly dropped his camera.

What... what was happening?

Were all the prominent companies in Linzhou holding their annual meeting here tonight?!

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were completely terrified by this spectacle.

They huddled in the corner, watching one major figure after another—people they'd only seen in financial news—walk past them, not even daring to breathe heavily.

Their minds were completely unable to comprehend the scene unfolding before them.

"I understand!"

From the crowd, Brother Wang suddenly slapped his thigh, his entire body trembling with excitement.

"I completely understand!"

He stared intently at the newly arrived company representatives, then glanced at Feng Rui, who was blocked at the elevator entrance with an ugly expression.

"The rules! It's the rules!"

"What rules?" a young journalist nearby urgently asked.

"Unwritten rules!" Brother Wang's voice was very low but filled with wild joy. "Every year after the Awakening Ceremony, for those top-tier geniuses, the major companies have an unwritten rule!"

"Let them cool off for a few days! Wait for them and their families to calm down, drive down their psychological price! Then make moves to sign them!"

"This both saves costs and avoids vicious competition!"

"But today!" Brother Wang's eyes gleamed with sharp light. "That old fox Feng Rui, to seize the initiative, for his damn 'Rising Star Project,' he broke the rules! He tried to sneak ahead!"

Boom!

All the journalists understood in that moment!

They looked at Feng Rui, then at the aggressive latecomers, feeling their blood burning throughout their bodies.

No wonder!

No wonder these big shots personally came down to the field!

Feng Rui wanted to use information asymmetry to lock down a Myth-level profession early with a seemingly sky-high contract!

And the others, upon learning the news, immediately couldn't sit still!

How could they let you, Wind Rider Technology, so easily snatch away a Myth-level profession?

Even if we can't get it, we absolutely won't let you have it comfortably!

We're here to drive up your price!

To ruin your plans!

To thoroughly disgust you!

Chapter 75: The highest bidder wins?

For a moment, the intentions of all the latecomers became crystal clear.

The President Qian from Baisheng, who had rushed in first, had already pushed through the crowd and walked up to Feng Rui.

He looked Feng Rui up and down with a fake smile that didn't reach his eyes.

"President Feng, you run quite fast."

"I heard Wind Rider is launching some 'Rising Star Project'? What, has your stock price fallen so low you can't even maintain appearances anymore, needing to sign a rookie to bring some luck?"

His words were filled with undisguised sarcasm.

Feng Rui's face had already darkened considerably.

The composure and confidence he had maintained all night vanished completely in this moment.

He had miscalculated.

He hadn't expected his old rivals to react so quickly.

Even less had he expected them to so disregard propriety, directly tearing off all pretense and chasing him here.

"Fatty Qian," Feng Rui spoke coldly, "my affairs are none of your business."

"None of my business?" President Qian laughed, and the representatives from Heaven's Pillar Group and Eastern China Heavy Industries behind him also closed in, forming an encirclement.

"Miss Lin Yao has awakened to a Myth-level profession!"

"Myth-level! Do you understand?"

"This is a treasure belonging to the entire Linzhou, no, to the entire world! Not some private property of your Wind Rider Technology alone!" a man wearing gold-rimmed glasses declared righteously.

"Exactly! If you want to sign her, fine, let's have fair competition!"

"Highest bidder wins!"

"President Feng, your eighty million seems rather shabby, doesn't it?"

"My Baisheng Pharmaceuticals is willing to offer ninety million!" President Qian roared directly.

"Our Heaven's Pillar Group offers one hundred million!"

"One hundred million, plus S-level contract resources increased sixty-fold!"

Bidding voices rose one after another.

Each offer higher than the last, each more aggressive than the previous.

The reporters had already become numb.

They just mechanically pointed their cameras at these influential figures who could make Linzhou tremble with a single stomp, watching them like vendors in a vegetable market, frantically bidding for a "commodity" they didn't understand at all.

And when Mother Su heard the number "one hundred million," her eyes rolled back, and she nearly fainted on the spot.

Fortunately, Aunt beside her caught her in time.

One hundred million.

This number descended upon her heart like an insurmountable mountain, crushing her and making it hard to breathe.

The reporters had completely lost their ability to speak, only instinctively, mechanically recording this utterly absurd scene before them.

The helmsmen of Linzhou's major groups were frantically raising their bids for what they called a "treasure."

While the relatives of that "treasure" were grieving over her so-called "failure."

The stark contrast created intense dramatic tension that made everyone present feel their scalps tingling.

Amid this nearly frozen chaos, Feng Rui, as the eye of the storm, did something no one expected.

He smiled.

Not the formulaic, confidently powerful smile from before.

But a genuine smile from the heart, carrying a hint of pleasure.

He had figured it out—the key wasn't what these competitors thought, but what the public thought, what the shareholders thought, what the capital market thought.

So he withdrew his foot that was about to step into the elevator, turned around, and calmly straightened his expensive suit jacket, his movements unhurried.

Then, he scanned the faces distorted by shock, greed, and anger.

"President Qian, one hundred million."

"Heaven's Pillar's President Li, one hundred million, plus sixty-fold resources."

He repeated the previous bids slowly, as if confirming a menu.

"Anyone else?"

He asked politely, his posture extremely humble, even carrying a hint of encouragement.

Everyone was stunned.

The sarcastic expression on President Qian's plump face instantly froze.

Heaven's Pillar's President Li, the man with gold-rimmed glasses, also furrowed his brow.

Something was wrong.

This reaction was completely wrong!

According to the normal script, Feng Rui should be flying into a rage now, or blustering and exchanging insults with them.

He should be accusing them of breaking rules, accusing them of malicious competition.

But he didn't.

Not only was he not angry, he seemed... happy?

He was even actively inviting everyone to continue bidding?

What was this? Thinking he wasn't dying fast enough?

"Feng Rui, what the hell are you playing at?"

President Qian finally couldn't hold back, taking a step forward until he was almost face-to-face with Feng Rui.

Feng Rui just looked at him calmly, then turned his gaze to everyone behind him.

"Everyone, please remain calm."

"We're all here for Linzhou's future, for our shared treasure, Miss Lin Yao."

He emphasized the word "treasure" particularly heavily, as if reminding them of something.

"Since everyone has shown such sincerity, I, Feng Rui, naturally cannot be the villain who monopolizes everything."

He paused, revealing what could be called a benevolent smile.

"I propose we engage in fair competition."

"A genius like Miss Lin Yao deserves the best contract, and deserves all of us competing for her with our utmost sincerity."

"Highest bidder wins—it's only natural."

These words were impeccably spoken, lofty and proper.

But to the ears of President Qian, President Li, and the others, they were like thunder from a clear sky.

Their hearts simultaneously skipped a beat.

A trap!

That old fox Feng Rui definitely had a trick up his sleeve!

Their purpose in coming here today wasn't actually to spend one hundred million to sign a freshly awakened rookie.

Even for a Myth-level profession, there had to be limits to early investment.

One hundred million in total investment wasn't much, but as a signing bonus, this price was absurd.

Their goal was to drive up the price, to annoy Feng Rui, to ruin his "sneak attack" plan.

To make Feng Rui either give up resentfully, or bleed heavily, signing her back under massive cost pressure and facing accountability from his company's board of directors.

But now, Feng Rui was actively handing them the executioner's blade, even smilingly encouraging them to strike harder.

When things go abnormal, there must be mischief afoot!

The minds of all the company representatives were racing.

They were thinking: where exactly was Feng Rui's confidence coming from?

Could Wind Rider Technology's financial situation be much better than rumored, and he didn't care about a signing bonus of over one hundred million?

Impossible.

The financial reports of listed companies were all there—Wind Rider had definitely been having tough times recently.

Then... where was the problem?

In the crowd, Heaven's Pillar Group's President Li, the gold-rimmed glasses man, adjusted his frames.

His mind rapidly flashed through all the intelligence about the Awakening Ceremony he had received this afternoon.

Thousands of purple Profession Runes shooting into the sky.

Anomalies covering the entire Linzhou.

All the purple runes ultimately converging into Lin Yao's body.

Finally, awakening into the red Myth-level profession, [Omni-Arcanist].

Wait!

A bolt of lightning flashed through President Li's mind!

He had finally grasped that key point everyone had overlooked!

Fusion!

Lin Yao's awakening didn't appear out of thin air—it was the result of fusing thousands of purple professions!

According to the characteristics of profession fusion, the new profession after fusion would inherit all the advantages of the base professions and undergo qualitative transformation!

What did this mean?

This meant that Lin Yao's [Omni-Arcanist] possessed unlimited plasticity!

She wasn't a fixed Myth-level Practitioner.

There was a high probability...

She remained a perfect template that could adjust her own abilities according to cultivation direction at any time, theoretically capable of mastering all systems!

Chapter 76: Go upstairs, everyone go upstairs!

Once he figured this out, President Li's back instantly broke out in a cold sweat.

He abruptly looked up, staring at Feng Rui.

He finally understood!

He finally understood why Feng Rui would tear off all pretenses, even break the rules to snatch this person early!

Because that old fox Feng Rui wasn't signing a myth-level genius!

He was seizing a "possibility" that could define the future!

Those things he said earlier—"potential beyond imagination," "limitless possibilities"—what if they weren't flattery, but facts!

This intelligence absolutely had to be Wind Rider Technology's exclusive information!

He wanted to exploit this information gap, using a contract that seemed astronomically priced but was actually a steal, to secure this future all-round employee in advance!

"You crafty Feng Rui!"

President Li stared daggers at Feng Rui, practically squeezing the words through gritted teeth.

The people beside him, like President Qian, seeing President Li's reaction, though they hadn't yet grasped all the details, immediately realized the situation's severity far exceeded their imagination.

"President Li, what's wrong?"

"What's so special about this Lin Yao?"

President Li didn't answer. He just looked at Feng Rui's calm face, then spoke word by word.

"Heaven's Pillar Group offers one hundred and fifty million!"

"Additionally, S-class contract resources, increased eighty-fold!"

"Moreover, we are willing to form an exclusive top-tier support team for Miss Lin Yao, meeting all her future growth needs!"

Boom!

If the previous hundred million was madness.

Then this one hundred and fifty million was utter hysteria!

This was no longer just raising the price.

This was betting the company's future!

Most crucially, President Li's attitude showed he was dead serious!

President Qian and the other company representatives, upon hearing President Li's offer, first froze, then quickly caught on.

If even the famously cautious President Li was willing to stake this much, it could only mean one thing.

Lin Yao's value was even more terrifying than any of them had imagined!

"Baisheng offers... one hundred and sixty million!" President Qian gritted his teeth and roared out the bid.

"Eastern China Heavy Industries can provide the highest access permissions to all material laboratories under our group!"

The bidding voices erupted once more.

But this time, the atmosphere had completely shifted.

No longer the previous rowdy, drama-fueled heckling.

But a truly bloody... slaughter!

The reporters were completely dumbstruck.

Brother Wang's hand holding the microphone trembled.

The bespectacled reporter aimed his camera lens at Feng Rui standing at the crowd's center.

He remained standing there, that inscrutable smile still on his face.

He watched these old rivals he was manipulating like puppets, watching them transition from mockery to shock, to their current frenzy.

His heart was ice-cold.

Come on.

All of you, come.

Bid it even higher.

The higher you bid, the easier it will be for me to justify things when I return.

The more frenzied you make the atmosphere, the more... justified my long-prepared, all-out astronomical contract will appear.

He wanted to sign Lin Yao not because of her value, but to boost market confidence.

For this, he would spare no expense.

For publicity, the bigger the spectacle, the better the effect!

Lin Yao was merely a pawn to display his strength; his preparations were extensive.

Li Mo was absolutely right—if Old Ghost Hall could throw out hundreds of billions in goods to attack them, why would they hesitate over this small change?

As for whether this Lin Yao was actually worth it...

Once they signed her, Wind Rider had plenty of ways to recoup their investment from her!

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle were completely numb.

Huddled in the corner, listening to those astronomical figures spouting from the mouths of important people, their minds went completely blank.

One hundred fifty million... one hundred sixty million...

They couldn't even imagine such sums, let alone see them.

Amid this near-uncontrollable frenzy, a voice suddenly cut through the noise.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!"

It was the ever-active reporter, Brother Wang.

He pushed through the crowd, holding up his microphone, his face plastered with an obsequious smile.

"I understand everyone's enthusiasm! It's for Linzhou's treasure, after all!"

"But, isn't it a bit... inappropriate for us to be bidding like this downstairs?"

His words caused a slight pause in the frantic bidding frenzy.

Everyone looked at him.

Brother Wang cleared his throat and continued, "After all, signing a contract is a major event. Ultimately, it depends on Miss Lin Yao's own wishes and respects her family's opinions."

"What does it look like with all of us crowded down here like this?"

"In my opinion, why doesn't everyone go upstairs first, lay out your respective offers in front of Miss Lin Yao and her family. Let Miss Lin Yao choose for herself!"

"That way, it's fair competition, it's respecting genius, right?"

As soon as he finished speaking, the scene instantly fell silent.

All the company representatives were stunned.

Right!

They were down here shouting themselves hoarse, but what if the people upstairs didn't acknowledge it?

What if Lin Yao had already privately reached an agreement with someone?

Unlikely, but not impossible!

Most importantly, Brother Wang's words gave them a way out.

The bidding had reached an absurd level; going higher would be unbearable for anyone.

Going upstairs to negotiate face-to-face, returning the decision-making power to the "commodity" itself, was undoubtedly the best choice right now.

"Exactly! Reporter Wang is right!"

Baisheng's President Qian was the first to react, wiping sweat from his forehead.

"We should go up and let Miss Lin Yao see our sincerity for herself!"

"Right! Let's talk upstairs!"

Heaven's Pillar's President Li immediately agreed, pushing his gold-rimmed glasses back up, regaining some composure.

He needed time, needed to contact headquarters immediately to reassess the risks and maximum bid for this signing.

"Let's go! Upstairs!"

"Don't crowd! Let President Feng and President Qian go first!"

The crowd's fervor instantly found a new outlet.

Feng Rui, President Qian, President Li, and a few others—these men at the pyramid's peak, surrounded by bodyguards, headed towards the building's sole old elevator.

Their expressions varied.

Feng Rui still wore that confident, everything-under-control smile.

President Qian and President Li looked grave, whispering urgently into miniature communicators with their headquarters as they walked, clearly applying for higher authority and increased bids.

The elevator door slowly opened, and the men filed in.

The door slowly closed before everyone's eyes.

The remaining people were completely shut out.

The lobby fell dead silent for a second.

The next second.

"Damn! They took the elevator!"

"What do we do? Wait for the next trip? It'll be too late by then!"

"Wait, my ass! Take the stairs! It's only the seventh floor!"

Someone roared.

Boom!

The entire lobby crowd, like a burst dam, suddenly turned and frantically surged towards the narrow, dimly lit stairwell!

"Charge!"

"Don't push me! This camera costs millions!"

"Move aside! Let the reporters through first!"

Chaos.

Utter chaos.

The previously suited-up, respectable company representatives and media journalists now tore off all pretenses, revealing their most primal impulses.

They shoved, cursed, and scrambled desperately towards that dark stairwell entrance.

Mother Su, Aunt, Second Uncle, and Su Qingxue hurriedly started climbing the stairs too; they were still half in a daze.

Brother Wang was jostled left and right, but he still held his microphone high, his face showing a sickly excitement.

The bespectacled reporter, swept along by the human tide, adjusted his glasses, a grin spreading across his lips that others couldn't comprehend.

Amid this near-uncontrollable frenzy, a voice suddenly cut through the noise.

Both read the same meaning in each other's expressions.

The real show was just beginning.

Those big shots upstairs were still fighting tooth and nail over a "myth-level profession"?

Still frantically raising bids by hundreds of millions?

Ridiculous.

Absolutely ridiculous!

They had no idea what they were about to face!

The bespectacled reporter adjusted the angle of the miniature camera on his chest, ensuring it would capture the clearest footage.

What they wanted to see was never the birth of some astronomical signing.

What they wanted to see was how this carnival would, in an instant, turn into a colossal joke!

It was the absolutely spectacular expressions on these arrogant big shots' faces when they realized they'd been played!

His words caused a slight pause in the frantic bidding frenzy.

Hadn't Lin Yao failed?

Now that was the real headline!

Chapter 77: Don't rub salt into her wounds!

The elevator doors opened on the seventh floor with a "ding."

Feng Rui, President Qian, President Li, and several other men who could command wind and rain in Linzhou's business world stepped out, each accompanied by their most elite assistants and bodyguards.

They almost simultaneously arrived at the doorway.

That old security door now seemed like an entrance to boundless treasure in their eyes.

Meanwhile, from the stairwell came thunderous footsteps and heavy panting.

"Hurry! Faster! It's on the seventh floor!"

"Damn it, who stepped on my foot!"

"Stop pushing! Let me through first!"

A dark mass of people surged frantically from the stairwell entrance, their target directly aimed at the Lin family's door.

The entire seventh-floor corridor was instantly jammed completely tight.

At the same time.

Inside.

The atmosphere was so oppressive it felt tangible.

Lin Yao sat on the sofa, burying her head in her knees.

She wasn't crying, but that silent gloom was more heartbreaking than any wailing sob. She felt utterly distraught right now.

Father Lin and Mother Lin sat nearby, completely at a loss.

They thought their daughter was so distressed because she couldn't accept the blow of failing her awakening and not getting a profession.

"Yao Yao, it's okay, it's just a profession, right?"

"Let's go home. Mom and Dad will take care of you for life."

Mother Lin's eyes reddened as she gently patted her daughter's back, her voice choked with emotion.

Father Lin sighed, pulled a cigarette case from his pocket, thought about smoking, then glanced at his daughter and finally stuffed it back.

His gaze shifted to his son sitting silently in the corner from start to finish.

Lin Yu sat quietly in the single sofa, calmly watching everything before him.

He certainly knew why his sister was upset.

Not because of failure.

But because during the Awakening Ceremony, she had seen those high-level executives reveal their greedy, ugly faces while competing for her.

That made her feel disgusted, feel powerless.

Of course, there were also those relatives...

But Lin Yu believed in Lin Yao.

She was far stronger than everyone thought.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Heavy, urgent knocking shattered the deathly silence inside.

This wasn't a polite visit—it was more like a death knell, pounding against everyone's hearts with each strike.

Mother Lin jumped in fright, her hand pausing mid-air as she patted her daughter's back.

This wasn't a polite visit—it was more like a death knell, pounding against everyone's hearts with each strike.

"Who is it? In the middle of the night!"

Lin Yao buried her head even deeper.

She didn't want to see anyone right now.

"Sis! It's me! Su Mei! And your second brother! Open up!"

Outside came Mother Su's anxious yet somewhat excited shouting.

Father Lin and Mother Lin exchanged glances, both sighing in relief.

It's them. Why did they come back?

Father Lin walked over, unlocking the door while complaining.

"What's wrong, did you forget something..."

The door opened.

The complaints abruptly stopped.

Father Lin froze completely in the doorway.

Outside were people.

A dark mass of people.

Countless unfamiliar faces packed the entire hallway, extending all the way to the stairwell entrance, with more heads surging behind them.

At the front were faces usually only seen in financial news.

Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology; President Qian of Baisheng Pharmaceuticals; President Li of Heaven's Pillar Group...

They all wore nearly fanatical expressions, staring intently at him, or rather, at the room behind him.

Countless camera flashes went off wildly among the crowd, the clicking sounds never ceasing.

Father Lin's mind went completely blank.

What... what was happening?

"Brother-in-law! Let us in quickly!"

Mother Su squeezed through the gap between Feng Rui and President Qian, followed by the equally terrified Aunt and Second Uncle.

Behind them, Su Qingxue looked pale, her body trembling as she looked at Lin Yu in the corner.

"Old Lin, what's wrong?"

Mother Lin also sensed something amiss and came over.

When she saw the scene outside, she froze completely, just like her husband.

So many people!

Who were they? What did they want?

In the corner, Lin Yu's [Eye of Analysis] had already seen through everything.

They came really fast.

Faster than he expected.

He originally thought only a bunch of journalists following the scent would come. He never expected these corporate leaders would personally intervene so quickly.

He watched with interest the well-dressed men at the door, observing the undisguised greed and desire in their eyes.

Lin Yao lifted her head. Seeing the dark mass of people at the door and those ugly faces she'd seen during the Awakening Ceremony, her expression grew even more indignant.

She was genuinely curious.

Five years ago, under the spotlight, how did her brother manage to chat and laugh casually with these people...

She couldn't do it.

She just felt disgusted.

The journalists wouldn't let this detail slip.

Brother Wang's cameraman immediately gave Lin Yao a close-up shot.

That exquisitely beautiful young face was filled with pain and despair.

Looking at the helpless, bewildered Father Lin and Mother Lin beside her.

Brother Wang's heart blossomed with joy.

Success!

Confirmed!

What those Su family relatives said was all true!

The Myth-level profession awakening failed!

Look at this family's reaction, this heavy, oppressive atmosphere—where was even a hint of joy from awakening a myth-level profession?

Thinking this, the journalists looked at Feng Rui and the others with expressions full of pity and schadenfreude.

A bunch of fools.

Still fighting desperately here, preparing to offer sky-high contracts worth hundreds of millions.

They had no idea what kind of huge joke they were about to face!

"Mr. Lin, Mrs. Lin, hello!"

Feng Rui couldn't wait any longer. He pushed aside Mother Su blocking the front, wearing his most cordial smile.

"I'm Feng Rui, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology."

"On behalf of Wind Rider Technology, I'd like to present Miss Lin Yao with..."

"Feng Rui, get out of my way!"

Baisheng's President Qian shoved him aside, his plump face piled with smiles.

"Mr. Lin, don't listen to him! Our Baisheng Pharmaceuticals is willing to offer 160 million! Just give us Miss Lin Yao's nod!"

"Our Heaven's Pillar Group adds another 10 million! Plus providing a dedicated support team!"

President Li immediately followed suit.

The doorway instantly turned into an auction house.

Bidding voices rose one after another.

Father Lin and Mother Lin were completely dumbfounded.

One hundred... sixty million?

What were they talking about?

Mother Su, Aunt, and Second Uncle still wore expressions of shock and jealousy.

Why?

Why did that Lin family girl get such good luck?

"Everyone! All you presidents!"

Seeing the situation spiraling out of control, Mother Su quickly stepped forward, putting on the airs of the person in charge.

"Everyone, don't rush! Don't rush!"

She cleared her throat, took Mother Lin's hand, and put on a heartbroken expression.

"I know you all mean well for our Yao Yao."

"But..."

She let out a long sigh, looked at the big shots arguing until red-faced, and said in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear:

"Stop arguing! Stop making offers!"

"Our Yao Yao... her awakening failed! She's feeling sad right now! Aren't you just rubbing salt in her wound!"

As her words fell.

The entire seventh-floor corridor.

Fell into deathly silence.

Chapter 78: I Just Don't Want to Talk

Everyone's movements froze at that moment.

President Qian from Baisheng, his flattering smile still lingering on his fat face as he had just pushed Feng Rui aside, stiffened into a comical mask.

President Li from Heaven's Pillar's follow-up bid still echoed in the corridor, his hand pushing up his glasses suspended mid-air.

The corporate representatives behind them all stood with mouths agape, like ducks being choked.

Failed?

These two words echoed like demonic whispers, reverberating madly in their minds.

Click!

Click! Click!

In the deathly silence, the only sounds remaining were the frantic shutter clicks from the reporters' cameras.

The camera flashes illuminated faces twisted with extreme shock, turning them ghostly pale.

Brother Wang's cameraman reacted the fastest.

He abruptly shifted his lens from the big shots to the Lin parents inside the room.

The faint hope and confusion Father Lin had just felt from those astronomical bids completely shattered upon hearing Mother Su's words.

His entire body seemed to have its backbone removed; the posture he had just straightened collapsed once again as he leaned against the doorframe, unable to utter a single word.

Mother Lin covered her mouth with her hand.

But the uncontrollable, heart-wrenching sobs still leaked through her fingers bit by bit.

She looked at her daughter, who had buried her head in her knees, shoulders trembling slightly.

Among the reporters, Brother Wang and the bespectacled reporter exchanged glances, seeing extreme excitement in each other's expressions.

This was what they wanted!

A fallen genius! Shattered hopes!

The tragic script of falling from the clouds into hell!

This was a hundred times more thrilling than any astronomical signing!

"Damn it!"

President Qian from Baisheng finally snapped out of his petrified state.

His plump face visibly transformed from stiffness to livid, finally swelling into a purplish-red color.

He grabbed Mother Su by the collar, practically lifting her off the ground.

"What did you say?!"

"Say that again, damn it!"

"Who failed?!"

His voice was no longer the ingratiating tone from before, but rather a beast-like roar.

One hundred sixty million!

He had just bid one hundred sixty million!

And now, you're telling him this "treasure" he was prepared to buy for one hundred sixty million was a failure?

President Li from Heaven's Pillar also had a face so dark it seemed water could drip from it.

He stared fixedly at the Lin parents' desperate reactions, then looked at the motionless girl on the sofa.

It's over.

They've been fooled!

All of them have been fooled!

"Feng Rui!"

President Li abruptly turned to look at the only man in the crowd who remained calm.

Feng Rui still stood there, even maintaining that gentle smile on his face.

He didn't look at the furious President Qian, nor did he acknowledge the questioning President Li.

His attention, from beginning to end, remained fixed on the room.

On that young man in the corner who had remained like an outsider throughout.

Lin Yu.

At this moment, Lin Yu was also looking at him.

Their gazes met in the air for an instant.

"Brother-in-law! Hurry and control him! He's going to hit someone!"

Mother Su, being lifted by President Qian, was scared out of her wits, desperately calling to Father Lin for help.

Father Lin, completely devastated, didn't hear her at all.

"Everyone! Everyone! Calm down! Everyone stay calm!"

Reporter Brother Wang, seeing the situation, immediately squeezed forward with his microphone, playing the peacemaker.

"President Qian! President Li! You're all distinguished figures, don't be impulsive!"

"We haven't clarified the situation yet!"

While mediating, he didn't forget to shove the microphone toward Mother Su's mouth.

"Madam, don't be afraid, could you explain in detail? Miss Lin Yao... how exactly did she fail? Was there some fatal flaw in the final step of the Fusion?"

His question was extremely well-phrased.

It both gave the firsthand witness a "reasonable" explanation step and pushed the climax of the "fallen genius" tragic story to its peak.

Mother Su, seizing the opportunity, quickly broke free from President Qian's grip, hiding behind the reporter while gasping for breath.

Looking at all the important people in the room, seeing their expressions that seemed ready to devour someone, she panicked too.

But things had reached this point, she could only brace herself and continue.

"I... I don't know either!"

"When we came back, Yao Yao kept crying, and she wouldn't say anything no matter what we asked!"

She pointed at Mother Lin, as if looking for a witness.

"She simply couldn't be happy at all! Isn't it obvious that something went wrong!"

These words were perfectly reasonable.

Paired with the heartbroken reactions of Father and Mother Lin, it practically nailed the coffin shut on the "Awakening failure."

President Qian's body swayed, almost unable to stand steady.

President Li closed his eyes, seemingly unable to bear watching this farce any longer.

Among the other corporate representatives, some cursed loudly, some beat their chests in frustration, some had already started contacting their companies to report this "fiasco."

The entire corridor had completely turned into a massive joke.

The reporters' lenses recorded everything.

They recorded the entire process of these top executives of Linzhou transitioning from frenzy to stupor, then to anger and despair.

This would become the most significant highlight of their careers.

Just as this farce woven from misunderstandings, greed, and foolishness was about to reach its climax.

The girl who had been burying her head all along moved.

Lin Yao slowly, raised her head.

Tear stains still marked her face.

Those beautiful eyes were somewhat swollen from crying.

But within them, there was none of the despair and pain everyone had imagined.

Only pure, bewildered confusion.

She looked at her mother, then at those seemingly insane executives and reporters.

Finally, her gaze fell upon Mother Su, who was still chattering nonstop, quite pleased with her own "discovery."

"Auntie Su."

Her voice wasn't loud, carrying a hint of hoarseness from recent crying.

But in all this noise, it clearly reached everyone's ears.

All noise ceased abruptly.

Everyone's attention focused on her once again.

Lin Yao sniffled, asking in a nearly naive tone, softly.

"What are you talking about?"

"What failure?"

She tilted her head, seemingly genuinely unable to understand.

"I didn't fail."

"I just... just felt a bit nauseous and didn't want to talk, that's all."

Lin Yao's almost naive counter-question was like a bucket of ice water poured over all the frenzied heads in the entire seventh-floor corridor.

No failure?

Just felt nauseous?

What kind of answer was that?

President Qian from Baisheng, President Li from Heaven's Pillar, and all those corporate representatives who had just been engaged in bloody battles were all stunned.

The ingratiating smile on Reporter Brother Wang's face stiffened into a comical mask.

The cameraman behind him instinctively aimed his lens directly at Lin Yao's face, marked with tear stains yet filled with confusion.

This... this wasn't the right script!

Wasn't this supposed to be the drama of a fallen genius with the whole family in mourning?

Chapter 79: Her role is still there

Mother Su's expression was the most dramatic among everyone present.

Her mouth hung open, her finger pointing at Lin Yao trembling slightly in mid-air, momentarily at a loss for words.

She had just confidently declared Lin Yao's "death," and now the person in question was standing up saying "I'm not dead"?

Where did that leave her dignity!

"You... you child! What nonsense are you talking!"

Mother Su finally reacted, raising her voice in an attempt to reclaim control of the conversation.

"Not failed? Then why were you crying! If you didn't fail, why do your parents look like this!"

Her words acted like a key, instantly unlocking everyone's chaotic thoughts.

That's right!

If she truly hadn't failed and had awakened a Myth-level profession, the family should be celebrating joyfully!

But what about now?

The oppressive atmosphere in the room, the despairing reactions of Father and Mother Lin, and the tear stains on Lin Yao's own face...

None of this looked like someone who had awakened a Myth-level profession!

A terrible thought simultaneously arose in everyone's minds.

"She's gone mad..."

Someone in the crowd murmured in an extremely low voice.

"She's insane."

This thought spread like a virus, instantly infecting everyone.

They remembered.

Five years ago.

Right in this same residential complex, in the same Lin household.

That even more dazzling genius, Lin Yu, hailed as Linzhou's once-in-a-century talent, after awakening a gold Epic-level profession, hadn't he also behaved strangely, eventually becoming a laughingstock that everyone regarded as mad?

Like brother, like sister!

The older brother went mad.

Now, the younger sister, unable to bear the immense shock of awakening failure, has also lost her mind!

This explanation was too perfect!

It perfectly connected all the contradictory phenomena before their eyes!

Reporter Brother Wang's eyes instantly shone with extreme intensity!

Mad!

A Myth-level genius failed at the final step of awakening and went insane on the spot!

This was even more explosive than simple failure! And carried even more tragic pathos!

Siblings, two former geniuses—one dormant for five years becoming worthless, the other breaking under public pressure and going mad!

What a tragic script of fallen prodigies!

"So that's how it is..." President Qian from Baisheng, his purplish face slowly losing color, turning into a pale mix of anger, relief, and contempt.

He hadn't lost over a hundred million, but he felt he'd been fooled by a madwoman.

"Damn it! Wasted my emotions!"

President Li from Heaven's Pillar adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses, having completely calmed down now.

He looked at the Lin family members in the room, his expression like he was watching a clumsy circus performance.

"Mr. Lin."

President Qian roughly pushed aside the reporter blocking his way, pointing at Lin Yao as he shouted at the devastated Father Lin.

"Make her display her Class Panel!"

"Mad or stupid! Let everyone see with their own eyes whether she failed or not!"

"That's right! Show it!"

"Let us see! What does a Myth-level profession actually look like!"

The crowd grew agitated again.

What they wanted to see now wasn't a contract signing anymore.

They wanted to see the final judgment, to witness firsthand how a genius becomes a joke.

Father Lin trembled from the shouting, looking at his daughter, then at the crazed-looking people outside the door, his lips quivering without uttering a single word.

Mother Lin instinctively moved to shield Lin Yao behind her.

"You... what are you trying to do!"

"Get out! All of you, get out!"

Lin Yao looked at the ugly faces before her, listening to the piercing shouts, the nausea in her chest reaching its peak.

She didn't want to explain anything to these people.

"Get out!"

A single word escaped her lips.

Carrying unprecedented coldness and disgust.

This word completely ignited the powder keg.

"Get out?" President Qian laughed in anger. "You, a failed madwoman, telling who to get out?"

"I think you're bluffing! You simply don't dare to show it!"

"There must be some shameful fatal flaw!"

Mother Su also fanned the flames from the side: "Exactly! Yao Yao, don't be afraid, if there's a problem just say it, everyone can help you! Hiding it like this isn't the solution!"

The situation was about to spiral completely out of control.

In the corner, Lin Yu slowly uncrossed his legs.

He was preparing to stand up.

However, right at that moment.

A steady voice, carrying a hint of laughter, overpowered all the noise.

"Enough."

It was Feng Rui.

The Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, who had maintained that unfathomable smile from beginning to end.

He leisurely walked out from the crowd, coming to the front.

He didn't look at the furious President Qian, nor did he acknowledge the fire-stoking Mother Su.

He simply looked at Lin Yao, his deep eyes showing no trace of doubt or contempt, only calmness.

"President Qian, President Li, and all media friends."

Feng Rui scanned the room, speaking slowly.

"It's just an interview, why make it like a public trial?"

"I believe Miss Lin Yao has no reason to lie to us."

His words stunned everyone.

Believe her?

Believe someone already "publicly recognized" as mentally unstable?

What was Feng Rui really up to?

President Qian frowned: "Feng Rui, what do you mean? You want to take on this mess?"

Feng Rui smiled.

"Mess? President Qian exaggerates."

He turned to Lin Yao, his attitude still respectful and gentle.

"Miss Lin Yao, I apologize to you and your family for the recent disturbance."

"We at Wind Rider Technology don't require any inspection or proof."

"We believe you."

After speaking, he took from his assistant a beautifully bound physical contract that had been prepared in advance.

Under everyone's disbelieving gazes, he offered the contract to Lin Yao.

"This is the S-level contract we prepared for you."

"Signing bonus: eighty million."

"Future resource allocation: fifty-fold priority."

"All terms remain valid."

Feng Rui's voice wasn't loud, but every word struck like a heavy hammer against everyone's hearts.

The entire corridor fell into dead silence once again.

Everyone looked at Feng Rui as if he were insane.

President Qian and President Li exchanged glances, both seeing deep absurdity and confusion in each other's expressions.

They completely failed to understand Feng Rui's move.

Only Lin Yu in the corner, with his [Eye of Analysis], had long seen through the cold calculation beneath Feng Rui's smile.

Profession failure?

Mental instability?

These didn't matter to Feng Rui at all.

What mattered was that the name "Lin Yao" had already become bound with the term "Myth-level profession."

As long as the official announcement wasn't retracted, as long as Lin Yao herself didn't admit failure.

Then she remained "Linzhou's second Myth-level Practitioner in history."

Her commercial value, her news impact, her promotional utility—they all still existed!

Chapter 80: Brother, please help me

In fact, a mythical genius who was "suspected to have failed" and "suspected to have gone mad" offered more sensational value and room for manipulation than a flawless genius!

What Feng Rui wanted wasn't a genius.

What he wanted was for every media outlet to report that Wind Rider Technology had signed a myth-level professional!

This eighty-million contract wasn't for Lin Yao.

It was for the market, for the shareholders, for Wind Rider Technology's precarious stock price!

"Madman!"

President Qian from Baisheng stared fiercely at Feng Rui, finally squeezing out two words through gritted teeth.

He wasn't cursing Lin Yao, but rather Feng Rui.

But he quickly realized.

Feng Rui wasn't a madman, he was a gambler!

He understood Feng Rui's purpose...

Feng Rui was gambling on Wind Rider Technology's future!

President Qian's mind raced rapidly.

He couldn't let Feng Rui win this gamble!

Even if Lin Yao was truly finished, he absolutely couldn't let Wind Rider Technology use this sensational story to escape their crisis!

"President Feng truly has remarkable courage!"

President Qian forced a smile back onto his plump face, though it looked more painful than weeping.

"Since President Feng has such high regard for Miss Lin Yao, our Baisheng Pharmaceuticals naturally cannot fall behind!"

"We offer one hundred million!"

He raised a single finger high.

"But!"

He abruptly changed his tone, turning to Lin Yao's parents with a business-like expression.

"To be responsible to the company, and to be responsible for Miss Lin Yao's future, we must conduct a comprehensive physical condition assessment of Miss Lin Yao before signing the contract."

"This is standard procedure, I believe Mr. Lin and Mrs. Lin can understand."

His words were flawlessly delivered.

He both matched the price and left himself ample room for retreat.

If the examination showed no problems, signing a myth-level talent for one hundred million would be an incredible bargain!

If problems were found, the contract would automatically become void, and Baisheng would not only suffer no losses but also gain a reputation for being rigorous and responsible!

"President Qian is absolutely right!"

President Li from Heaven's Pillar Group immediately followed suit, pushing up his glasses.

"Heaven's Pillar Group offers one hundred and ten million! Similarly, we require a pre-contract health assessment."

"After all, cultivating a myth-level professional requires pouring immense resources, and we must ensure everything is foolproof."

For a moment, the corridor became lively again.

"Feihong Group offers one hundred and twenty million!"

"Deep Blue Heavy Industries, one hundred and twenty-five million!"

Bidding voices rose one after another, but every offer was tacitly followed by that "comprehensive testing" restriction clause.

They were all shrewd operators.

They instantly understood the calculations of President Qian and President Li.

They could both spoil Feng Rui's plans and minimize their own risks.

Why wouldn't they take this opportunity?

Father Lin and Mother Lin were completely bewildered.

Watching these powerful figures who had been ready to devour them one moment and were now frantically throwing money the next, their brains couldn't process the information before them.

Only Mother Su in the corner had her face twisted beyond recognition in the flames of jealousy.

Why?

Why was this little slut worth so much money even if she had gone mad, even if she had failed?

One hundred million! Two hundred million!

She had never seen so much money in her entire life!

She couldn't accept this!

"Yao Yao! Listen to me!"

Mother Su rushed out again, grabbing Lin Yao's arm with a pained, earnest expression.

"You can't let this money blind you!"

"Look at them! What are their true intentions? And they talk about examinations! This is simply distrust! It's an insult! An insult to us myth-level professionals!"

She was filled with righteous indignation, as if she were the one being insulted.

"You're myth-level! The only myth to appear in Linzhou in so many years! Your future is limitless! How can you be bound by these conditional contracts?"

"Listen to your aunt, think twice! You must think twice! You deserve better!"

These "heartfelt words" were delivered with such apparent sincerity.

Reporter Brother Wang's camera faithfully recorded Mother Su's face, flushed with excitement.

He was laughing heartily inside.

Perfect!

This old woman was truly a born drama queen!

Building up to destroy!

Bare-faced building up to destroy!

She was trying to put Lin Yao in an impossible position, making her reject all contracts due to so-called "myth-level dignity," ultimately leaving her with nothing!

Then she could pose as a victor again, "comforting" the niece she had personally destroyed.

This display of human depravity was simply the best news material!

All the pressure instantly converged on Lin Yao alone.

She looked at the hypocritical, greedy, ugly faces before her.

Feng Rui's smile hiding daggers.

President Qian's unreasonable arrogance.

President Li's hypocritical calculations.

And Mother Su's venomous "care."

She felt like she was suffocating.

She didn't know what to do.

She instinctively looked toward her parents, but Father Lin and Mother Lin were equally panicked, only able to look back at her with the same helpless expressions.

Finally.

Her gaze passed through the crowd and landed on that figure in the corner.

The one who had remained utterly quiet from beginning to end, as if completely detached from the situation.

Brother.

Lin Yu.

Only he stood apart from everything happening here.

As if no matter how chaotic the outside world became, nothing could shake him.

"Miss Lin Yao?"

The gentle smile remained on Feng Rui's face as he once again extended that contract with no additional conditions.

"What is your decision?"

Lin Yao ignored him.

She just looked at Lin Yu, her swollen eyes filled with confusion and a plea for help.

"Brother..."

Her voice was soft, carrying a sob.

But these two words instantly silenced the entire corridor.

Everyone's gaze shifted in unison from Lin Yao to the young man forgotten in the corner.

Lin Yu?

That genius from five years ago?

The current good-for-nothing?

Why was she calling him?

Under everyone's gaze, Lin Yao took a deep breath and mustered all her strength to utter a sentence that petrified everyone present.

"I don't know... I don't know what to do..."

"Brother, you decide for me."

"Whatever you say, I'll listen to you."

As her words fell.

The entire world seemed to have been put on pause.

The fat on President Qian's face twitched.

President Li's hand pushing his glasses froze mid-air.

Mother Su's mouth, ready to continue "persuading," formed an O shape.

Reporter Brother Wang felt like his brain had been struck by lightning!

It's over!

This time, it's truly over!

Let Lin Yu make the decision?

Let someone universally acknowledged as a madman obsessed with making garbage cards for five years decide on a contract worth over a hundred million?

A madman paired with a madwoman!

The Lin family had truly gathered a pair of extraordinary talents!

This was no longer a tragedy.

This was a damn comedy! A farce!

Under everyone's gazes mixed with shock, contempt, pity, and schadenfreude.

The person who had been treated as a madman for five years.

Lin Yu, finally slowly, stood up from the sofa.

Chapter 81: Absolute Freedom

Lin Yu's movement as he stood up wasn't fast.

It could even be said to be somewhat slow.

He simply straightened his slightly wrinkled clothes calmly, then stood up straight.

Yet this simple action instantly froze the entire seventh-floor corridor's atmosphere, which had been so boisterous it was nearly boiling.

Everyone's gaze, like iron filings drawn to a magnet, locked firmly onto this young man who had just risen.

This... madman?

President Qian from Baisheng, President Li from Heaven's Pillar, and all those corporate representatives holding billion-dollar contracts—their impressions of Lin Yu still lingered in those absurd rumors from five years ago.

Obsessed with worthless cards, abandoned by everyone, willingly wallowing in degradation.

The Lin Yu they imagined should have been a haggard, deranged-looking failure, or at least someone with unfocused eyes and listless spirit.

But the young man before them didn't match their imagination in the slightest.

He was tall, and thanks to the medicine, Lin Yu was in decent condition, his posture quite upright.

Dressed in the simplest T-shirt and jeans, yet he carried an indescribable cleanliness and composure.

His features were handsome and clear, without any trace of life's weariness, instead appearing almost unnervingly calm.

Very much looked like a normal person.

Was this... really that Lin Yu who had been mad for five years?

Some younger reporters who had only recently entered the industry, after a brief moment of astonishment, actually had excited gleams in their eyes.

They quietly raised their cameras, aiming at this legendary figure.

"Is that Lin Yu?"

"The Epic-level profession [Myriad Forms Card Crafter] from five years ago?"

"He looks... quite normal actually."

Whispers arose from the back of the crowd.

"Lin Yu!"

President Qian was the first to snap out of his shock, pointing at Lin Yu and shouting gruffly.

"This has nothing to do with you! Let your sister make her own decision!"

He feared this mad older brother might say something utterly shocking that would completely ruin this deal.

Even if this deal was most likely a trap.

Mother Su also quickly reacted, putting on a "concerned" expression as she urgently called out to Lin Yu.

"Xiao Yu! You mustn't be foolish!"

"This concerns Yao Yao's entire future! You've already... you can't harm your sister anymore!"

Her words sounded "sincere," but carried heavy implications.

However, Lin Yu didn't even look at them.

He didn't give those shouting big shots and "concerned" relatives even a sidelong glance.

He only looked at his sister.

At that girl with tear-streaked face, confused and helpless, seeing him as her only reliance in the world.

Lin Yu spoke.

"Is it difficult to choose?"

His voice was clear and steady, not loud, yet it clearly cut through all the noise.

This question made Lin Yao slightly freeze.

It also made everyone present freeze.

Is it difficult to choose?

Of course it is!

On one side, eighty million with no additional conditions, but highly likely to be a huge trap.

On the other side, a higher-priced contract worth over a hundred million, but with insulting clauses like "physical examination" attached.

How could anyone choose?

For a girl who had just reached adulthood, this was practically the most difficult choice in the world!

Yet Lin Yu was asking, is it difficult to choose?

He really was mad!

President Qian almost laughed out loud.

Mother Su kept shaking her head, putting on a heartbroken expression of "this child is completely hopeless."

Ignoring everyone's reactions, Lin Yu continued looking at his sister, speaking unhurriedly.

"Actually, deep down, you already know which one to choose."

"It's just that you yourself don't dare to be sure."

Lin Yao's body trembled almost imperceptibly.

She lifted her head, staring blankly at her brother.

Was... was that true?

She herself already knew which one to choose?

Lin Yu shook his head.

"It's not difficult to choose."

He looked at Lin Yao, speaking clearly word by word.

"You don't need to choose the right one."

"You don't need to choose the one most beneficial to you."

"You only need to choose the one you want most."

"Choose the one that makes you most comfortable, least disgusted."

These words made everyone present completely bewildered.

What did he mean by not needing to choose the right one?

What did he mean by choosing the most comfortable one?

This was deciding on a contract worth over a hundred million! Concerning the entire future of a Myth-level practitioner! This wasn't buying cabbage at the vegetable market!

He really was mad!

President Qian from Baisheng could no longer restrain himself, pointing at Lin Yu and cursing loudly.

"Lin Yu! You've been trash for five years yourself, and now you want to drag your sister into the fire with you!"

"You madman! Idiot!"

Mother Su also grew anxious, rushing forward to grab Lin Yao again, but Lin Yao subconsciously avoided her.

"Yao Yao! You absolutely mustn't listen to your brother's nonsense!"

"He's already mad! His mind isn't right! If you listen to him, your life will be ruined!"

She beat her chest and stamped her feet, putting on an appearance of deep distress, as if Lin Yu were some unforgivable criminal.

However, Lin Yu turned a deaf ear to these curses and "advice."

He just quietly looked at his sister, continuing to speak in that terrifyingly steady tone, saying things that could disrupt everyone's cognition.

"Consequences?"

"You don't need to consider them."

"Money? Resources? Future development?"

"These, you don't need to consider."

"Because..."

Lin Yu paused, then gave the final answer.

"I'm here."

I'm here.

Just two simple words.

Yet they seemed to contain some terrifying power that made words become reality.

Not a promise.

Not comfort.

But a statement.

Stating an established, indisputable fact.

What were these five years of lying low for?

What were these five years of enduring scorn, mockery, and abandonment for?

For this moment.

For being able to calmly tell his only sister, when she faced the world's greed and malice, feeling helpless and confused.

Go choose.

Choose freely.

Choose what you truly want, without weighing pros and cons, without considering consequences, without bowing to anyone.

Because no matter what choice you make, whether right or wrong, good or bad.

Your brother can handle the fallout.

This was the true purpose behind spending five years filtering out [Joker] from thousands of [A Small Pebble] cards.

This was the real power brought by combining [Card Innovation] with [Infinite Multiplication].

Not the [Lightning Spell] that could easily destroy a parking lot.

Nor the massive quantities of medicine that could stack up extreme attributes.

But freedom.

An absolute freedom that could disregard all rules.

Lin Yao's body stopped trembling.

She looked at her brother, that brother who had become blurry, strange, even somewhat frightening in her memory.

At this moment, he seemed to have transformed back into that youth from many years ago, the one who would stand in front of her when she was bullied, telling her "Don't be afraid, I'm here."

That boy completely worthy of her absolute trust.

Chapter 82: One Person Succeeds

An immense surge of courage and warmth welled up from the depths of her heart, instantly scattering all the nausea, confusion, and fear.

However, the atmosphere in the corridor became utterly bizarre at that moment.

President Qian's cursing stopped.

Mother Su's wailing caught in her throat.

Everyone stared at Lin Yu with expressions as if they were looking at a monster.

It was a mixture of absurdity, mockery, and a trace of... fear that they themselves hadn't even noticed.

"Haha... hahahaha!"

President Qian suddenly burst into dry, forced laughter, the fat on his face trembling with each chuckle.

"Good! Very good, 'I've got this!'"

"I'd really like to see how a waste who's been making trash cards for five years plans to back up his sister!"

The company representatives behind him joined in the derisive laughter.

"This is absolutely hilarious! One sibling's gone mad, the other's turned stupid!"

"What kind of curse has struck the Lin family? They only produce these freaks?"

"The biggest joke of the year, bar none!"

The young reporters behind veteran journalist Brother Wang could no longer hold back their laughter, their shoulders shaking uncontrollably.

Only Brother Wang himself had long since lost his smile.

He stared intently at Lin Yu, a professional intuition making him feel chilled to the bone.

Something was wrong.

Very wrong.

This young man named Lin Yu—his calmness wasn't feigned.

That composure, as if he held everything in the palm of his hand, wasn't something a madman could possess.

And then there was Feng Rui from Wind Rider Technology.

The smile had vanished from his face as well.

He adjusted his glasses on the bridge of his nose, his eyes behind the lenses gleaming with shrewdness and confusion.

He couldn't understand Lin Yu.

But he trusted his own judgment.

This person was either hopelessly insane.

Or he was hiding a terrifying trump card powerful enough to flip the entire game table.

President Li from Heaven's Pillar Group also furrowed his brow.

He too sensed that something was off.

But he trusted logic even more.

What kind of trump card could a Card Creator who had deferred exams for five years, obsessed with trash cards, possibly have?

Nothing but bluster.

Or perhaps, complete and utter madness.

Believing the delusions in his own mind.

Using insane ramblings to cover up the fact that he and his sister had become laughingstocks.

Pitiful, and laughable.

"Miss Lin Yao."

President Li stepped forward, deciding to cut through the knot quickly and end this farce.

He pushed his gold-rimmed glasses up and assumed a businesslike demeanor.

"Heaven's Pillar Group is very sincere."

"The 110 million signing bonus, and subsequent resource allocation, are all negotiable."

"But the prerequisite is that you must undergo our pre-contract evaluation."

"This is responsible towards you, and towards our company. I hope you won't listen to some... unrealistic nonsense and make the wrong choice."

His words once again kicked the ball back to Lin Yao's court.

All eyes focused on her again.

This time, with even heavier scrutiny and mockery.

They wanted to see.

What ridiculous decision this little madwoman would make after listening to the "advice" of her big madman brother.

Lin Yao took a deep breath.

She didn't look at President Li, nor at anyone else.

She simply took one last look at her brother.

Lin Yu gave her a slight nod.

It was a silent encouragement.

That was enough.

That was all she needed.

Lin Yao turned around, finally raising her head to face the group of predatory people in the corridor.

The tear tracks were still fresh on her face.

But all the confusion and helplessness had vanished from her red, swollen eyes.

Leaving only a cold, clear, resolute determination.

She first looked at Feng Rui, the man who had maintained his composure from beginning to end, yet also harbored hidden calculations.

"President Feng."

She gave a slight bow.

"Thank you for your contract, and thank you for stepping in earlier."

Feng Rui was taken aback, then quickly revealed a gentle smile, about to say something.

But Lin Yao had already shifted her gaze away.

She looked at President Qian, at President Li, at Mother Su, at every face in the corridor filled with greed, hypocrisy, and schadenfreude.

Then, she spoke the words she had been brewing in her heart for a long time.

"As for all of you..."

Lin Yao's icy gaze swept over President Qian's plump face, over President Li's hypocritical glasses, and finally landed on Mother Su's face, twisted with jealousy.

She took a deep breath, the accumulated disgust and resolve ready to erupt.

However, just one second before she could speak.

A gentle yet undeniable male voice sounded at precisely the right moment.

"Miss Lin Yao, please wait a moment."

Feng Rui from Wind Rider Technology had, at some point, stepped to the front of the crowd again.

The same inscrutable smile still hung on his face, as if the earlier farce had nothing to do with him.

He paid no attention to the about-to-erupt Lin Yao, nor did he look at the others waiting for the show.

His action caused all the sharp words Lin Yao had prepared to catch in her throat.

"President Feng, what else do you want to do?" Baisheng's President Qian shouted impatiently. "Isn't this farce enough already?"

Feng Rui merely smiled. He turned to Lin Yao and once again offered the S-class contract forward.

"Miss Lin Yao, Wind Rider Technology's sincerity remains unchanged."

"And," he pivoted, dropping a bombshell that instantly detonated the entire corridor.

"We not only hope to sign you, but we also hope to reach an exclusive cooperation with your brother, Mr. Lin Yu."

What?

Sign Lin Yu?

The entire corridor once again fell into deathly silence.

"Feng Rui! Have you truly lost your mind?!" President Qian pointed at Feng Rui, his entire body shaking with rage.

Heaven's Pillar's President Li was also completely baffled.

He adjusted his glasses, the shrewd light behind his lenses turning into pure confusion for the first time.

Lin Yu? That Card Creator? What value does he have? A pile of trash cards?

Yet, Feng Rui completely ignored the reactions of these people.

He turned to Father Lin and Mother Lin, who were completely stunned, wearing an impeccably gentle smile.

"Mr. Lin, Mrs. Lin, please rest assured."

"Wind Rider Technology will not only sign Miss Lin Yao and Mr. Lin Yu, but will also provide the highest level of security for your retirement years."

"Security, healthcare, elderly care—everything will be fully undertaken by Wind Rider."

These words made the already disoriented Lin parents even more at a loss.

But Feng Rui's performance wasn't over yet.

His gaze passed over the Lin parents and landed on the few equally dumbfounded relatives nearby.

Aunt, Second Uncle, and Mother Su.

"Of course, and the relatives who have always been so 'concerned' about Yao Yao."

Feng Rui's smile was meaningful.

"Wind Rider Technology has always valued family harmony. Since you are Yao Yao's family, you are also friends of Wind Rider."

"If there are any business dealings in the future, or work-related needs, Wind Rider's doors are always open to you."

Boom!

It was as if a thunderclap had exploded in the minds of the several relatives.

The astonishment on Aunt's face instantly transformed into wild joy.

Second Uncle's features, previously twisted with schadenfreude, smoothed out, now piled with fawning smiles.

Mother Su trembled all over.

Chapter 83: Sign it, must sign it!

Wind Rider Technology's favor?

What did that mean?

It was a massive pie falling straight from the sky!

"Ah! President Feng! You... you're truly so far-sighted!"

Mother Su was the first to react. She rushed forward in one swift step, squeezed past Father Lin who was blocking the way, her face wreathed in smiles.

"I said it all along! Our Yao Yao is so outstanding, and her brother Xiao Yu is also a dragon among men! How could he possibly be lacking!"

Her face-changing speed was faster than flipping a book.

"Xiao Yu this child, he truly has great wisdom! He knows how to bide his time! Five years of sharpening a single sword, what's this called? This is called a great vessel taking time to mature!"

Aunt quickly chimed in, her voice sharp and excited.

"That's right, that's right! President Feng, your eye for talent is truly accurate! Unlike some people who look down on others!"

As she spoke, she meaningfully glanced at President Qian and President Li.

Second Uncle rubbed his hands together, grinning so widely his mouth couldn't close.

"Yao Yao! What are you still standing there for! Quick! Quickly thank President Feng! Such a good opportunity, if you miss this village, you won't find this shop anymore!"

The relatives who had just been treating Lin Yu as a negative example and the Lin Family as a laughingstock had now all become their most steadfast supporters.

They crowded around Lin Yao, speaking over each other, their words earnest and sincere, as if they were genuinely thinking of her best interests.

Feng Rui was very satisfied with everyone's reactions.

He knew he had successfully pulled Lin Yao away from her brother's side.

Using a large net woven from practical benefits.

He finally looked toward the girl who had remained silent the whole time, the one with the pretty face.

Su Qingxue.

"Miss Su, I heard you're currently unemployed at home, preparing for the civil service exam?"

Feng Rui's smile was like that of the most experienced hunter.

"Wind Rider Technology's legal department and administrative department are always open to talents like Miss Su. No exam required, direct employment, with preferential treatment."

Su Qingxue's body stiffened abruptly.

She looked at Feng Rui in disbelief.

A formal position at Wind Rider Technology?

That was an opportunity countless graduates would fight tooth and nail for but still couldn't obtain!

Her breathing instantly became rapid.

Feng Rui took in everyone's reactions and knew the timing was about right.

He turned to Lin Yao again, throwing out his final, most deadly bargaining chip.

"Miss Lin Yao, I know what you're worried about."

"You're worried about your brother."

Feng Rui's gaze fell upon Lin Yu.

"I've also heard that Mr. Lin Yu will be challenging the unprecedented 160-times difficulty College Entrance Exam this year."

"I can assure you, as long as you sign, Wind Rider Technology will use all our connections and resources to maneuver and facilitate matters for Mr. Lin Yu's exam."

"We cannot change the rules, but we can ensure that within the rules, he receives the fairest, most advantageous treatment."

"All pre-exam training, resources, equipment, and skills will also be fully covered by us at Wind Rider!"

This proposal hit Lin Yao's heart like a heavy hammer.

Brother.

She had just resolved to stand with him no matter what.

To choose the least nauseating, most comfortable option.

To reject these hypocritical faces.

But...

Feng Rui's proposal was too tempting.

So tempting it took her breath away.

Her brother told her not to consider the consequences.

But how could she not consider them?

The family's savings, that last three million, had all been given to her brother.

What about their living expenses going forward?

What about their parents' retirement?

She herself had awakened a Myth-level profession—the subsequent cultivation, skill learning, equipment forging... which of these didn't require astronomical sums?

And then there was her brother.

A 160-times difficulty College Entrance Exam!

That simply wasn't something human strength could challenge!

She knew her brother was strong, ridiculously strong.

But was that strength really enough against Linzhou's entire rule system?

Lin Yu could give her infinite strength and courage spiritually.

But Feng Rui had handed her a key to solve all their practical problems.

Moreover...

Feng Rui's contract would sign both her and her brother together.

They could still stand together.

Only, they would be switching from a path full of thorns to a broad, smooth highway paved with flowers.

She only wanted to stand with her brother.

This contract... didn't seem to violate that principle.

It might even allow them to stand more firmly, more comfortably.

Lin Yao's heart was swept by stormy waves.

She raised her head and looked again at the figure in the corner.

Lin Yu was just watching her calmly, not speaking.

But this time, Lin Yao read something different in that calmness.

She saw the wavering in her own heart.

She saw that resolute determination being slowly crushed by a boulder called "reality."

The icy refusal that was ready to be spoken aloud got stuck in her throat.

Unable to come out.

Everyone in the room, including those in the hallway, harbored their own schemes.

Baisheng's President Qian and Heaven's Pillar's President Li, these two commercial giants who had been fighting to the death just moments ago, now looked at each other.

They both saw a similar emotion on each other's faces—a mix of absurdity and relief.

Follow?

How could they follow?

Signing Lin Yao alone was already a gamble.

Adding on Lin Yu who had been "crazy" for five years?

And being responsible for the Lin family's entire retirement and funeral arrangements? Even taking care of distant relatives who weren't closely connected?

This wasn't doing business, this was charity!

Charity that only someone with their head slammed in a door would undertake!

At this point, it was completely not worth it anymore.

President Qian's fat body relaxed, and he quietly took half a step back, completely withdrawing from the battlefield.

He wouldn't compete anymore.

Now he just wanted to watch the show.

President Li also silently adjusted his glasses and stopped speaking.

Heaven's Pillar Group's losses were already irreversible.

But if he could see competitor Wind Rider Technology suffer significant damage from a wrong decision, that would be some kind of... spiritual compensation.

The representatives from other small companies had long become quails, wishing they could shrink into the corners.

This battle of titans was no longer something they could participate in.

They, like the excited reporters, had become spectators now.

Spectators waiting for the final outcome.

And the most anxious, most excited people in the hallway were undoubtedly those few relatives of the Lin family.

Mother Su could barely control the corners of her mouth from turning upward.

She glanced at Father Lin and Mother Lin who were still stunned beside her, feeling another wave of contempt in her heart.

Truly worthless mud that can't be plastered on a wall!

With such great happy news, they still looked worried!

She cleared her throat, squeezed to the front again, and began a new round of "persuasion" directed at the still-hesitant Lin Yao.

"Yao Yao! What are you still thinking about!"

"President Feng is showing such great sincerity! He's considered you, your brother, your parents, even us relatives!"

"What's this called? This is called 'when one man achieves the Dao, even his poultry and dogs ascend to heaven!'"

Aunt also shouted in her shrill voice: "That's right, Yao Yao! Isn't your brother taking the College Entrance Exam? 160-times difficulty! Without Wind Rider Technology's help, how can he take it?"

Second Uncle was even more direct: "Sign it! You must sign! If you don't sign, you're being irresponsible to your brother! Irresponsible to your parents!"

Chapter 84: We Reject

Their words struck like precisely aimed daggers, piercing through Lin Yao's already wavering resolve.

Yes.

Brother.

College Entrance Exam.

Parents.

Reality.

One mountain after another came crashing back down upon her.

Feng Rui's proposal was like a magnificent ark, docked at the shore of a raging flood, inviting her and her family aboard.

What her brother offered her was just "I'm here."

A promise that seemed so fragile, so unrealistic amidst the overwhelming flood.

Mother Su saw Lin Yao's defenses weakening and immediately felt the timing was almost perfect.

She turned and glared fiercely at her daughter.

"Qingxue! What are you standing there like an idiot for? Hurry! Go persuade your sister! Aren't you two the closest?"

Su Qingxue jolted at her mother's scolding.

To be honest, she was indeed very tempted... but...

Persuade?

How could she persuade?

Her gaze unconsciously drifted toward that corner.

Toward the young man who had remained like an outsider from beginning to end.

Lin Yu.

The terrifying scene from the parking lot flooded back into her mind.

She felt.

If she dared step forward and say one wrong word, that seemingly calm man would not hesitate to turn her into a pile of mangled flesh too.

Su Qingxue's lips trembled, unable to utter a single word, she could only shake her head desperately.

"You..."

Mother Su was so angry she nearly choked on her breath.

This useless daughter!

Completely useless at the critical moment!

Frustrated by her daughter's incompetence, yet not daring to truly shout for fear of disturbing Lin Yao, the golden phoenix almost within their grasp.

She could only suppress all her rage inside, her face turning crimson with the effort.

The entire corridor fell into an eerie silence once more.

Everyone's gaze focused on Lin Yao.

The reporters' cameras were already aimed at her face, ready to capture the moment she nodded or shook her head.

This would determine tomorrow's front-page headlines for all media outlets.

■Myth Descends, Priceless Contract Goes to Wind Rider!■

Or...

■Genius Falls, Siblings Head for the Abyss Together!■

Father Lin and Mother Lin remained silent.

They simply watched their daughter quietly, their gentle eyes silently conveying one message.

Whatever you choose, we support you.

Lin Yao's body trembled slightly.

She felt as if she were standing at the edge of a cliff.

On one side was a broad, smooth road paved with flowers, leading to a visible, tangible future of stability and wealth.

On the other side was her brother.

He stood on the opposite shore of the mist-shrouded abyss, watching her calmly, with endless unknowns behind him.

What should she choose?

Reason told her she should choose Feng Rui.

This was the choice that would benefit everyone.

But...

The mere thought of nodding to Feng Rui's smiling face, of accepting this contract tainted with calculation and charity, made her stomach churn with overwhelming nausea.

No.

She didn't want to.

But... could she really be that selfish?

Just because of her momentary disgust, reject this contract delivered to their doorstep that could change her entire family's destiny?

Her brother told her to choose what she wanted.

But what she wanted was for her whole family to be well.

For her parents to no longer worry about money and enjoy their later years.

For her brother not to have to face that life-or-death College Entrance Exam.

This... seemed to be what she wanted too.

These two "wants" tore violently at her mind, almost ripping her reason to shreds.

She had no confidence.

No confidence to be like her brother, ignoring everything and handling all the consequences.

She was just an eighteen-year-old girl.

An ordinary person who had just witnessed the world's cruelty and was now thrust into the spotlight.

Her trembling grew increasingly violent, almost making her unsteady on her feet.

Just as she was about to be completely swallowed by the flood called "reality," ready to open her mouth and utter that insincere "I'm willing"—

A warm, strong hand gently steadied her shoulder.

The force wasn't great, but it instantly dispelled all her coldness and uncertainty, like an immovable pillar driving straight into her chaotic heart.

It was her brother.

Lin Yu had stepped out from the corner and stood by her side.

He didn't look at anyone, just gazed calmly ahead at that crowd of people with varied expressions and hidden intentions.

Then he spoke.

His voice wasn't loud, but it clearly carried throughout the entire corridor, overriding everyone's breathing.

"We refuse."

Four words.

Exploded like thunder in the crowded corridor.

The reporters' hands holding cameras froze mid-air.

President Qian and President Li's spectator expressions instantly solidified.

The worried gazes of Father Lin and Mother Lin transformed into pure astonishment.

And those relatives who had just been ecstatic and fawning saw their smiles shatter piece by piece.

"You... what did you say?"

Mother Su was the first to shriek, her voice as shrill as a cat whose tail had been stepped on.

She pointed disbelievingly at Lin Yu, her entire body trembling.

"Lin Yu! Have you gone mad! Do you know what you just said! That's Wind Rider Technology! A contract dozens of times better than S-class!"

"You good-for-nothing! Jinx! You've ruined yourself, and now you want to drag Yao Yao down with you!"

Aunt reacted too, her face that had been full of smiles now twisted beyond recognition with anger and disappointment.

"Mad! Truly mad! For the Lin Family to produce someone like you, they must have had the worst luck for eight generations!"

Second Uncle trembled with rage, pointing at Lin Yu, unable to form a complete sentence for a long moment.

"You... you... you're going to be the death of your parents!"

Their curses poured over Lin Yu like the filthiest sewage.

Yet Lin Yu didn't even make an extra movement.

He just stood there, supporting his sister, like an unshakable mountain.

All eyes eventually gathered on the instigator, Vice President of Wind Rider Technology, Feng Rui.

The gentle smile had completely vanished from Feng Rui's face.

He stood there motionless, his expression beneath those gold-rimmed glasses unreadable.

But the temperature throughout the corridor seemed to have suddenly dropped several degrees.

The surrounding company representatives watched him with schadenfreude.

They wanted to see how this calculating man would react after being so decisively slapped in the face by a "madman" in front of all the media.

"Mr. Lin Yu."

Feng Rui finally spoke.

His voice was flat, devoid of any emotion.

"I believe the signing party of this contract is Miss Lin Yao."

"Her decision probably isn't something you can make for her."

He didn't show anger or lose composure, but with just one light sentence, he pushed the core issue back before Lin Yao.

Seeing this, Mother Su immediately seized the lifeline, shouting at Lin Yao.

"Yao Yao! Say something! Hurry and tell President Feng that you're willing! Don't listen to your brother's nonsense!"

"This is your own future! Not some useless person's! Why should you be held hostage by him!"

"Hurry up and say it!"

Lin Yao paid her no mind.

She just slowly, slowly raised her head.

She first looked at her brother beside her.

Lin Yu was also looking at her, his calm demeanor silently conveying one message.

Don't be afraid.

Go choose.

Whatever you choose, I'll be here.

Chapter 85: Goodbye

Lin Yao's lips trembled slightly.

That sense of desperate resolve that had been crushed by reality, that icy clarity, returned to her at this moment.

She finally turned around to face Feng Rui directly.

To face this man who had given her the "perfect" choice, yet made her feel endlessly disgusted.

Feng Rui adjusted his glasses, believing that no sane person could refuse the conditions he had offered.

Especially after her own brother had made such an insane move, any rational sister would definitely make the "correct" choice.

He had even prepared comforting words in advance.

However.

Lin Yao spoke.

What she said was completely opposite to what he had anticipated.

"No."

A single word.

Resolute and unwavering.

The muscles on Feng Rui's face twitched almost imperceptibly.

Without pausing, Lin Yao looked directly at Feng Rui and clearly repeated her brother's words, syllable by syllable.

"We refuse."

Boom!

If Lin Yu's refusal was a nuclear bomb.

Then Lin Yao's confirmation was the button that detonated it.

The entire world completely exploded.

"It's over..."

Aunt's legs went weak, and she almost collapsed to the floor.

"Mad! They're all mad! This entire family has gone mad!" Second Uncle beat his chest and stamped his feet, his face filled with despair.

Mother Su's face instantly drained of color, turning as pale as paper.

She looked at Lin Yao, then at Lin Yu, her venomous gaze seeming to want to devour the siblings whole.

She wasn't just "regretting" things for Lin Yao.

She was heartbroken over her daughter Su Qingxue's "easily obtainable" formal position at Wind Rider Technology!

When one person achieves enlightenment, even their pets ascend to heaven.

But now, not only had the pets failed to ascend, they had fallen into the cesspit together!

The journalists went completely wild!

Camera flashes went off like they were free, almost turning the corridor into daylight!

"Heavens! The news story of the century! A myth-level practitioner rejects an astronomical contract!"

"Siblings join forces! Is this the pride of geniuses or the revelry of madmen?"

Brother Wang stared intently at Lin Yu and Lin Yao, knowing that the biggest career breakthrough of his life had arrived!

As for the Lin parents, they simply stood in place, their bodies trembling uncontrollably.

They looked at their son and daughter surrounded by the crowd, at their son standing calmly in front of his sister.

Their minds went completely blank.

They didn't understand contracts, nor did they understand myth-level professions.

But they could comprehend one thing.

Their son, the son they thought had been mad for five years, completely useless.

Today, in front of all the important figures in Linzhou.

Had shattered the heavens.

The corridor erupted into chaos, filled with exclamations, curses, and discussions that made people's scalps tingle.

And at the center of this chaos.

Feng Rui finally stopped pretending.

He adjusted his glasses, the lenses reflecting cold light.

He looked at Lin Yu, then at Lin Yao, his previously gentle face completely darkening.

He spoke slowly, each word seeming to be squeezed through gritted teeth.

"Are you certain?"

Lin Yu nodded.

Not even interested in looking at Feng Rui any further, he simply supported his sister calmly and uttered two faint words.

"Don't bother."

Two light words, yet they struck Feng Rui's face like two invisible slaps.

Certain?

What more needed to be certain?

From the very beginning, he hadn't cared about these so-called contracts, these self-important figures.

The muscles on Feng Rui's face finally began to twitch uncontrollably.

His face beneath the gold-rimmed glasses grew so dark it seemed water could drip from it.

Rage, like a volcano about to erupt, surged wildly in his chest.

He, the vice president of Wind Rider Technology, an influential figure in Linzhou, who had calculated everything, arranged everything, even stooped to promise countless benefits.

In the end, had been trampled underfoot in the most contemptuous manner by a madman, a waste, in front of all Linzhou's media.

He wanted to explode.

He wanted to make this ignorant youth understand the power of capital, the cruelty of society.

But he couldn't.

Countless cameras were pointed at him, countless flashes recording his every subtle movement.

If he lost his composure here, combined with recent circumstances, Wind Rider Technology's stock would plummet even more severely than the other three companies tomorrow.

Feng Rui stared fixedly at Lin Yu, his gaze almost materializing to pierce through him.

After a long moment.

He slowly exhaled a turbid breath.

All his rage was forcibly suppressed, transformed into words laced with ice.

"You will regret this."

Having said that, he didn't spare anyone another glance, turned abruptly, and strode away in a huff.

His retreating figure was both resolute and disheveled.

President Qian of Baisheng and President Li of Heaven's Pillar watched Feng Rui depart with expressions of extreme complexity.

There was schadenfreude, there was sympathy for fellow victims, but mostly there was relief at having survived a disaster.

Fortunately, they hadn't followed.

Fortunately, it was Feng Rui who had jumped into this fire pit.

They exchanged a glance and simultaneously thought about approaching Lin Yu or Lin Yao to say something, even if just to save face with some polite remarks.

But when their eyes met the calmly standing young man, their feet seemed nailed to the spot.

Lin Yu merely glanced at them indifferently.

That glance held no particular emotion.

Yet it made these two business tycoons, who had weathered many storms, shiver simultaneously.

Madman.

This was a true madman.

A madman who dared publicly refuse a myth-level profession's astronomical contract, who dared rub Wind Rider Technology's face in the dirt.

Talk to him?

What if he became violent?

President Qian and President Li almost instantly made their decision, retreating in perfect unison, turning, and squeezing out of the crowd with their entourages in disgrace.

Leave.

Get away quickly.

As representatives of the three major companies departed one after another, the representatives from smaller companies scattered like birds and beasts, fleeing faster than anyone.

The corridor that had been packed solid just moments ago suddenly emptied out significantly.

Only the Lin family members, those dumbfounded relatives, and a group of thoroughly excited media reporters remained.

"Ah—!"

A shrill, distorted scream pierced the brief tranquility.

It was Mother Su.

As if all the bones had been pulled from her body, or as if struck by invisible lightning, her entire body trembled violently as she pointed a shaking finger at Lin Yu, then at Lin Yao.

Her face, once twisted with jealousy and wild joy, now held only despair and venom.

"Mad! You're all mad!"

"An S-class contract! Wind Rider Technology! Do you have any idea what you've rejected!"

"It's over... completely over..."

Aunt's legs gave way, and she collapsed directly to the floor, slapping her thighs as she began wailing loudly.

"Oh heavens! What sin has the Lin family committed to produce such two ill-fated stars!"

"All that glorious wealth and honor, gone! Just like that!"

Chapter 86: It is important to choose the right person

Second Uncle was trembling with rage as he rushed in front of Father Lin and Mother Lin, spittle flying everywhere.

"Big Brother! Sister-in-law! Are you just going to stand by and watch? Watch this good-for-nothing ruin Yao Yao's entire life?"

"Say something! Make him kneel and apologize to President Feng! It's not too late to chase after them now! It's still not too late!"

Their wails and curses were like a sudden storm, filled with the most selfish despair.

No one cared about Lin Yao's feelings.

No one cared about Lin Yu's choice.

They were only howling over the shattering of their own "one person attains enlightenment, even their pets ascend to heaven" fantasy.

They were weeping bitterly over Su Qingxue's job at Wind Rider Technology that hadn't even materialized yet, over their own foreseeable future business dealings, over all the parasitic fantasies they had attached to the Lin Family that were now completely destroyed.

Father Lin and Mother Lin were terrified pale by this scene, instinctively shielding their daughter behind them, their lips trembling without being able to utter a single word.

Lin Yao watched the ugly scene before her, her stomach churning.

Disgusting.

Unbelievably disgusting.

The slight wavering about "reality" that had just risen within her was completely crushed and obliterated at this moment by the faces before her.

She felt immensely grateful.

Grateful that in the end, she had still stood together with her brother.

And Lin Yu, from beginning to end, had just stood there calmly, using his own body to shield his sister from all the foul language and verbal abuse.

He was like a reef at the center of a storm, standing firm and unyielding against the wind and waves.

Just then.

"Hurry! Hurry!"

"Don't let them get away!"

Another, more turbulent storm swept in.

The reporters who had just been on the periphery, after a brief moment of shock, reacted.

Like sharks smelling blood, they instantly split into three streams.

One group chased after the cars of Feng Rui, President Qian, and the others, trying to dig out the last bit of sensational material before they left.

"President Feng! What are your thoughts on the Lin siblings' decision?"

"Will Wind Rider Technology blacklist them because of this?"

The largest group, however, surged forward like a tide, instantly surrounding Lin Yu and Lin Yao so tightly that not even a drop of water could pass through!

"Mr. Lin Yu! Why did you reject the contract on your sister's behalf? Is it because you feel Wind Rider's terms aren't good enough?"

"Miss Lin Yao! Did you really voluntarily give up this sky-high contract? Are you being coerced by your brother?"

"There are rumors that your brother has mental issues, is that true?"

Countless microphones were practically shoved into the siblings' faces.

Countless camera flashes went off frantically, blinding everyone.

Lin Yu frowned slightly, pulling Lin Yao even tighter behind him, emanating an invisible pressure that made even the most frenzied reporters instinctively halt their steps.

The third group, and the most cunning one, led by veteran journalist Brother Wang, quietly changed direction.

Their target wasn't the business tycoons who had already left, nor the main characters currently surrounded airtight.

It was those few... relatives who were collapsed on the ground, crying and cursing, their emotions completely broken.

Brother Wang dashed over in one swift movement, directly thrusting his microphone in front of Mother Su, who was crying the hardest.

"Ma'am! Are you a relative of Miss Lin Yao?"

Brother Wang spoke extremely fast, "We saw you were very emotional just now, do you know some inside information? Is there another reason why Miss Lin Yao rejected the contract?"

This question was like a key, instantly opening the floodgates of Mother Su's venting.

She grabbed Brother Wang's arm as if clutching her only lifeline, and began pouring out her grievances frantically.

"Inside information? I'll tell you! The biggest inside information is him!"

She pointed sharply at Lin Yu, who was surrounded by reporters, her venomous hatred almost materializing into substance.

"It's that good-for-nothing! That jinx! Five years of his own madness wasn't enough, now he wants to drag his sister down to hell with him!"

Mother Su's shrieks, Aunt's wails, and Second Uncle's angry shouts were like three blunt knives, repeatedly cutting through everyone's eardrums in the narrow corridor.

But Lin Yu paid no attention.

He didn't even glance at these relatives again, simply turning around and addressing the group of overexcited reporters before him with an indisputable attitude.

"Get out."

Two words, without inflection, yet carrying an inexplicable pressure.

The reporters were taken aback.

They were used to interviewees dodging, raging, even begging, but they had never encountered such a calm expulsion.

"Mr. Lin Yu..."

A reporter tried to ask again.

Lin Yu didn't give him the chance.

He stepped forward, the invisible pressure suddenly intensifying, making the frontmost reporters instinctively retreat half a step.

They suddenly remembered that this young man before them had just rubbed the faces of Linzhou's three giants into the ground.

He was a madman.

You can't reason with a madman.

Father Lin and Mother Lin also reacted, quickly stepping forward, one pushing, one persuading.

"Friends from the press, you've worked hard today, our home is a bit chaotic, another day, let's talk another day..."

"Please, give us some peace and quiet..."

With a pillar of support, the elderly couple's movements became more efficient.

They pushed and shoved, forcibly herding the reporters toward the elevator.

The reporters didn't dare actually use force, so they could only retreat passively.

Amid the chaos, Lin Yu's gaze fell on those relatives who were still collapsed on the ground throwing tantrums.

"You leave too."

His words made Mother Su's wails cease abruptly.

She looked up sharply at Lin Yu in disbelief.

"You... what did you say? Lin Yu, you ungrateful brat! We're doing this for your own good! You're actually kicking us out?"

"Big Brother! Sister-in-law! Look at this! This is the fine son you raised!" Second Uncle also jumped up.

Father Lin and Mother Lin's movements froze, their faces full of distress.

But Lin Yu showed not the slightest wavering.

He walked directly to the door, pulled it open, and made a gesture of invitation.

The meaning couldn't be clearer.

Get lost.

Mother Su trembled with rage, wanting to curse more, but was pulled back by her daughter Su Qingxue.

"Mom, let's go."

Su Qingxue's voice was tearful, but more than that, it was filled with fear.

She didn't dare stay any longer.

Pulled by her daughter, Mother Su, along with Second Uncle and Aunt, could only reluctantly get up from the ground, still cursing and grumbling as they were half-pushed, half-escorted out the door by Father Lin and Mother Lin.

The reporters who had been kicked out looked at each other, most of them looking frustrated.

The first wave who had chased after the big shots like Feng Rui had already sent back news.

Apart from a few meaningless official statements, they had dug up nothing.

And their group who had surrounded the main characters had been directly swept out the door.

Today had been a wasted trip.

Many young reporters were already packing their equipment, preparing to head back.

Only Brother Wang, that veteran media professional, wasn't discouraged at all—instead, his eyes shone with excitement.

His prey wasn't the siblings inside the room.

It was these few... idiots who had been kicked out together, now huddled together for warmth, pouring out their grievances to each other.

"What terrible luck! How did we end up with such a family of lunatics!"

"Oh heavens! That was an S-class contract! Wind Rider Technology! Gone just like that! My heart aches..."

"It's all Lin Yu's fault! He's a jinx! He's finished himself, and now he's dragging our Yao Yao down with him!"

Mother Su's voice was the loudest and most venomous.

Brother Wang quietly moved closer, turning his recorder to maximum power.

He squeezed out an expression of utmost sympathy and sorrow.

"Ma'am, you've really suffered."

His sudden interjection startled the relatives.

Recognizing him as a reporter, Mother Su immediately found an outlet for her venting.

"Suffered? More than just suffering!"

She grabbed Brother Wang's sleeve, spittle flying.

"You're a reporter, right? You tell me! Is this any way for a brother to act? Personally destroying his own sister's future! That was our whole family's hope!"

Brother Wang was ecstatic inside.

These Lin Family relatives were complete fools; no matter what you asked, they would say exactly what he wanted them to say.

They were practically rumor-making machines!

Although it was unethical, it generated traffic!

When reporting, he could pin everything on the Lin Family relatives and still maintain his image as a conscientious media professional!

This was the work ethic a news professional should have!

Old Wang here, after all these years, still had it—he was still a hit-making machine!

Chapter 87: Let the whole Linzhou dare not make any disrespectful voices

The next day, early morning.

The sun rose as usual, and Linzhou welcomed a new day.

However, the entire internet of Linzhou had already been completely ignited by two reports.

The first one came from the front-page headlines of official media and major commercial portals.

[Wind Rider Technology Takes the Lead, Jointly Launches "Rising Star Project" with Qingyun Pharmaceuticals, Giant Force Group, and Bedrock Biotech!]

The accompanying photo showed four men in business suits.

Feng Rui from Wind Rider Technology, Wang Teng from Giant Force Group, President Shi from Bedrock Biotech, and... that mysterious CEO of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals, Li Mo.

The four stood shoulder to shoulder, wearing commercial smiles as they announced they would invest billions in funds to discover and cultivate new Practitioners from this year's College Entrance Exam.

The main body of the report lavishly promoted the first achievement of the "Rising Star Project."

Wind Rider Technology had overnight signed two Practitioners from Lin Yao's class at Linzhou First High School, one male and one female, one golden and one purple.

The signing bonus reached as high as ten million!

Moreover, on the very day of signing, both had already been transported by private jet to Wind Rider Technology's headquarters for training.

This news exploded like a massive bomb among countless exam candidates and parent groups.

Countless people felt envy, countless people felt jealousy.

They all discussed Wind Rider Technology's boldness and financial power, discussing those two lucky individuals who had soared to success overnight.

As for that Myth-level profession Practitioner Lin Yao who rejected the S-class contract during yesterday's Awakening Ceremony?

It seemed she had already been forgotten.

Or rather, deliberately buried by this massively promoted report.

The power of capital was beginning to reveal its fangs.

This was purely bought promotion.

The other report, meanwhile, swept across major social platforms and forums with viral spreading speed.

Its title was even more sensational.

[Genius on the Left, Madman on the Right! Exclusive Revelation of the "Mad" Family Behind Myth-level Profession Practitioner Lin Yao! Both Siblings Have Severe Mental Issues!]

This "in-depth report" penned by veteran journalist Brother Wang didn't interview any official sources, yet cited numerous "recorded evidence" from "insiders."

These so-called insiders were precisely Lin Yu's aunt, second uncle, and Su Qingxue's mother.

The report painted the Lin family as a tragic household shrouded by hereditary mental illness history, using a tone of pity and compassion.

"According to revelations from Mr. Lin Yu's own second uncle, Lin Yu has behaved strangely since childhood. After awakening to an Epic-level profession, he completely lost his mind, broke with his family, became obsessed with creating garbage, and hasn't lived normally for five years."

"Miss Lin Yao's own aunt tearfully disclosed in an interview that Lin Yu not only ruined himself but now also coerces and controls his younger sister, personally destroying her chance to rise to greatness overnight."

"And Ms. Su, who has been friends with the Lin family for decades, dropped an explosive revelation: this mental issue in the Lin family has existed for a long time, traceable even to the previous generation. Lin Yu's father himself is the product of consanguineous marriage, a premature baby with congenital deficiencies who failed prenatal screening back then and was born privately..."

At the end of the report, Brother Wang pretentiously sparked a discussion.

Could this kind of "mental issue" actually be some kind of "trigger" for awakening top-tier professions?

This article struck at the heart with every word.

It portrayed Lin Yu's period of lying low as madness, twisted Lin Yao's autonomous choice into coercion, and even attacked their parents with the most vicious rumors.

This report hurt more than any blade.

What it brought wasn't physical wounds, but social death.

...

Lin family household, at the dining table.

The atmosphere was terrifyingly oppressive.

Mother Lin's eyes were swollen and red, clearly having stayed up all night, now just silently setting breakfast on the table.

Lin Yao sat there, head lowered, her expression unclear.

Lin Yu ate his portion quietly, same as usual.

"Bang!"

A loud crash.

Father Lin violently slammed his phone onto the dining table.

His entire body trembled violently, not from anger, but from a piercing humiliation of being betrayed by close relatives.

"Animals! They're truly a bunch of animals!"

Father Lin's teeth ground audibly, his eyes bloodshot.

"I treated him as my own brother... I treated her as my own sister... They... how could they say such things about me! About you!"

Consanguineous marriage?

Premature baby?

Failed prenatal screening?

What... what kind of nonsense is all this...

Lin Yao kept her head down, unconsciously stirring her chopsticks in the bowl.

She couldn't eat.

Her stomach churned, not from hunger, but from intense self-loathing.

Ultimately, all of this was because of her.

If she hadn't awakened to a Myth-level profession, if she hadn't caused such a commotion at the Awakening Ceremony, her brother wouldn't have clashed with those companies, those relatives... wouldn't have revealed such ugly true colors.

It was her who pushed this family into the eye of the storm.

"Old Lin, don't be angry."

Mother Lin walked to her husband's side, gently patting his heavily heaving back, taking away the phone in front of him.

"Getting angry over those people isn't worth it."

Her voice was soft, yet carried an unprecedented determination.

"I misjudged people, decades of sisterly affection... I was truly blind."

She smiled self-mockingly, the smile full of disappointment and coldness.

"Before, I only thought she was a bit materialistic, a bit self-centered. I never expected... she could utter such conscience-betraying words."

Mother Lin turned, looking at her silent daughter, and equally silent son.

"From now on, none of them will set foot in this home again."

She walked to the dining table, taking Lin Yao's cold hand with one hand, while her other hand covered the back of Lin Yu's hand.

"Yao Yao, don't overthink it. This isn't your fault."

"You did right, your brother did right too. There are so many paths in this world, you don't necessarily have to take the most glorious one. Mom doesn't ask for anything, just hopes both of you can live happily for your entire lives."

"As long as our family stays together, healthy and well, who cares how those mad dogs outside bark!"

Warm palms connected the siblings together.

The rage in Father Lin's chest that almost burned through his reason unconsciously dissipated in this moment of tenderness.

He looked at his wife, looked at his children, a sour sensation welling up in his bloodshot eyes.

Yes.

As long as the family stays together, what obstacle can't be overcome?

Lin Yu felt the warmth transmitted from the back of his hand, his heart peaceful.

This long-lost sense of family happiness satisfied him immensely.

But he also understood clearly.

This kind of happiness needed strength to protect, needed absolute power to support.

Otherwise, it would be like a bubble in sunlight, popping at the slightest touch.

He had to grow stronger quickly, fast enough to make the entire Linzhou not dare to have any disrespectful voices anymore.

Chapter 88: Unleashing Their Potential!

A tense breakfast finally ended with the comfort of family.

"Dad, Mom."

Lin Yu suddenly spoke up.

"Yao Yao and I will be going to the pre-exam intensive class in a couple of days, so the house will be empty. Why don't you two go on a vacation?"

Both Father Lin and Mother Lin were taken aback.

"Vacation?"

"What kind of time is this for a vacation?" Father Lin instinctively refused.

"Exactly because of this timing, you should go."

Lin Yu explained unhurriedly.

"First, you've worked hard all these years and deserve a proper break. Second, it's a good chance to lay low. With all the commotion online right now, reporters will definitely keep hounding our door. If you go somewhere quiet for a couple of days, most people will have forgotten by the time the storm passes."

Mother Lin seemed tempted but complained, "I've never properly traveled in my life... Besides, that would cost so much money."

"It's all arranged."

Lin Yu smiled.

"Flight tickets, hotels, all covered. Just consider it your son's early filial piety."

"You child..."

Though Mother Lin complained, the smile she couldn't hide said everything.

Only Father Lin seemed thoughtful.

After the meal.

Father Lin stopped Lin Yu at the study door.

"Come in for a moment."

Inside the study, Father Lin wasted no time on pleasantries. From the deepest part of a locked drawer, he retrieved an antique wooden box.

Opening the box revealed a smooth, warm jade plaque resting quietly inside.

"Take this."

Father Lin solemnly handed the jade plaque to Lin Yu.

The plaque felt slightly heavy and cool to the touch.

"You remember Uncle Wang, right?"

Lin Yu nodded.

He was Father Lin's childhood friend who had even held him as a baby. But as Uncle Wang's business grew bigger and he became a truly important figure, their families gradually lost contact.

"He's now one of the directors at 'Heaven's Pillar Group,' and probably holds other positions too..."

Father Lin's voice sounded strained.

"He made this jade plaque for me back when he was learning stone carving, said it was a token of our brotherhood."

"Use this to find him, he can help you... but only once."

"After using this, my old face won't have anywhere left to rest. Our friendship will be finished."

"Some favors can only be asked once in a lifetime."

Father Lin looked deeply at Lin Yu. His bloodshot eyes held no blame, no doubt, only a heavy trust.

"You've grown up and have your own ideas. During those five years, everyone outside said you'd gone mad, even your mother and I... believed it."

"But now, your father believes in you."

"You've always been the smartest in this family, the one with the clearest mind. Your father knows that those five years of detours had their own purpose."

He wasn't the type of father who thought his child, even if the smartest in the universe, must obey him unquestioningly.

He was just an ordinary father who loved his children.

"Your father hasn't achieved much in life, can't help you too much. This is the last thing I can do for you."

"Go ahead and do what you need to do."

"Whatever you or Yao Yao accomplish, you'll always be your father's pride."

After speaking, Father Lin stood up and walked toward the door.

Just as he pulled the door open, he paused and turned back.

"Lin Yu."

"Don't act impulsively in the future."

"Your father can't give you much life advice... I can only hope that when emotions overwhelm you and you can't control yourself, you'll remember me and what I said today."

"You're smart, so you need to understand how to use that intelligence wisely. Xiao Yu, think thrice before you act."

...

Lin Yu's arrangements moved swiftly.

That very afternoon, Father Lin and Mother Lin packed simple luggage and prepared to head to the airport.

Everything was arranged by Lin Yu through Zhao Tianyang - from the private car service to security at their destination, ensuring nothing could go wrong.

Only after sending his parents off could he truly unleash his potential.

Before leaving, Mother Lin held both siblings' hands, her eyes reddening again.

"Call us often, whether there's something or not."

"Take care of yourself, and take care of Yao Yao too. Don't let her suffer at school."

"If you need money, just say so..."

"Your father still has some private savings."

Father Lin interrupted her from the side.

"Enough, the children are grown up now. They know what they're doing."

He patted Lin Yu's shoulder, then looked at Lin Yao. A thousand words finally condensed into a single sigh.

The car slowly drove away from the residential area and disappeared around the street corner.

Lin Yao kept waving until the car was completely out of sight before slowly lowering her hand.

She turned and linked arms with Lin Yu, gently resting her head on his shoulder.

The family turmoil and the outside noise seemed to fade away in this moment.

As long as her brother was by her side, she felt an inexplicable peace.

"Brother."

Lin Yao asked softly.

"What do we do next?"

Lin Yu didn't answer immediately.

He took out his phone and casually scrolled through the overwhelming negative reports and that massive "Rising Star Project."

His face showed no trace of emotion.

Those heart-piercing words, those malicious speculations - they couldn't stir even the slightest ripple within him.

Because he understood that anger was the least effective emotion when dealing with such things.

The only solution was to use absolute strength to completely crush all doubts and mockery.

Crush them until they weren't even qualified to look up.

"Just focus on your exam preparation for now..."

Lin Yu put away his phone and ruffled his sister's hair.

"Leave the rest to me."

Lin Yao nodded obediently.

"Mm!"

"Oh, Yao Yao."

"Hmm?"

"Are you still afraid of injections?"

...

Meanwhile.

Wind Rider Technology, top-floor president's office.

"Bang!"

An expensive energy crystal cup was smashed violently against the floor, instantly shattering into pieces that scattered everywhere.

Feng Rui's chest heaved violently, his well-maintained face distorted with anger.

He hated!

Hated like mad!

Lin Yao! Lin Yu! Zhao Tianyang!

Two Myth-level professions, one Epic-level profession.

These three people should have been his, should have been Wind Rider Technology's possessions.

And what happened?

He had been publicly humiliated, pressed into the ground and trampled repeatedly by a madman and a young girl in front of all Linzhou's media and major companies!

An S-class contract treated like worthless paper!

Wind Rider Technology's face had been completely lost!

If it weren't for the fact that the three major medicine companies' stock prices were teetering on the edge, with the entire market on the verge of collapse, leaving him stretched too thin...

He swore he wouldn't have let that brother-sister pair off so easily!

"President Feng, please calm down."

The assistant nearby nervously cleaned up the fragments on the floor.

"Hmph! Calm down?"

Feng Rui kicked away the smart cleaning robot that approached, cursing angrily, "How can I calm down! The whole of Linzhou is laughing at me right now!"

But then another thought occurred to him, and he sneered coldly.

He had been rejected, publicly slapped in the face.

After this battle, probably no company in Linzhou, or even the entire Jiangnan Province, would dare to sign Lin Yao and the others.

Offending Wind Rider Technology meant offending half the medicine market.

Once this storm passed, he had plenty of ways to deal with that arrogant brother-sister pair who didn't know their place!

For now, the most important thing was to stabilize their foundation.

Chapter 89: The Eve of the War

Thinking of this, Feng Rui's mood calmed down slightly.

He sat back down in his boss chair, picked up the freshly brewed tea his assistant had brought, and gently blew on it.

Right now, the most important thing was to deal with the immediate crisis.

That damned Old Ghost Hall.

The culprit that caused the stock prices of three companies to evaporate overnight.

"Beep beep."

The private terminal on the desk suddenly rang.

It was an encrypted line.

Feng Rui glanced at the caller ID—it was Wang Teng. He answered the call.

Wang Teng's rugged face appeared on the screen, the background still that oppressive conference room, but his face carried a barely suppressed excitement.

"Old Feng! It worked!"

Feng Rui was stunned. "What worked?"

"The Rising Star Project!" Wang Teng's voice carried the relief of someone who had survived a disaster. "Once your promotional materials went out, plus the two new recruits we signed overnight, the market reacted! Damn it, the stock prices have stabilized! They're still falling, but the rate has slowed down! At least now, those short-selling bastards can't easily crush us anymore!"

This news finally brought a slight smile to Feng Rui's face, which had been gloomy all day.

Li Mo's plan—the first step—had succeeded.

Using the massive promise of "hundred-billion investment," they successfully fooled the market and stabilized investor confidence.

Although the cost was ten million in signing bonuses and substantial follow-up resources given away for free, compared to the hundreds of billions in evaporated market value, this amount of money was nothing.

"This is good news." Feng Rui nodded. "Next comes the second and third steps."

"Exactly!" Wang Teng slammed the table heavily. "Old Shi over there is already prepared! Warehouse inventory is complete, all channels are cleared! Once we give the order, medicines at 30% off will immediately flood the entire Linzhou!"

"Our goal is to choke Old Ghost Hall's inventory to death in their own hands!"

"But..." Wang Teng's tone shifted, the excitement on his face growing even more intense, even carrying a trace of awe.

"Old Feng, I have another tremendous piece of good news to tell you."

"We've made contact with Chen Ao."

Feng Rui's movements froze.

Chen Ao.

This name was like a massive mountain pressing down on the hearts of all upper-class figures in Linzhou.

The King of the Black Market.

A true underworld overlord who could make the entire underground world of three surrounding provinces tremble with just a stomp of his foot.

This was a genuinely hardcore ruthless character, the godfather of the black market.

Their original plan was just to pay for information, and incidentally pay respects to the local boss, hoping Chen Ao wouldn't interfere when they finally cleared out Old Ghost Hall's inventory.

Being able to connect with one of Chen Ao's minor subordinates would have been considered burning incense for good luck.

"How? What did his people say? How much did they ask for?" Feng Rui asked urgently.

Wang Teng didn't answer directly. He just took a deep breath, then spoke in a tone almost like someone dreaming.

"It wasn't his subordinates."

"The price we offered, and Li Mo... the plan Li Mo provided, somehow reached Chen Ao's own ears."

"He... personally responded."

Wang Teng's Adam's apple bobbed.

"He said he's also very interested in this Old Ghost Hall operating on his turf."

"He will personally go to meet that Old Ghost."

"Boom!"

It felt like thunder exploded in Feng Rui's mind.

Chen Ao... taking action personally?

How was this possible!

For their small matter? Why would Chen Ao do this?

Wait.

Not for them.

Wang Teng's words mentioned another person.

Li Mo.

Li Mo's plan!

A terrifying thought instantly flashed into Feng Rui's mind, making all the hairs on his body stand on end.

Li Mo!

It was Li Mo again!

This plan was his idea, and now even Chen Ao was stirred because of this Li Mo!

Could it be...

There was also some unknown relationship between Li Mo and Chen Ao?

Could he actually command Chen Ao?!

This speculation sent a bone-chilling cold through Feng Rui.

He had always thought Li Mo was just a top-tier professional manager, a genius at playing with capital and markets.

But now it seemed he had severely underestimated this man's influence.

This person's reach had actually extended into the darkest corners of Linzhou, even able to affect Chen Ao's personal decisions!

Too terrifying.

But what if he considered it from another angle—what if there was no relationship between him and Chen Ao?

...That might be even more terrifying!

Two complete strangers—how did Li Mo convince Chen Ao?

Just how powerful were his abilities exactly?

No matter how he thought about it.

This man was simply unfathomable!

Fortunately... fortunately this time they were cooperating, not opponents.

No wonder the three of them had been so desperately insistent on making him stay back then.

So worth it...

Seeing the plan getting on track, Feng Rui felt unusually relaxed for once.

"Good! Excellent!"

Feng Rui ended the communication.

He excitedly paced back and forth in his office, his entire body radiating a burning excitement.

It's back!

Everything's back!

That feeling of strategizing from a command tent, determining victory a thousand miles away, gradually forcing opponents into a corner—that thrill was back!

This reminded him of the passion and excitement from his early days following his boss to build their empire.

It had been too long, far too long since he'd felt this way.

Since taking this high position, facing nothing but boring reports and hypocritical social interactions every day, he had almost forgotten that he too had fought his way through dangerous situations!

"Notify everyone!"

Feng Rui issued instructions to his assistant.

"Get all of Wang Teng and President Shi's people moving! All discount activities, promotional materials, channel distribution—prepare everything to the final stage!"

"Once good news comes from Chen Ao's side, the price war begins immediately!"

"Yes, President Feng!" The assistant, infected by his mood, responded excitedly.

This time, he would show that reckless Old Ghost what the power of capital truly meant!

The most difficult hurdle was already over!

They hadn't been knocked out in the first blow and had already recovered. What capabilities did Old Ghost Hall really have?

How much money?

Even if they had substantial backing and weren't short on funds.

In terms of medicine inventory, you could never possibly compete with three major medicine suppliers who had been accumulating stock for decades!

When the price war truly begins, these people will finally understand...

What genuine dimensional reduction assault really means!

...

Meanwhile, at the Lin Family home.

After seeing their parents off, the originally warm house instantly became empty and desolate.

The air still carried the faint scent of laundry detergent from their mother and the heavy sigh their father had left behind before departing.

Lin Yao stood in the center of the living room, somewhat at a loss.

The home was still there.

But that sense of stability had disappeared along with their parents' departure and the external storm.

"Brother, we..."

She looked at Lin Yu, wanting to ask something but not knowing where to start.

"We're leaving too." Lin Yu said concisely.

He picked up his jacket from the sofa and handed one to Lin Yao.

"Leaving? Where to?" Lin Yao looked confused.

"To a place... where we won't be disturbed for now, a place where we can have peace and quiet for a few days."

Lin Yu didn't explain further.

For the two siblings right now, the safest place in all of Linzhou was actually that most chaotic, most lawless territory beyond legal jurisdiction.

What an irony.

The Awakening Ceremony had ended, and there was still one week before the pre-exam intensive course began.

He needed to settle everything before then.

Although that intensive course was optional for him.

But he still needed to understand some of the College Entrance Exam systems and rules.

After all, he would be facing hellish difficulty multiplied by one hundred and sixty.

Lin Yao didn't ask any more questions. She just silently put on her jacket and followed behind Lin Yu.

She trusted her brother.

Unconditionally.

Chapter 90: Come, rent a room

Lin Yu hailed a taxi, not heading toward any bustling commercial district but instead driving toward the city outskirts, an old industrial area.

The scenery outside the window gradually shifted from towering, glamorous skyscrapers to dilapidated and desolate buildings.

Finally, the car stopped outside an abandoned freight station.

"We're here."

Lin Yu paid the fare and got out with Lin Yao.

A smell mixed with engine oil, rust, and unidentified decaying substances assaulted their senses, making Lin Yao instinctively frown.

Was this the "safe" place her brother had mentioned?

She watched as Lin Yu skillfully navigated around several collapsed shipping containers and entered a dimly lit alleyway.

At the end of the alley stood an inconspicuous, rust-covered iron door.

Two muscular men wearing black tank tops stood guard at the entrance.

Lin Yao's heart instantly leaped into her throat.

The aura emanating from these two men was filled with violence and bloodlust—they were definitely not ordinary people.

Yet Lin Yu walked straight toward them as if they weren't even there.

Just as Lin Yao thought a conflict was about to erupt, the two burly men simultaneously bowed their heads to Lin Yu.

Though they didn't speak, their posture showed genuine, almost reverent respect.

Lin Yu took a black card from his pocket and swiped it through an inconspicuous slot on the door.

This place was the VIP entrance to the black market.

You needed substantial funds in your Black Card to get through.

Lin Yu had never used this entrance before.

"Beep."

The iron door silently slid open to both sides.

Behind it was an entirely different world.

Bustling, chaotic, yet maintaining a strange sense of order.

The wide underground passage was filled with people coming and going, everyone wearing large cloaks and various masks that hid their identities in the darkness.

Stalls lined both sides of the passage, displaying items that would never be seen in regular markets.

Enchanted weapons glowing with dangerous light, unknown creatures squirming in glass jars, cursed artifacts emitting ominous auras...

This was... the black market?!

Lin Yao's mind went blank with a buzzing sound.

Although she was a student, she had heard about places like this.

It existed outside the bounds of law and order, a gray zone belonging to Practitioners.

A breeding ground for crime, a paradise for desperadoes.

Why would her brother... bring her to such a place?

And...

She looked at Lin Yu walking ahead, her mind raging with turbulent thoughts.

Lin Yu collected two cloaks and handed one to Lin Yao.

Lin Yao took the cloak and put it on somewhat clumsily.

The cloak's material was peculiar—not only did it block outside vision, but it seemed to conceal their auras as well.

She noticed a small number on the cloak's tag.

Three thousand.

Was this the price?

Three thousand to rent for one day?

Lin Yao was astonished.

From entering the door, to changing into the standard black cloaks,

to skillfully navigating through the crowded passage toward a shop with a "Bug Residence" sign...

Her brother's every movement showed a deeply ingrained familiarity.

She followed Lin Yu into the shop called "Bug Residence," and the scene inside once again shattered her expectations.

This wasn't the general store she had imagined, but rather a reception area decorated with understated luxury.

A receptionist wearing a ghost mask and a crisp uniform stood behind the counter.

"Sir, what service do you require?"

"Accommodation." Lin Yu's voice sounded muffled under the cloak. "The best."

The receptionist paused briefly before resuming his professional demeanor.

"The best 'Infinite' suite rents for ten thousand per day."

Lin Yao's heart skipped a beat.

Ten thousand per day?

That was equivalent to an entire month's income for an ordinary family.

Yet Lin Yu simply shook his head.

"I said, the best."

The receptionist fell silent for a moment, seemingly reassessing this client.

"...'Divine Concealment' class residence, independent space, absolute privacy, with highest authority. Daily rent... four hundred thousand."

Lin Yao felt like she couldn't breathe.

Four hundred thousand... per day?

What kind of concept was that? Burning money like paper?

"Two rooms." Lin Yu's voice showed no fluctuation. "Connected internally."

"Auto-renew."

He placed the pure black card on the counter.

When the receptionist saw that card, his body visibly stiffened.

His attitude instantly became extremely respectful.

"Of course, honored guest. I'll process this for you immediately."

Lin Yao was completely stunned.

Her large eyes widened beneath the mask, staring unblinkingly at Lin Yu.

Auto-renew?

Four hundred thousand per day, two rooms meant eight hundred thousand.

Brother... what exactly has he been doing outside?

Could it be... what Aunt Su said was true, that brother works as a security guard outside?

What kind of security guard could earn this much money!

No, that doesn't make sense.

An uncontrollable thought emerged from the depths of Lin Yao's mind.

Is brother... a mafia boss?

This absurd yet seemingly only reasonable explanation threw the young girl's thoughts into complete chaos.

Led personally by the receptionist, they passed through a special corridor and arrived at the so-called "Divine Concealment" residence.

These weren't rooms at all.

But rather two doors floating in empty space.

Lin Yu and Lin Yao each entered through a door.

Behind the door was an impossibly spacious luxury suite.

Beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows stretched a brilliant galaxy, with countless stars slowly rotating.

Lin Yao walked to the window and could even see a blue planet hanging not far away.

"Is this... a virtual landscape?" she murmured to herself.

A gentle electronic voice sounded throughout the room.

[You can switch between over three thousand surreal landscapes according to your preference at any time.]

Lin Yao jumped in surprise, then noticed a semi-transparent control interface appearing on the wall.

She tentatively tapped "Deep Sea," and the galaxy outside the window instantly transformed into deep blue ocean waters, with massive whale pods swimming leisurely past the window.

Yao Yao was completely dumbfounded.

This was practically a place where immortals would live!

The side walls between the two rooms could be made completely transparent or opened as passages as needed. Lin Yu walked over at this moment.

He completely ignored the surroundings that would astonish anyone and went straight to the control interface.

"These basic services are insufficient."

As he spoke, he began selecting options on the screen.

[Spatial Expansion Service activated, space enlarged tenfold, additional daily cost: five hundred thousand.]

[Virtual Training Partner Service activated, can simulate any opponent below level one hundred, additional daily cost: three hundred thousand.]

[Skill Teaching Service activated, includes basic skill library for all professions, additional daily cost: two hundred thousand.]

[Top Teacher One-on-One Anonymous Tutoring Service activated, additional daily cost: five hundred thousand.]

[Customized Medicinal Meals and Herbal Bath Conditioning Service activated, additional daily cost: one hundred fifty thousand.]

...

Chapter 91: The more you use, the more they lose

A series of notification tones struck Lin Yao's heart one after another.

She watched the number in the lower right corner of the operation interface rapidly jumping and felt her arithmetic ability completely short-circuiting under this continuous bombardment.

Finally, the number stopped at:

2.15 million/day.

Lin Yao was completely stunned.

Two hundred and fifteen thousand... per day?

This amount of money was enough to buy a small apartment in the best area of Linzhou.

And now, this was just the cost for her and her brother to stay here for one day.

Only then did Lin Yu nod slightly with some satisfaction.

He turned around and looked at his petrified younger sister.

"Yao Yao."

"As for the remaining value-added services, pick whichever ones you like, don't hold back with me."

"Pick whatever I like?"

Lin Yao's little brain buzzed and completely shut down.

Looking at that 2.15 million figure, she felt the concept of money she had built over the past eighteen years was completely shattered at this moment.

It wasn't that she had never seen money before.

Their family had been wealthy before.

But, several million...

That was their lifetime savings.

And now?

One day.

Just the cost of staying here for one day was enough to make the money their parents had saved through a lifetime of hard work vanish into thin air.

Lin Yao stood dazedly in place, her body trembling slightly—not from fear, but from a shudder originating from the depths of her soul, caused by the unknown and loss of control.

Under her mask, her small face had turned completely pale.

She suddenly grabbed Lin Yu's sleeve, looked up, and asked in a trembling voice that sounded like she was about to cry.

"Brother..."

"Are we... are we doing something that could get us executed?"

In her simple worldview, those who could squander money so extravagantly were either those great figures standing above the clouds, or... desperate outlaws.

Lin Yu was momentarily stunned.

Then, he couldn't help but laugh.

He reached out and gently patted his sister's head.

"Silly girl, what nonsense are you thinking?"

Executed?

That probably wouldn't happen.

This amount of money really didn't mean much to him.

Two cards, [Joker] and [Mirror Copy], formed a perfect infinite loop.

If he wanted, his wealth could instantly overwhelm the entire world's financial system.

Money, to him, was just a number.

A number he could create anytime, as much as he wanted.

Moreover, since Old Ghost Hall's business had gotten on track, an astronomical amount of funds flowed into his account every day.

He couldn't even be bothered to count how many zeros were behind that number.

This visit to Bug Residence was actually Seventh Master's suggestion.

The black market in Linzhou, and even the underground world of the three surrounding provinces, were all controlled by someone named Chen Ao.

But the black market wasn't a monolithic entity.

Service industries like "Bug Residence" that could grow this big had influential figures backing them who were no less powerful than Chen Ao himself, guaranteeing absolute credibility and safety.

This place was truly beyond the law, yet it was also currently the safest place in Linzhou.

Seeing his sister still looking anxious and uneasy, Lin Yu knew that without a reasonable explanation, this girl probably wouldn't even be able to sleep well.

He cleared his throat and adopted a deliberately mysterious tone.

"Actually."

"I signed with a... well, very mysterious and very powerful company."

"This company gave me an offer I couldn't refuse, and all this is just resource allocation included in the contract."

He made up this nonsense without blushing or his heart racing.

This was the explanation he had prepared long ago, and the only reason that could account for his current changes.

However, after hearing this, Lin Yao didn't feel reassured—instead, she became even more upset.

Her mood instantly plummeted.

Company?

Faction?

Just thinking about the greedy, ugly faces of those company representatives at the Awakening Ceremony, and the way they looked at her as if she were a perfect commodity, Lin Yao felt physically sick.

In her heart, every single one of these so-called companies was no good.

"Brother!"

She grabbed Lin Yu's arm and said urgently, "Then weren't you tricked by them? They definitely have ulterior motives! Brother, you're so talented, they must have signed you to exploit you!"

"Quickly terminate the contract with them! We don't want their things anymore! Let's go home!"

The young girl was truly anxious.

She would rather her brother remain the "madman" living in a shipping container than see him fall into another pit of fire.

Looking at her anxious expression, Lin Yu felt a wave of warmth in his heart.

"Don't worry, Yao Yao."

He ruffled his sister's hair and smoothed her somewhat messy bangs.

"Your brother knows what he's doing."

"This company is different, they're... well, foolish and rich."

"And the contract terms are very favorable to me, I have complete initiative, I can leave anytime I want, and they can't stop me."

Lin Yao looked at him with a mixture of belief and doubt.

"Really?"

"Truer than real gold."

Lin Yu nodded with a serious expression.

Looking at his sister's still troubled little face, a sudden idea came to him.

He leaned close to Lin Yao's ear and lowered his voice.

"Yao Yao, do you want... your brother to take massive advantage of that company?"

Lin Yao was stunned.

"What do you mean?"

Lin Yu pointed at the huge operation interface, indicating the rows of dazzling paid services.

A mischievous smile curled at the corner of his mouth.

"This company signed a valuation adjustment mechanism with me."

"They think I have unlimited potential, so they gave me nearly unlimited resources."

"But what they provide and what I can actually use are two different concepts."

"So..."

He looked at Lin Yao, guiding her patiently.

"Feel free to activate them, feel free to use them."

"The more you use, the more you spend, the more that company loses on me."

"Turning their resources into our own strength—that's what's most profitable, understand?"

"What we need to do is, during this period, fleece this company until it's completely bald!"

Lin Yao was completely confused by this twisted logic.

She stared dazedly at Lin Yu, then looked at the interface flashing with tempting options.

It seemed... to make sense?

Brother signed with a company.

The company provides resources.

They use these resources and become stronger.

The company... loses money?

Although she felt something was off somewhere, this logic seemed perfectly self-consistent.

Especially the phrase "fleece the company until it's completely bald" inexplicably gave her a sense of satisfaction.

Just thinking about those big companies suffering losses, her resistance actually diminished quite a bit.

"Alright, I'm going to my room."

Lin Yu patted her shoulder.

"Remember what I said, don't hold back, treat it like your own home."

"Oh no, be even less reserved than in your own home."

After saying this, he turned and walked into the passage connecting the two rooms, returning to his own suite.

Leaving Lin Yao alone, standing in place, facing that huge light screen.

Her gaze fell on each service item.

[Top-tier Technician Full-body Massage]

[Skin Care]

[Beauty and Hair Styling]

[Photon Rejuvenation]

...

Damn it... Brother makes sense!

I'll use them hard, use them vigorously!

Those rotten companies, let them lose money until they die!

Chapter 92: Million Volts!

Returning to his own suite, Lin Yu closed the connecting passageway.

His younger sister needed some time to digest and adapt.

As for him, he needed to use this final period of tranquility before the College Entrance Exam to push his strength up another level.

According to Linzhou's regulations, before the unified Abyssal Domains practical combat assessment organized for the College Entrance Exam, all examinees were prohibited from privately entering any Abyssal Domains or secret realms.

This meant that the most conventional path of leveling up through combat and farming monsters was blocked.

If he wanted to become stronger, only other avenues remained.

Equipment, medicine, skills, talents...

For equipment and medicine, the medicine was temporarily maxed out, and equipment was ultimately external items, so there was no rush for now.

Talents were innate and extremely difficult to acquire later.

Therefore, the only thing that could be quickly improved was skills.

Lin Yu pulled up his attribute panel, his gaze falling on the skills section.

Profession Skills: [Card Manifestation LVMAX], [Card Innovation LV10], [Mirror Copy LV1], [Card Creation].

Learned Skills: [Falling Rock Technique], [Fireball Technique], [Water Arrow Technique], [Wind Blade Technique], [Ice Spike Technique], [Lightning Spell], [Hardening Technique], [Mana Shield].

His line of sight lingered for a long time on the [Card Creation] skill.

This was the true core of the [Myriad Forms Card Crafter] profession.

[Card Manifestation] transformed existing things into cards.

[Card Innovation] optimized and derived from existing cards.

But [Card Creation] created cards from nothing, conjuring them into existence.

This was the fundamental ability of a card creator.

Yet over the past five years, in order to filter for the [Joker], he had focused all his mental energy on [Card Manifestation] and [Card Innovation].

For this most fundamental profession skill, he had actually never used it even once.

The proficiency was a glaring "zero."

He had truly wronged it.

Lin Yu planned to start from today, gradually grinding up the proficiency of this core skill.

However, just as he was about to close the panel, a different color suddenly caught the corner of his eye.

Among all the skill proficiency bars that were uniformly gray, one skill actually emitted a faint blue glow.

[Lightning Spell LV1 (Proficiency: Blue)]

Huh?

Lin Yu's movements halted.

Blue proficiency?

The proficiency mechanism for these non-core skills was different, and blue... was not low!

What was going on?

He clearly remembered that after buying these basic spell skill books from the black market, he had only learned them and hadn't used them even once.

The proficiency of all skills should be zero.

Why was [Lightning Spell] the only exception?

A thought suddenly flashed through his mind.

The parking garage!

He remembered now.

In the residential area's underground parking garage, to intimidate Chen Rui and Su Qingxue, he had used [Lightning Spell] once.

One time... a [Lightning Spell] amplified by sixteen thousand three hundred and eighty-four times!

Could it be...

Lin Yu's heartbeat suddenly accelerated.

He immediately clicked open the detailed description of [Lightning Spell].

[Lightning Spell LV1]

[Proficiency: Blue (16384/100000)]

[Proficiency Effect: Skill damage increased by 20%, skill range expanded by 20%, paralysis effect duration increased by 20%, mana consumption reduced by 20%.]

So that was it!

The system's judgment wasn't based on the "number of times" he used the skill.

It was determined by the energy level he leveraged each time he used it!

That one [Lightning Spell] amplified by sixteen thousand three hundred and eighty-four times was judged by the system as equivalent to him seriously casting the standard version of [Lightning Spell] sixteen thousand three hundred and eighty-four times!

One time!

Just one use!

His skill proficiency directly jumped from zero, broke through the white common grade (0-999), the green excellent grade (1000-9999), and directly surged to the blue proficient grade (10000-99999)!

A crazy idea uncontrollably sprouted and spread in Lin Yu's mind.

Since the amplification multiplier was equivalent to the number of uses...

Then...

What if he went all out?

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred and seventy-six times!

The highest amplification multiple he could currently achieve!

Just thinking about this number made him shudder with a tingling scalp.

What kind of spectacle would that be?

Would the proficiency of [Lightning Spell] directly leap from blue to purple, or even... gold? Red?

The temptation was too great.

So great that he was willing to take a risk for it.

He looked around.

This "Divine Concealment" residence claimed to have the highest authority, independent space, and absolute privacy.

The receptionist's respectful attitude was still vivid in his mind.

Presumably, the defense and soundproofing measures here should be top-notch.

It should... be able to withstand it, right?

Lin Yu took a deep breath and stopped hesitating.

He walked to the vast open area in the center of the suite, which was specifically designated as a virtual training area.

Lightning Spell!

Card Manifestation!

Skill Activation Card [Lightning Spell]!

Joker, Multiplication!

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred and seventy-six times!

Hum!

An indescribable, terrifying pressure instantly spread out from him as the center.

The [Lightning Spell] card in his hand was no longer that ordinary hard card.

It had transformed into a miniature black hole of lightning!

Countless fine, pitch-black electric arcs frantically danced across the card's surface, tearing at the surrounding space, emitting a teeth-grating sizzling sound.

The light in the room seemed to be devoured by it.

Lin Yu felt like he wasn't holding a card.

But a supernova about to explode!

Just maintaining this state brought an incredibly terrifying consumption.

Making it somewhat difficult for Lin Yu to sustain.

He couldn't wait any longer!

"[Lightning Spell]!"

Lin Yu shouted in a low voice, hurling the lightning in his hand forward!

The moment the card left his hand, the entire world fell into absolute dead silence.

Time seemed to have been put on pause.

Then.

A pure, ultimate white light, impossible to describe with words, erupted violently!

That wasn't light.

That was destruction itself.

It was the most primitive energy torrent tearing through space and dimensions!

The entire world before Lin Yu's eyes was completely swallowed by this white light.

The brilliant galaxy outside the floor-to-ceiling window instantly vanished.

The luxurious room, sturdy walls, intelligent operation interface... everything turned into the most basic data streams within this white light, then completely annihilated.

"Bzzzt... Crackle..."

The harsh electric current explosion sounds, delayed by several seconds, frantically poured into his ears.

[Warning! Warning! Detection of ultra-specification energy impact!]

[Spatial module... collapsing!]

[Virtual landscape system... collapsing!]

[Life support system... switching to backup energy!]

[Core energy source... overload! Overload! Initiating circuit break!]

[Warning! Emergency landing in progress!]

A series of urgent, sharp alarm sounds echoed frantically in the space that had already turned into a chaotic darkness.

Lin Yu felt a violent tremor under his feet, as if the entire building was falling from high altitude.

He was completely stunned.

Did he... overdo it?

He just wanted to grind some skill proficiency!

How did it seem like... he burned out their server?

Chapter 93: One Billion Move

"Bang!"

A tremendous crash echoed as the tightly shut door was forcibly smashed open from the outside by immense force.

Several Practitioners wearing Bug Residence security uniforms, their bodies radiating formidable auras, rushed in holding energy weapons, their expressions tense to the extreme.

However, when they clearly saw the scene inside the room, everyone froze in place.

What should have been an extremely luxurious Divine Concealment suite had now become a massive, charred-black empty shell.

The walls, floor, and ceiling were covered with spiderweb-like cracks, continuously emitting black smoke and electrical sparks.

And standing perfectly unharmed in the very center of this ruins was Lin Yu, wearing his cloak.

The security captain looked at Lin Yu, then at the charred ruins around them that looked like they'd been plowed by strategic-grade weapons, momentarily falling into confusion.

External attack?

Bug Residence's defense system was impregnable as a fortress, never having had problems before.

Internal explosion?

But this guest had just checked in, and his registered power rating wasn't high either—where would he get the ability to cause destruction of this magnitude?

Just then, a man wearing a ghost-face mask with a "Front Desk Manager" badge hanging on his chest hurried over.

"What happened?!"

The manager's voice was sharp, carrying a trace of barely suppressed panic.

The security captain immediately stepped forward, quickly reporting the situation in a low voice.

Lin Yu's heart tightened slightly.

But on the surface, he appeared completely bewildered.

He pulled on his hood, replying in a muffled voice tinged with lingering fear and confusion.

"I don't know."

"I just selected the 'Virtual Sparring Partner' service, hadn't even started yet, when... it just became like this."

He acted flawlessly, the shock in his tone perfectly matching the image of an innocent victim.

The manager scrutinized Lin Yu, then looked again at the terrifying scene around them, his eyebrows tightly knitted together.

"Virtual sparring partner? Impossible!"

The manager flatly denied.

"Our virtual system has hundreds of safety restrictions! The energy output limit can't even break a single floor tile in a Divine Concealment suite! How could it possibly..."

Before he could finish speaking.

"Beep! Beep! Beep! Warning! Warning!"

Even more piercing, harsh alarm sounds frantically erupted from all directions in the corridor. Red warning lights instantly replaced the originally soft lighting, flashing wildly.

The manager's face instantly turned deathly pale.

A security guard's wrist communicator transmitted hysterical screams.

"Manager! It's bad! All Divine Concealment-level spaces have completely collapsed! They're falling from the imaginary dimension!"

"Backup energy system overloaded by three hundred percent! Approaching meltdown!"

"All guest rooms' independent spaces are disappearing! Guests are being forcibly teleported out!"

"The main hall... the main hall is about to explode!"

Holy shit.

Only these two words remained in the manager's mind.

This was no longer just a problem of one destroyed room.

This was Bug Residence's entire core system being destroyed at its foundation!

"Hurry! Evacuate all guests! Activate the highest emergency protocol!"

The manager roared hoarsely, no longer caring about pursuing Lin Yu's "responsibility," turning and rushing outside.

Lin Yu was "protected" by two security personnel, sandwiched within the chaotic crowd as they were all evacuated to Bug Residence's resplendent first-floor main hall.

The main hall had now descended into complete chaos.

Hundreds of guests wearing various attire, all without exception radiating formidable auras, had been forcibly "kicked" out of their respective private spaces. Everyone wore expressions of astonishment and raging fury.

"What the hell! My secluded cultivation was interrupted!"

"Bug Residence? More like Dead Man's Residence! What about your reputation? Your security guarantees? Fed to the dogs?"

"Refund! You must compensate double!"

Curses and questioning voices rose and fell in succession.

These people were all influential figures in Linzhou's and even several surrounding provinces' black markets—which of them wasn't arrogant and decisive in killing?

Now being so disgracefully driven out like this, completely losing face, their fury was imaginable.

All of Bug Residence's staff, from managers to receptionists, now stood lined up in the hall's center, bowing ninety degrees to all guests, not even daring to lift their heads.

Lin Yu blended into a corner of the crowd, remaining silent.

Just then, a petite figure squeezed through the crowd, anxiously running to his side.

It was Lin Yao.

The young girl also wore a cloak, but beneath her hood, her small face was full of panic and confusion.

"Brother! Are you okay? What happened just now? My room... my room suddenly disappeared! It scared me to death!"

She had been studying those beauty and skincare treatments in her room, before she could even take full advantage of the company's benefits, when her entire world spun wildly, then she was thrown into this noisy main hall.

"I'm fine."

Lin Yu patted her back, comforting her.

"Don't be afraid, it's probably just a small problem with their system."

Small problem?

Lin Yu silently added in his heart.

Probably... a small problem caused by me.

Looking at the scene before him that was almost turning into a riot, watching that front desk manager sweating profusely, his body shaking like a sieve, he gained his first intuitive understanding of his own destructive power.

Seems... I might have gone a bit overboard.

Finally, that front desk manager, under enormous pressure, announced the solution in a trembling voice.

"Honored guests! We sincerely apologize! It was our operational error that caused the core energy source to accidentally burn out, resulting in the main system completely crashing!"

"To express our apology, all consumption for today's guests will be completely free!"

"Moreover, Bug Residence will provide additional compensation of one million cash to each affected honored guest!"

"We have urgently contacted headquarters—the top engineering team is rushing here. Please, honored guests, temporarily move to the backup guest area to rest..."

The manager's words slightly calmed the on-site anger.

Free consumption for one day, plus one million compensation.

For these wealthy big shots, money wasn't really anything, but Bug Residence's attitude showed they were giving sufficient face.

After all, everyone knew that the backer behind Bug Residence was someone even they couldn't afford to provoke.

Listening to the manager's explanation, Lin Yu's heart surged with towering waves.

Core energy source... burned out?

Million-fold amplification was truly terrifying.

The manager continued lamenting, almost reciting the loss details to gain sympathy.

"...Just repairing the Divine Concealment-level space modules will require at least five hundred million... deploying the core energy source from headquarters is another three hundred million... plus all guests' free consumption and compensation... conservatively estimating, our losses from this accident... exceed one billion..."

One billion.

Lin Yu rarely froze momentarily.

Probably even more than that...

Even with Lin Yu's considerable wealth, he still felt somewhat astonished.

Chapter 94: Lightning Magic, Control!

He casually practiced his proficiency and ended up burning through wealth that ordinary people couldn't earn in tens of thousands of lifetimes.

This destructive power was indeed a bit over the top.

Lin Yao tugged at his cloak and asked quietly, "Brother, the compensation they mentioned..."

"Take it," Lin Yu said succinctly.

"Ah? That doesn't seem right... after all..." Lin Yao hesitated, feeling that this matter was definitely related to her brother.

"There's nothing wrong with it," Lin Yu interrupted her. "They said it themselves, we're just guests."

Hearing Lin Yu's words, Lin Yao indeed felt much more at ease.

Thinking about it carefully, this was basically fleecing the corporations!

Just a different corporation!

It's all the same!

None of them are any good!

Just as the crowd in the main hall gradually stabilized and began accepting Bug Residence's arrangements in small groups, preparing to head to the backup guest rooms, an aura far more formidable than the previous Security Captain descended from outside the main entrance.

The crowd automatically parted to create a path.

A middle-aged man wearing exquisite black suit with perfectly combed hair walked in.

He wasn't wearing any mask, his square face naturally commanding respect without showing anger.

The Front Desk Manager who had been crying earlier, upon seeing him, looked like he had found his savior and scrambled over frantically.

"Boss!"

The boss merely glanced at him briefly before walking directly to the raised platform in the center of the main hall.

He scanned the entire room, his voice not loud but clearly reaching everyone's ears.

"Everyone, I am the person in charge of Bug Residence in Linzhou, my surname is Zhong."

"Regarding the incident that occurred tonight, on behalf of Bug Residence, I extend our most sincere apologies to everyone."

He bowed deeply.

"The emergency engineering team from headquarters has already identified the cause."

Mr. Zhong's words made everyone perk up their ears.

"It was an extremely rare Abyssal Domains energy fluctuation that, while penetrating the spatial barrier, happened to resonate with the frequency of Bug Residence's Core Energy Source, causing an energy overload and system shutdown."

Abyssal Domains energy fluctuation?

This explanation convinced the vast majority of people present.

In this world, Abyssal Domains and secret realms were the eternal themes. All kinds of incredible phenomena occurred every day.

Compared to Bug Residence's impregnable defenses being breached from within, this kind of natural disaster-like accident was obviously easier for people to accept.

After all, everyone knew how terrifying Bug Residence's security system was.

Forget about a single guest, even top-tier Practitioners above level two hundred would find it extremely difficult to breach this place from the outside.

"The core hardware was not damaged, only the protection system automatically fused. Please rest assured, honored guests, Bug Residence's security remains at the highest level."

Mr. Zhong continued, "In addition to the full waiver and one million cash compensation that the manager just promised, all honored guests present today will receive a Bug Residence diamond membership card, enjoying a 20% discount for life."

This gesture was undoubtedly generous.

The atmosphere at the scene completely eased.

Many people even began to feel that tonight's trip was worth it.

Mixed in the crowd, Lin Yu listened to Mr. Zhong's flawless explanation, understanding the situation perfectly clear in his heart.

Abyssal Domains fluctuation?

Only a fool would believe that.

This was just a face-saving excuse Bug Residence came up with to protect their golden reputation.

They couldn't admit that their system had been deliberately burned out.

And didn't dare believe it.

Forget about them, no one else would dare believe it either!

Although Bug Residence's advertised defense level had some boasting elements, it wasn't some shoddy product either.

Lin Yu pondered thoughtfully.

His million-times amplified [Lightning Spell], with power comparable to a natural disaster, had only overloaded their energy system without destroying the core hardware.

This level of foundation was truly astonishing.

The storm subsided.

Guests, guided by staff, gradually returned to their respective rooms.

Bug Residence's efficiency was extremely high. When Lin Yu and Lin Yao returned to the Divine Concealment suite, it had already been restored to its original state, as if the charred ruins had never existed.

The backup system had completely taken over.

"Alright, go enjoy yourself," Lin Yu said to his sister. "Remember, don't hold back."

Lin Yao nodded heavily, her eyes sparkling with what could be called "fleecing" light.

She turned and ran into her room, probably planning to experience all those beauty treatments from start to finish.

Lin Yu closed the passage between the two rooms.

He almost couldn't wait to pull up his attribute panel.

Everything else could wait.

Right now, he only wanted to know what kind of transformation that 1,048,576 times proficiency had brought!

His gaze directly locked onto the skills column.

[Lightning Spell]

The skill bar that originally glowed with blue light was now radiating a noble and dazzling golden color!

It worked!

It really worked!

Lin Yu's heart beat wildly despite himself.

Once!

Just one cast!

Had forcefully raised an ordinary basic spell to the golden legendary level that countless Practitioners couldn't reach in their entire lifetimes!

With trembling hands, he clicked open the detailed information of [Lightning Spell].

[Lightning Spell (Golden Legendary)]

[Proficiency: Golden (1048576/100000000)]

[Proficiency Effects: Skill damage increased by 100%, skill range expanded by 100%, paralysis effect enhanced by 100%, mana consumption reduced by 50%.]

[New Ability Unlocked: Thunder Form Control]

[Thunder Form Control: You can freely control the form of lightning released by this skill. You can shape it into thunder nets, thunder blades, thunder whips, thunder armor, and any other forms. More complex forms consume greater Mental Energy.]

Lin Yu's mind buzzed.

Looking at those unreasonably powerful attributes and that new ability called [Thunder Form Control], he was completely stunned.

This wasn't quantitative change anymore.

This was qualitative transformation!

A skill going from ordinary to golden brought earth-shaking improvements!

Damage, range, effects all doubled, while consumption was halved!

This meant that the current [Lightning Spell], even without any Multiplication amplification, probably had base power comparable to those high-level mages' signature skills!

Even more terrifying was [Thunder Form Control].

This completely freed [Lightning Spell] from the constraints of "single-target attack," transforming it into an all-purpose divine skill integrating single-target, area-of-effect, control, and defense capabilities!

Weaving lightning into a large net to cover the battlefield.

Condensing lightning into a sharp blade to pierce through powerful enemies.

Even transforming lightning into armor to protect oneself!

How was this still a basic spell?

This was practically a small skill library!

Not bad, not bad!

Lin Yu took a deep breath, forcibly suppressing the wild joy in his heart.

He slowly raised his right hand.

This time, he didn't use any Cards, merely mobilizing the most basic mana within his body and mentally issuing the command to cast [Lightning Spell].

There was no terrifying energy fluctuation, no frightening sound or light effects.

A slender, golden thread-like electric light silently appeared at his fingertip.

It showed no trace of violent energy, instead being as docile as a kitten.

Lin Yu focused his mind.

[Thunder Form Control]!

The wisp of golden electric light began to dance and transform nimbly at his fingertip.

It first transformed into a small sword, with even fine lightning patterns visible on the blade.

Then, the sword disintegrated and reformed into a small shield.

Finally, it transformed into a small bird, flapping wings made of electric arcs, circling and dancing around his finger, vivid and lifelike.

Then under Lin Yu's control, it dissolved into his body, bringing a tingling sensation.

This exquisite level of control shocked even Lin Yu himself.

What surprised him even more was that this altered Lightning Spell seemed to be able to activate the residual medicinal efficacy within his body!

Chapter 95: Conjecture about Proficiency

That tingling sensation didn't vanish in an instant.

It transformed into countless tiny electrical currents that coursed through his body, as if exploring a brand new continent.

Lin Yu clearly felt that his constitution, which had a five hundred point limit, was undergoing a peculiar optimization by this power.

The hidden dangers left behind from forcibly breaking through his limits by injecting massive amounts of medicine, those violent medicinal energies that had settled deep within his body and couldn't be fully absorbed, were now being located one by one by this gentle golden lightning, then crushed, decomposed, and re-integrated into his entire being.

His muscles trembled at an almost imperceptible frequency, becoming denser and filled with explosive power.

His bones emitted faint, dense crackling sounds, growing more resilient like refined steel tempered a hundred times.

Even his skin, nourished by this power, became smooth as jade, with the tiny needle marks left from his previous frantic medicine injections now completely vanished.

It could even create the illusion that this was an evolutionary leap in life level.

Lin Yu walked over to the large floor-to-ceiling mirror in the suite and looked at his reflection.

The person in the mirror seemed to have grown slightly taller, with shoulders that were originally somewhat narrow now becoming broad and straight.

The muscle lines beneath his T-shirt were no longer exaggerated and distorted, but instead presented a streamlined form full of power, every inch containing explosive energy.

He was no longer that pale youth from years of lying low.

Nor was he the medicine-dependent freak with abnormal physique from drug injections.

Now, he was unequivocally a walking hormone, a perfectly built tough guy.

This inner and outer strength brought his sense of bodily control to an unprecedented peak.

This unexpected delight made Lin Yu's heart burn with excitement.

He electrocuted himself several more times, only stopping when the sensation began to diminish.

After stopping, Lin Yu began contemplating his method of grinding proficiency.

Since it was effective...

Should he do it again?

Once this thought emerged, it became impossible to suppress.

He almost instinctively wanted to perform Card Manifestation again, to summon that lightning carrying million-fold power once more.

But as he raised his hand, he abruptly stopped.

No.

His mind instantly flashed to the Front Desk Manager's ghostly pale face at Bug Residence, and Mr. Zhong's seemingly calm but actually sharp demeanor.

One accident could be explained as a natural disaster, some kind of Abyssal Domains energy resonance—they could convince themselves of that.

But if the same natural disaster occurred in the same place a second time within a short period...

It wouldn't be so easy to adapt to.

That wouldn't be a natural disaster anymore, but man-made calamity.

By then, forget Mr. Zhong, even Bug Residence headquarters would undoubtedly turn the place upside down, sparing no expense to find the source of that "man-made calamity."

He didn't want to become the hunted target for now.

So, a different approach?

Directly target himself?

Amplify it a million times and give himself a thorough "electrotherapy" with the Lightning Spell?

This idea was immediately dismissed as soon as it emerged.

What a joke.

He'd be electrocuted to a crisp.

His five hundred point constitution had only felt the massive load when acting as an "artillery turret" firing outward.

If he used his own body as the "target," the consequences would be unimaginable.

Lin Yu sighed, feeling somewhat conflicted.

He opened his attribute panel again, his gaze falling on the golden proficiency bar of the Lightning Spell.

[Proficiency: Golden (1048576/100000000)]

The next level, red mythic tier.

The required proficiency was a number that made his eyelids twitch.

One hundred million.

What did that mean?

Lin Yu quickly calculated in his mind.

A standard Lightning Spell, from incantation to release, would take even the most talented mage at least three seconds.

One hundred million times would be three hundred million seconds.

Converted, that was five million minutes, over eighty-three thousand hours.

This meant an ordinary Practitioner would need to continuously cast Lightning Spells without eating, drinking, or sleeping for nearly ten years to potentially raise this basic skill to red mythic tier.

Ten years to sharpen a sword.

This was the true law of this world.

And himself?

One million-fold amplification counted as one million proficiency points.

Which meant he only needed one hundred times to complete the path others took ten years to walk.

But the problem was... where could he cast these hundred times?

Bug Residence's backup system probably couldn't withstand even one more time.

His own body couldn't handle it either.

It seemed he needed to strengthen his body first.

This thought flashed through Lin Yu's mind.

Should he stack up some passive reinforcement or auxiliary skills?

In terms of attack power, basic skills under million-fold amplification were definitely sufficient for now. One could even say they were severely excessive.

If a golden proficiency skill could cause such commotion, what about red?

Lin Yu looked at the glaring one hundred million proficiency cap on the panel, calculating in his heart.

For others it was an insurmountable chasm, but for him, it was just one hundred skill casts.

If handled properly, he could even grind out several red mythic-tier skills within a single day.

Thinking of this, Lin Yu's heart burned with excitement again.

He immediately opened the virtual screen in the room and began searching through the network.

He needed guides.

He needed truly valuable core information about skills, proficiency, and professional advancement.

However, reality quickly poured cold water on his enthusiasm.

What appeared on the screen were all common, low-quality materials.

"Must-See for Beginners! Top Ten Easiest Basic Skills to Raise Proficiency!"

"Shocking! A Triple-Advanced Archmage Shares Quick Leveling Insights, The Answer Is Actually..."

"On the Importance of Team Coordination in Grinding Proficiency."

Lin Yu opened each one, then closed them one by one.

These so-called guides were full of nonsense.

Either persuading people to join large guilds for group benefits, or recommending expensive training courses and auxiliary medicines.

The truly crucial information, the research involving the world's underlying rules, were all treated as confidential by major factions and would never be publicly disclosed.

What could be found online were just scraps, or even deliberately released misinformation.

Lin Yu felt somewhat irritated and restless.

He was like someone sitting on a massive treasure mountain but unable to find a suitable pickaxe.

Just as he was about to give up, an inconspicuous search result appeared in the corner of the screen.

It was a website snapshot of an old forum that had long ceased operations.

The title was: "Conjectures About Proficiency Limits, the Ramblings of an Old Soldier."

Lin Yu, as if guided by some unseen force, clicked into it.

The page loaded slowly, full of mosaics and garbled code, but the post's content was clearly displayed.

The poster's ID was "Medal of Honor."

Chapter 96: Exquisite finger snap!

The post's content was simple, even somewhat disjointed.

"...I know no one believes this, but red isn't the end. After reaching one hundred million proficiency, you can continue... I've tried it, it really works..."

"I can't screenshot the panel or take photos, otherwise I'd post images here."

"One billion times, yes, one billion times! The proficiency will change to a color I've never seen before, not gold, not red, but a kind of... ancient color. The proficiency advancement limit will become ten billion times!"

"The skill will completely transform. That's not an upgrade, it's... evolution!"

"What about ten billion times? I don't know, I haven't reached it yet, but I feel that after ten billion times, it can change again!"

The post's content abruptly ended here.

Lin Yu's heart skipped a beat.

Beyond red!

One billion proficiency!

Ten billion!

These numbers were nothing short of fantasy to any Practitioner.

But for Lin Yu, they were like a thunderclap exploding in his mind!

One billion times, for him, was merely one thousand Multiplication cycles.

Ten billion times was only ten thousand cycles!

Suppressing his excitement, he continued scrolling down the page to look at the replies.

As expected, the comment section was flooded with overwhelming mockery and insults.

"Has the poster woken up yet? You can dream about anything!"

"One billion times? Do you even know what that concept means? If I started casting skills from birth until now, I wouldn't have reached that! Are you bragging nonsense here?"

"Even if you cast one skill per second, without eating, drinking, or sleeping, you couldn't achieve it in ten years! How old are you, hundreds of years?"

"Another clown desperate for fame."

"What a divine person, everyone can ignore him."

"Do you believe him or believe that I'm Qin Shi Huang?"

"Anyone who believes this has their whole life figured out."

"Send me 50, I'll teach you how to break the limit."

Facing the doubts, the poster began clumsily defending himself.

"I'm not lying! I used to be from one of the three great guilds of the Abyssal Domains. I was severely injured during a mission, became half-paralyzed, and was forcibly retired."

"I can't do anything else, only one skill works for me called [Exquisite Snap] - just snapping my fingers to make a small object move slightly."

"I rely on it for eating, drinking, turning pages. For decades, I've used it tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of times every day. That's how... how I discovered this secret!"

This explanation didn't quell the anger but instead attracted even more intense ridicule.

"Hahahaha! I'm fucking dying of laughter! The three great guilds of the Abyssal Domains? Do you know what that place is? That's the supreme organization above all nations! Their veterans would be half-paralyzed at home with no one caring? At least make your story believable!"

"Exactly! Anyone coming from the three great guilds, even if they were just sweepers, would be superior people when they return to local areas! Your treatment is worse than the street sweepers in my hometown!"

"And [Exquisite Snap]? What use does this crappy skill have besides amusing cats? Tens of thousands of times? Don't your hands cramp up?"

"Pure clown, verified."

"Delusional disorder, nothing can help at home."

The subsequent comments completely turned into one-sided humiliation of the poster.

The poster kept trying to prove himself, mentioning his former unit number, using jargon and secrets that only Abyssal Domains veterans might know.

But no matter what he said, it was only treated as more ridiculous lies.

Finally, after hundreds of comments mocking and attacking, that "Medal of Honor" never appeared again.

The post page was old, filled with garbled code and broken image links, but the text itself remained clearly preserved.

Lin Yu stared at it, his brain rapidly processing the information contained within.

Beyond red.

One billion proficiency.

Ten billion.

These weren't just numbers - they pointed to an unknown path, a road to heaven that no one had ever imagined.

The comment section was flooded with mockery. Every reply was steeped in contempt and ridicule, that poster called "Medal of Honor" was nailed to the pillar of shame as a madman and clown by everyone.

To be honest, this kind of claim was even less credible than the UFO secrets and lake monster stories in tabloid newspapers. At least those had blurry pictures. This only had text - the disjointed ravings of a down-and-out veteran.

Any rational person would close the page, treating it as a pathetic joke.

But Lin Yu wasn't any rational ordinary person.

He had spent day after day transforming small stones into Cards and then innovating them, all to find a [Joker]. For five full years, never stopping. If there was anyone in the world most skilled at this tedious, repetitive work to the point of being outrageous, he was undoubtedly that person.

The insults in the comment section had no effect on him. On the contrary, his brain, tempered by five years of tedious life into extreme calmness, had already begun automatically reasoning and calculating.

One billion proficiency.

For ordinary Practitioners, this was an astronomical number that couldn't be reached even after exhausting one lifetime, or even several lifetimes.

But for him?

His thoughts rapidly operated.

One [Joker] cycle, stacking all prerequisites, could achieve a 1,048,576-fold amplification. For calculation convenience, consider it one million times.

One billion proficiency only required one thousand such million-fold cycles.

One thousand cycles to verify the truth.

This number was still not small.

But what about that skill mentioned in the post? [Exquisite Snap].

Snapping fingers once.

How long does it take? Half a second.

Whereas the entire Multiplication process, from Card Manifestation to final release, if he was fast enough, could be completed in ten seconds per cycle.

One thousand cycles... would be ten thousand seconds.

Converted, that's one hundred sixty-six minutes.

Less than three hours.

Lin Yu's breathing slightly paused.

Using less than three hours to verify an ultimate secret that could overturn the entire world's power system.

The risk? Wasting three hours.

He could afford that waste!

He had gambled five years of youth for an elusive [Joker]. What did mere three hours matter?

He had plenty of experience doing this kind of thing.

Those five years of lying low weren't wasted.

Do it!

He closed the virtual screen. The suite was completely silent, leaving only the faint electric current sound of the backup system.

Skill, [Exquisite Snap].

A non-combat, non-elemental, purely basic skill.

Whoever first discovered this was also a skill.

Many so-called online skill packages included it as a free bonus. Its only function was producing a crisp snapping sound. No damage, no effect, no use.

So useless that... even Bug Residence's skill services didn't include it...

Perfect.

This thing shouldn't blow up the hotel again.

Lin Yu ordered a basic skill book collection from the black market - a bunch of things sold for ten dollars each.

The bundled package cost him thirty-five hundred.

These black market merchants' money-making speed wasn't slower than his!

But the service was relatively quick.

In less than ten minutes, the goods were delivered to him.

Chapter 97: Red Snap!

Lin Yu found that small skill book, located it, and learned Exquisite Snap.

It happened almost instantly.

Afterwards, Lin Yu moved to a more spacious environment, just in case.

Once everything was prepared, he raised his hand.

A blank card materialized in his palm.

Focusing his mind, he imprinted the concept of a snapping motion and the crisp sound it produced onto the card.

Skill Card [Exquisite Snap]!

Effortlessly achieved.

Next came the core of his power.

[Joker]!

[Doubling Card]!

That familiar process, etched deep into his bones, activated once more. Cards appeared and vanished in his hands at a dizzying speed, the surrounding air slightly distorting from the layered accumulation of energy.

One.

Two.

Four.

...

One hundred twenty-eight...

...

Five hundred twenty-four thousand, two hundred eighty-eight...

The final layer, perfectly integrated.

Your next card will take effect an additional one million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six times!

The [Exquisite Snap] card, amplified to its absolute limit, emitted a blinding white light in his palm, as if containing an entirely new universe within.

He didn't hesitate in the slightest.

Activate!

Snap!

A snap, incredibly crisp, echoed through the room. The sound wasn't loud, yet it seemed to pierce directly through the eardrums, detonating deep within his consciousness.

Immediately afterwards, he sensed a brand new connection, an unprecedented feeling of control.

His status panel instantly refreshed.

[Exquisite Snap (Gold)]

[Proficiency: Gold (1048576/100000000)]

[Proficiency Effect: Skill costs nothing, instant cast.]

[New Ability Unlocked: Micro-Object Manipulation]

[Micro-Object Manipulation: You can slightly move objects within a five-meter range, weighing no more than five hundred grams, by snapping your fingers.]

Lin Yu froze completely.

His gaze fell upon a pen resting on the coffee table a few meters away.

He slowly raised his hand.

His will, intensely focused.

Snap!

The pen on the coffee table trembled slightly, then, extremely slowly, as if drunk, rolled one centimeter to the side.

It moved.

It actually moved.

A shockwave, like an electric current, instantly surged through Lin Yu's entire body. This impact was more violent than the feedback from [Lightning Spell], more exhilarating than any power he had ever felt!

Because that old veteran hadn't lied!

A completely useless non-combat skill, after being stacked with millions of proficiency points, had evolved! It had gained a genuine physical effect capable of interfering with reality! From nothing, it had created value!

This proved the foundation of the entire theory was valid!

If a million times could turn it gold and grant a new ability, then... what about one billion times?

What would that "ancient color" the old veteran mentioned be?

What kind of terrifying "evolution" would the skill undergo?

A wildfire named excitement exploded in his chest, incinerating the last trace of doubt into ashes.

His train of thought was clearer than ever before; his path forward, in this moment, was utterly illuminated by a divine radiance.

He had found it.

A true path leading to the divine throne.

He glanced once more at the proficiency bar.

One million was still far from the one hundred million required for promotion to the Red Mythic tier.

But this was merely the next step. The true treasure lay in a much more distant place.

One billion.

Ten billion.

Even more!

He had to continue.

He had to witness it with his own eyes!

That ecstasy nearly overwhelmed his reason, but his hands remained steady as a rock. Five years of solitude had long since forged a will of steel within him.

He took a deep breath; the very air seemed to carry the sweet taste of "possibility."

The process began again.

New blank card.

Imprint the skill.

Joker, Mirror Copy, Doubling Card.

This time, the cycle was faster, driven by a frenzied and fervent energy.

One.

Two.

Four...

The numbers skyrocketed madly, transforming into a torrent of immense power converging in his palm. He was no longer merely verifying a theory.

He was personally forging a miracle.

The light from the card in his hand grew increasingly intense, casting sharp contours across his resolute face.

His eyes were locked firmly on that ultimate threshold of one billion times, a milestone no one had ever reached before.

The second million-fold amplification was about to be completed.

Snap!

Another crisp snap rang out.

Lin Yu's movements didn't pause for a moment; his hands became a blur.

Blank cards materialized, imprinted, [Joker] activated, [Mirror Copy], [Doubling Card] stacked...

The entire sequence flowed seamlessly.

As if practiced hundreds of millions of times.

He didn't even need to think; his body's instinct drove him to complete all the operations.

This was the memory etched deep into his soul from five years of monotonous hibernation.

Snap!

The crisp sound of snapping fingers rang out continuously within the suite at a fixed rhythm.

Each snap represented the addition of one million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six proficiency points.

Lin Yu's expression was devoid of joy or sorrow; his entire being had entered a peculiar, ethereal state.

In his world, only the cards and the snaps remained.

Time lost all meaning at this moment.

He didn't know how long had passed.

When the ninety-sixth million-fold amplification was completed, when that crisp snap sounded once again.

On Lin Yu's status panel, that golden proficiency bar was finally filled.

[Exquisite Snap (Gold)]

[Proficiency: Gold (100000000/100000000)]

Hum!

A dazzling red light erupted from the panel.

The gold faded away.

Replacing it was a profound, heavy crimson, imbued with a mythical aura!

[Exquisite Snap (Red · Mythic)]

[Proficiency: Red (100000000/100000000)]

[Proficiency Effect: Skill costs nothing, instant cast, can be activated ignoring any physical/energy environment.]

[New Ability Unlocked: Will-Driven Snap]

[Will-Driven Snap: Snap speed is massively increased. Wherever your will reaches, a snap can be generated.]

Success.

Red Mythic tier.

A new ability unlocked, and simultaneously, the proficiency count would no longer change.

Lin Yu sensed the new changes brought by the skill.

Ignore any environment.

This meant that even if he were ten thousand meters deep in the ocean, in the vacuum of space, at the core of magma, as long as he wished it, he could produce a snap.

This skill had completely broken free from physical constraints.

And [Will-Driven Snap]...

Lin Yu focused his thoughts.

Snap snap snap snap snap!

A series of snaps, so dense they almost merged into one continuous sound, erupted from the air around his body!

Not with his hands.

But with his mind!

How fascinating.

A faint smile finally appeared at the corner of Lin Yu's mouth.

Could he be considered a master of snapping fingers now?

However, this wasn't the end.

His gaze fell upon the brand new proficiency bar.

One hundred million, to one billion.

A tenfold gap.

Chapter 98: Come on, Primordial!

That old soldier had said there was more beyond red!

Lin Yu hesitated not at all; he didn't even give himself half a second to rest.

Those hands, moving so fast they blurred, began to dance again.

A new cycle began!

One hundred times.

Two hundred times.

...

Five hundred times.

...

Nine hundred and ninety-nine times.

Lin Yu's mind was stretched to the limit, fine beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

Nearly a thousand consecutive extreme operations—even he felt a weariness that seemed to seep from his very soul.

Yet his eyes shone with startling clarity.

The final layer!

The one-thousandth millionfold cycle—complete!

The Card of Exquisite Snap, bearing a billion points of proficiency, emitted a restrained, profound white light in his hand.

Activate!

Snap!

A sound like a snap from ancient times reverberated in his consciousness.

Lin Yu couldn't wait to pull up the attribute panel.

[Exquisite Snap (Red · Mythic)]

[Proficiency: Red (1000000000/1000000000)]

Then...

Nothing.

Nothing happened.

The color didn't change.

The ability didn't increase.

Behind the proficiency bar, there wasn't even a new maximum number—just a simple “MAX”.

The anticipation on Lin Yu's face froze instantly.

What's going on?

He refreshed the attribute panel again and again, but nothing changed.

Had that old soldier lied?

The moment that thought surfaced, an indescribable disappointment washed over him.

He had spent nearly three hours performing over a thousand extreme operations only to end up with a capped red skill?

No.

That wasn't right.

Lin Yu shook his head hard, forcing the negative emotions away.

The old soldier's rambling explanation on the forum, the details about unit numbers and jargon—it didn't sound like a lie.

Was he just too gullible, believing everything?

Where was the problem?

He forced himself to calm down.

He looked again at the post's description.

“The panel cannot be screenshot or photographed...”

“Proficiency will change to a color I have never seen... an ancient color...”

If the old soldier could see it, why couldn't he?

Could it be...

One possibility flashed across Lin Yu's mind.

Eye of Analysis!

He activated the passive without hesitation.

Countless subtle streams of data blazed past his eyes at light speed.

The whole world was deconstructed and reassembled in his vision.

He looked at his attribute panel again.

This time, he saw something different.

Under the bright crimson text of [Exquisite Snap], a tiny annotation—hidden by some rule-force and only visible under Eye of Analysis—slowly surfaced.

[Skill proficiency has reached the 'Limit-Break' tier. Proficiency required for the next tier 'Primordial': 10,000,000,000]

The color of that annotation was neither gold nor red nor any known hue.

It was a... language-defying, dusted, ancient color that seemed saturated with the radiance of endless ages.

Limit-break!

Primordial!

Ten billion proficiency!

Lin Yu's heart stuttered as if it had skipped a beat.

The old soldier had not lied!

He had simply possessed, like Lin Yu, an analytical ability that could see through appearances—thus revealing the true advancement path hidden by the world's rules!

But...

Lin Yu's brow furrowed again quickly.

This "Primordial" tier, aside from sounding intimidating, seemed... to grant no actual bonuses?

The skill's effect hadn't changed at all.

What was this?

An honorary title?

Lin Yu calculated once more.

One billion proficiency required one thousand cycles, taking nearly three hours.

Ten billion proficiency would require ten thousand cycles!

Thirty hours!

A full day and night plus more!

And as cycle count increased, the mental energy consumption was real and measurable.

He already felt obvious fatigue and mental depletion after those not-quite-three hours.

If he had to continuously perform extreme operations for thirty hours...

He would likely collapse mentally and become a fool before the skill even advanced.

Give up?

That thought appeared for a fraction of a second and was immediately snuffed out.

Are you kidding me!

This was the only road to the divine seat!

A pathway hidden by world rules, at least for now, belonging uniquely to him, Lin Yu!

A little mental exhaustion—what of it?

Lin Yu's eyes flashed with a touch of madness.

Without hesitation, he raised his hands again.

But this time, he did not imprint Exquisite Snap.

A blank card appeared.

He took from his storage space a bottle of the market's most standard Mental Stabilizer, purchased from the black market.

Card Manifest!

[Mental Stabilizer (White)]

[Joker]!

[Doubling Card]!

That familiar sequence began once more.

But this time, the target was not a skill card but a medicine card!

When the final layer of Doubling Card slotted in,

Lin Yu activated the cards.

Hum!

There was no earth-shattering tumult.

A flash of light appeared on the empty floor in front of him.

The next second,

mountains of Mental Stabilizers, emitting a faint blue glow, materialized and instantly filled half the suite!

One bottle.

Ten bottles.

One hundred bottles.

One thousand bottles!

Over ten thousand standard Mental Stabilizers piled in the room like a small mountain!

Still not enough.

Lin Yu looked at his hands again.

The entire doubling process—from Card Manifest to release—took ten seconds.

Too slow!

Ten thousand cycles would be a hundred thousand seconds.

He had to optimize!

His brain whirled; Eye of Analysis broke every action into countless data frames.

A 0.1-second lift delay.

A 0.03-second card-switching gap.

A 0.2-second energy injection fluctuation.

All compressible time!

He closed his eyes and ran frantic simulated rehearsals in his mind.

Once.

Ten times.

A hundred times!

When he opened his eyes again, his whole aura had changed.

It was an extreme, mechanized calm—the sort that makes every process feel like a finely tuned machine.

He glanced at the virtual window's time.

5:58 a.m.

Dawn was just beginning to pale the sky.

And he was about to begin a secluded, grueling thirty-hour practice.

Lin Yu casually picked up a Mental Stabilizer, twisted off the cap, and downed it in one gulp.

It was indeed much better than the cheap stuff he'd taken before.

The cool liquid slid down his throat, a refreshing chill shooting to his brain, clearing away fatigue.

He slowly raised his hands and placed them in front of him.

A new blank card appeared.

He imprinted Exquisite Snap.

The optimized, perfected process he had refined was about to begin.

Chapter 99: Ancient Snap

For a full day and night.

The starry river outside the virtual window had completed one full cycle.

Inside the suite, Lin Yu's figure moved so fast that only afterimages remained.

Imprint, copy, multiply, release.

These four actions were compressed into an unbelievably short timeframe.

He hadn't closed his eyes, hadn't rested for even a second.

The fatigue of mental energy washed over him in waves, only to be forcibly suppressed by the Mental Stabilizers he downed without hesitation.

The piled-up medicine bottles had formed a small sea of blue glass at his feet.

During this time, the side door leading to the adjacent room slid open twice.

Lin Yao peeked in cautiously, each time only seeing her brother's back, so focused it bordered on madness, and the medicine bottles covering the floor.

She didn't make a sound to disturb him.

Just watched silently.

The first time, she saw Lin Yu's bare upper body - the smooth, powerful muscle lines, and his figure that stood even more upright than before.

His skin had also become smoother, and he radiated a healthy vitality.

Her little face instantly flushed bright red.

It seemed her big brother hadn't skimped on medical aesthetics services either.

But what followed was deep shame.

What had she been thinking before?

Her brother was clearly working desperately hard in a way she couldn't comprehend.

Lin Yao didn't fully understand, but she could see it clearly.

Her brother was giving it his all.

She quietly retreated.

When she came the second time, her little face was filled with determination.

Seeing her brother still cultivating frantically, she wasn't worried - instead, she felt injected with powerful motivation.

If someone as amazing as her brother was working this hard,

what excuse did she, who had awakened a Myth-level profession, have to slack off?

She retreated to her room again, closed the door, and plunged into studying her own profession [Omni-Arcanist].

And Lin Yu remained completely unaware of this.

His world contained only cards, and that goal he was about to achieve.

Ten thousand cycles!

Ten billion proficiency points!

When the final set of Doubling Cards merged into the card core of [Exquisite Snap].

Lin Yu activated it.

But didn't release it.

He just quietly watched as this card completed its final qualitative transformation in his hand.

Snap.

A light sound.

The card transformed into pure white light particles that merged into his body.

Success!

Lin Yu immediately pulled up his attribute panel.

[Exquisite Snap (Red · Mythic)]

[Proficiency: MAX]

The information on the panel was brutally simple.

The color remained red.

There were no new tier annotations following it.

[Eye of Analysis]!

With a thought, the data stream of the entire world unfolded before his eyes once again.

He looked back at his attribute panel.

This time.

Below the line of crimson text for [Exquisite Snap].

A line of annotations composed of ancient gray runes, hidden by the world's rules, clearly emerged.

[Skill Tier: Primordial]

[Ability: All things can become the snap, all laws can enter the snap.]

Primordial!

This was it!

Lin Yu's spirit surged with excitement.

But the new ability description made him fall into contemplation once again.

All things can become the snap, all laws can enter the snap.

What did this mean?

Some deliberately mysterious statement?

Just as he was puzzled, an unimaginably vast torrent of information suddenly flooded into his mind without warning!

It wasn't knowledge.

It was "Dao."

About the behavior of "snapping fingers" itself - from the physical level to the conceptual level, from the crisp sound made by mortals to the rhythm of gods annihilating stars... everything had become his instinct.

He understood.

He completely understood.

What was called [Exquisite Snap] was no longer merely a "skill."

It had become a "vessel."

An absolute "container" that could carry any other skill!

Countless applications instantly surfaced in Lin Yu's mind.

Those forbidden spells that required lengthy incantations.

Those secret techniques that needed complex hand seals.

Those ultimate killing moves requiring charging preparation.

Before the "Primordial Snap," they would all become a simple action.

In plain terms, he could store skills within the snap, and when needed, a single snap could directly release the stored skill!

Snap.

Instant cast!

A terrifying ability enough to overturn the entire Practitioner combat system!

However, Lin Yu's ecstasy lasted less than three seconds before being rapidly replaced by extreme calm.

This world had no true "absolute."

So-called "arbitrary" and "disregard" often came with a long list of hidden restrictions.

Energy suppression.

Mental energy limits.

Law conflicts.

Any one of these could turn this seemingly heaven-defying ability into an impractical empty shell.

Just like his own [Joker Doubling Cycle].

Theoretically capable of infinite Doubling Cards.

Also capable of infinite cycles.

But in reality, the Doubling Card holding limit was restricted by his mental energy, and every cycle, every amplification, crazily consumed his mental energy.

Without the unlimited supply of Mental Stabilizers, he would have long been drained dry.

Where were the limits of this [Primordial Snap]?

What level of skills could it store?

To what extent could it ignore energy suppression?

If a level one novice attempted to instantly cast a forbidden spell like [Doomsday Judgment] with a snap, what would happen?

Would the skill fail to release?

Or would he himself explode first from the massive energy?

Countless questions rose in his heart.

He needed an answer.

A definite answer that could serve as the foundation for his future path.

Yet, contrary to his expectations.

The very second he raised the question.

That answer automatically, clearly, emerged from the depths of his consciousness.

As if it was a truth he had known since birth.

"No restrictions."

That's right.

Truly, no restrictions.

It didn't follow energy conservation.

It didn't care about mental limits.

It didn't concern itself with law conflicts.

It was purely a "concept," an absolute "rule."

If it said it could store, then it could store.

If it said it could instant cast, then it could instant cast.

A level one novice, as long as they learned [Exquisite Snap] and possessed a forbidden spell skill.

They could.

Snap.

Release a genuine forbidden spell capable of destroying an entire city.

Lin Yu froze completely.

Was this Primordial?

But it wasn't entirely without restrictions either.

That stream of information about the "Primordial" rules that flooded his mind, after displaying its absolute dominance, also revealed its only shackle.

It wasn't targeting skill levels.

Nor was it targeting energy intensity.

The restriction came from the snap itself.

The current [Primordial Snap] could only store one snap, meaning one skill.

One.

The soaring ambition Lin Yu had just felt was doused with cold water by this number.

Only being able to store one drastically reduced its practicality in an instant.

Chapter 100: The Power of Life and Death

This was like being given a pocket that could hold the entire universe, only to be told you could only put one thing in at a time.

However, before Lin Yu could feel disappointed.

The next piece of information immediately appeared in his consciousness.

After "Primordial," there was an even higher tier.

Origin.

And the proficiency required to advance from "Primordial" to "Origin" was...

One trillion times.

Lin Yu's breathing stopped for a moment.

Trillion.

This unit made him feel a sense of unreality.

He recalled a long time ago, when he was still in school, a teacher who taught basic skill theory had jokingly said in class.

"Students, don't underestimate any basic skill."

"Legend has it, even a common skill like [Fireball Technique], if you can cast it countless times, can eventually touch the origin of its power!"

"Because all the laws and all energy in our world share the same initial origin!"

Of course, even the teacher who said this only treated it as a joke to motivate students to train hard.

Or rather, an inspirational quote that could never be verified.

What a joke.

Could you become infinitely stronger just through repetition?

Then why are there so many mediocre people and failures in the world of Practitioners?

Talent, resources, comprehension - none can be lacking.

This was the universally recognized truth of the entire world.

But today, Lin Yu knew.

What the teacher said was all correct.

Repetition could truly touch the origin.

It's just that this "countless times" was simply too many.

So many that everyone treated it as a joke.

One hundred million proficiency points took him an entire day and night.

What about one trillion?

Lin Yu's brain rapidly calculated.

One hundred days.

One hundred days of extreme operation without sleep or rest, with an unlimited supply of Mental Stabilizers.

He had no doubt that long before the skill advanced, he would first completely collapse due to excessive mental energy depletion and become a true idiot.

Right now, this path was completely impassable.

At that moment, another new rule clearly manifested in his consciousness.

[Primordial Snap] gains one additional storage slot for every additional ten billion proficiency points.

Lin Yu's mind was instantly illuminated.

So that's how it is!

Although he couldn't reach "Origin" in one step for now, he could increase the practicality of the snap by accumulating proficiency.

Add ten billion, get one more slot.

One hundred billion would be ten slots.

This was the most realistic improvement path at the current stage.

But what Lin Yu thought of went far beyond this.

His mind instantly returned to his core ability.

[Joker Doubling Cycle]!

His current maximum amplification per cycle was 1,048,576 times.

So, he needed nearly ten thousand cycles to accumulate ten billion proficiency.

But if...

If his mental energy could undergo another qualitative leap?

His maximum number of [Doubling Cards] he could hold was twenty-two, but under extreme operation, he could only use twenty, because he needed to keep two as seeds. But actually, through Mirror Copy, he could keep just one seed in extreme conditions.

But as long as his mental energy improved, the number of [Doubling Cards] he could use would increase!

Every additional [Doubling Card] didn't mean a simple additive increase to his power, but an exponential explosion!

He began frantically calculating.

If he could use twenty-seven [Doubling Cards], the amplification would be two to the twenty-seventh power.

Over 134 million times!

At that point, ten billion proficiency would be less than one hundred cycles for him.

One trillion proficiency would only need less than ten thousand cycles.

What originally required one hundred days of arduous cultivation would be compressed to within three hours!

If...

If he could use forty [Doubling Cards]?

Two to the fortieth power.

That was a terrifying, suffocating number exceeding one trillion.

At that point, he would only need to perform one doubling cycle.

Just one.

And he could instantly max out a skill's proficiency from zero directly to the "Origin" tier!

All it required was a mere forty [Doubling Cards].

Having figured this out, Lin Yu's thinking became clear.

The core of all problems returned to the starting point.

Improve the four basic attributes, especially mental energy!

As long as his mental energy was strong enough, he could withstand higher amplification multiples and turn all impossibilities into possibilities.

The matter with the pharmaceutical company needed to be accelerated.

Lin Yu's thoughts quickly returned to reality from his skill research.

The purpose of his trip wasn't solely for secluded cultivation.

The three major pharmaceutical merchants in Linzhou, and the Qingyun Pharmaceuticals behind them.

These behemoths entrenched in Linzhou and even several surrounding provinces were the first hard nut he had to crack in his plan.

He needed to use these companies' channels and R&D capabilities to explore higher power, or, if they weren't qualified enough to serve as stepping stones, then use their laboratories to research and develop higher-tier medicines that could break through the five hundred attribute point limit.

To quickly bring these local powers under his control, he needed to display power they couldn't resist, even power that made them feel fear.

Was pure destructive power enough?

Lin Yu quietly pondered.

True authority was never about destruction.

He thought of Zhao Tianyang.

That high school student who signed a Master-Servant Contract with him in despair, completely devoted to him.

One death, one life.

This was the greatest authority in the world.

Mastering life and death.

Death was too simple.

A [Lightning Spell] with million-fold amplification should be enough to physically erase any of their headquarters.

Now, having glimpsed the "Primordial" tier and touched the essence of skills, Lin Yu might well be able to attempt to master... life!

If he could push even the most basic healing skill to the "Primordial" tier, what would happen?

A healing spell that could instantly cure all injuries, even regenerate severed limbs, and bring the dead back to life?

At that time, he would temporarily master both poles of "life" and "death."

Once his thinking was clear, his actions became swift and decisive.

Lin Yu immediately opened the black market's skill trading platform.

[Holy Light Infusion]: Chant for three seconds, restoring a large amount of health to the target and applying "Holy Light" effect, continuously dispelling negative statuses.

Too slow.

[Spring Breeze Transforms Rain]: Channeling spell, continuously consumes mana, providing sustained healing to friendly units within range.

Not suitable for single-target burst.

[Life Link]: Links own life force with the target, sharing damage.

Unorthodox method, and not pure "giving."

Lin Yu's filtering conditions were extremely stringent.

Must be instant cast.

This was to match the efficiency of the [Joker Doubling Cycle] - any skill requiring casting time would become a disaster under million-fold amplification.

Must have minimum consumption.

Because what he was going to perform was hundreds of millions of repeated castings.

Power was actually the least important thing.

After nearly half an hour of filtering through the massive skill database, even paying to access several encrypted private skill libraries, the results were still unsatisfactory.

The more powerful the healing skill, the more complex its casting conditions - either requiring specific hand seals, or devout prayers, or even consuming precious materials.

Chapter 101: A Brilliant Idea

Lin Yu's fingertips swept across the virtual light screen, leaving trails of afterimages.

The black market's skill library was vast as an ocean, yet not a single one met his stringent criteria.

Either the casting wind-up was excruciatingly long.

Or it required specific casting mediums.

Or it was simply a channeling spell that couldn't possibly match his [Joker Doubling Cycle].

What he needed was a "trigger."

A trigger that could be pulled instantly, unleashing all his accumulated power in one explosive moment—simple and pure.

Not some antique firearm requiring complicated maintenance and warm-up.

Time passed minute by minute.

Lin Yu closed the interface of the last private skill library.

Nothing.

Still nothing.

Had his thinking been wrong from the very beginning?

Was mastering the authority of "Life" an impossible path?

No.

Lin Yu immediately dismissed that thought.

The direction absolutely wasn't wrong.

Even if it were, he currently had no other choice.

Maybe... he was looking in the wrong place?

The black market was, after all, a place that chased profits.

What circulated here were skills that had been market-verified—either capable of quick monetization or possessing powerful immediate combat strength.

Those truly fundamental skills that everyone considered "trash" were actually extinct here.

Because they simply couldn't fetch a price.

Like snapping fingers.

An idea flashed through his mind.

He swiped across the virtual interface and directly pulled up a long-dusty document from the internet.

[Linzhou Tianxing Vocational Technical College · Standard Skill Textbook · Third Year Support Department (Revised Edition)]

Of course, it was a pirated version.

The official version wasn't allowed to be leaked.

The light screen lit up as electronic pages rapidly flipped past.

Lin Yu was also making his own judgments.

[Skill model solidified, cannot perform underlying modifications.]

[Casting wind-up too long, conflicts with doubling cycle.]

[Energy conversion rate too low, lacks investment value.]

...

All junk.

Just as he was about to close the document and search in even older, possibly unpublished archives...

His finger stopped.

The light screen froze on an utterly inconspicuous corner of the textbook.

It was an elective skill classified in the interdisciplinary area between "Daily Life" and "Recovery," something that wouldn't even appear in final exams.

[Vitality Nourishment]

[Skill Description: Condenses a tiny amount of life energy, injecting a thread of vitality into the target. Instant cast. No cost.]

Yes, no cost.

This made it an anomaly among all profession skills that required energy expenditure.

And precisely because of this, it had been tossed into this neglected corner.

Because its effect was basically equivalent to nothing.

Below the textbook description, smaller font detailed its specific effects.

"Instantly restores 1-3 health points to the target, and for the following minute, restores 0.1 health points per second."

Pathetically low.

Any Practitioner, even a freshly awakened level one newbie, had health points in the triple digits.

This amount of recovery couldn't even compensate for a mosquito bite.

It was practically a joke.

But Lin Yu didn't laugh.

His full attention was focused on the supplementary notes the textbook compilers had attached—those few lines about "high proficiency conjectures."

This content was usually treated by students as filler text.

Not that its effects were fake, but rather that no one would spend time verifying this kind of skill.

And there was no point anyway.

[Proficiency Conjecture (This entry is not officially confirmed, only theoretical deduction):]

[Golden Proficiency (Million uses): According to ancient texts, when this skill's usage reaches a certain threshold, the life energy it contains undergoes a slight qualitative change. Beyond basic recovery effects, it can to some extent remove negative energy corrosion from the target's body and passively strengthen the target's basic physical functions, slightly increasing all attributes.]

[Crimson Proficiency (Hundred Million uses): Building on the golden proficiency conjecture, when the qualitative change deepens further, this skill might affect the target's mental level. The textbook editorial committee speculates the effect might manifest as 'Deep Rest'—significantly improving the target's sleep and rest efficiency, rapidly recovering energy. Specific effects vary by individual.]

Lin Yu read every word carefully.

All attributes increase.

Rapid rest.

To ordinary Practitioners, these effects were still useless.

Golden proficiency, a million skill uses, for an almost negligible attribute increase? With that time, running two dungeons would yield equipment with better stats.

Crimson proficiency, a hundred million uses? Pure fantasy. Who would repeat a trash skill a hundred million times just to "sleep a little better"?

Normally, Lin Yu wouldn't either.

But he didn't have many choices right now.

Instant-cast skills were rare to begin with, and recovery types even rarer.

[Vitality Nourishment]—instant cast, no cost.

These two conditions perfectly matched his [Joker Doubling Cycle].

A match made in heaven!

As for the effects?

The golden and crimson effects were indeed basic.

But so what?

This at least proved that this skill's growth path was actually effective.

It wasn't a complete dead end.

That was enough.

The risk instantly dropped to an acceptable level.

Lin Yu's thoughts completed all the pros and cons analysis in a flash.

The investment was enormous.

The time and effort required to grind a skill from zero to the "Primordial" tier would be a significant burden even for him.

The outcome was unknown.

What would [Vitality Nourishment] at the "Primordial" tier actually become?

A miracle capable of regenerating severed limbs, or just a super sleeping spell that made people fall asleep quickly?

No one knew.

But...

Rather than wasting time here worrying about an unknown outcome...

It would be better to just do it.

No matter if the final result was good or bad, it would be a hundred times better than staying put and empty speculation.

In this world, the cheapest thing was ideas.

Lin Yu closed the textbook document.

His mindset had already shifted from the "selection" phase to the "execution" phase.

Without the slightest hesitation, Lin Yu directly found the electronic document for that [Linzhou Tianxing Vocational Technical College · Standard Skill Textbook · Third Year Support Department (Revised Edition)] online.

Pirated, but free.

He couldn't even be bothered to download it, opening it directly online.

The light screen expanded as he precisely flipped to the [Vitality Nourishment] page.

[Learn skill: Vitality Nourishment?]

"Yes."

A barely perceptible warm current flowed into his body, then dissipated without a trace.

Learned.

The entire process had even less tangible feeling than him taking a sip of water.

Lin Yu raised his hand, directed his will toward the empty space before him.

A green speck of light, barely larger than dust, appeared at his fingertip, then merged into the air and disappeared.

This was [Vitality Nourishment].

A skill so weak it was laughable in its very presence.

Lin Yu's face showed no expression.

But a brilliant idea suddenly appeared in his mind.

Chapter 102: A Million of Millions!

The Primordial Snap was a "vessel," a "container."

It could store "one" skill.

But what exactly was the definition of this "one"?

Was it the "name" of a skill?

Or the "concept" of a skill?

Or perhaps... was it a complete "attack command" that had completed all preparations, was ready to be unleashed, and only needed the final step to be released?

Lin Yu's thoughts accelerated wildly.

His own core ability, the Joker Doubling Cycle, was essentially the ultimate utilization of the concept of "repetition."

It leveraged massive repetition to trigger qualitative change.

And now, he was going to try another approach.

Intercepting the "process"!

What if...

He first activated the Joker Doubling Cycle, amplifying a skill's release to a million times.

Then, at the very moment before this million-fold power skill was about to be unleashed...

Forcefully interrupt it!

And then treat this terrifying energy aggregate, suspended between "completed" and "unreleased," as a "skill," and store it in the Primordial Snap's slot!

Was this feasible?

Try it!

Lin Yu closed his eyes.

The surrounding air seemed to freeze solid.

[Joker Doubling Cycle, activate!]

Mental energy poured out without reservation.

Twenty Doubling Cards rapidly circulated in his consciousness, each collision causing the amplification power to increase exponentially.

Four times.

Eight times.

Sixteen times.

...

One thousand twenty-four times.

...

Sixty-five thousand five hundred thirty-six times.

...

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six times!

The terrifying amplification multiplier instantly reached its peak.

The veins on Lin Yu's temples bulged, but he had long grown accustomed to this tearing pain.

Now!

His consciousness precisely locked onto that newly learned, utterly worthless skill.

[Vitality Nourishment]!

He mobilized a trace of almost negligible energy and began operating it according to the skill model.

Under the million-fold amplification, this trace of energy was instantly catalyzed into a vast, boundless ocean of life!

A green speck of light condensed at his fingertip once again.

But this time, it was no longer as tiny as dust.

It was an emerald green sun compressed to the extreme!

The life energy contained within was majestic, vast, even carrying a hint of ancient charm from the beginning of creation.

This power was so terrifying that the surrounding space began to emit strained hums.

It longed to be released!

It wanted to transform this room, this building, even this entire residential area into a wildly growing primeval forest!

Lin Yu could feel that if he relaxed his focus even slightly, this "sun" would instantly explode.

However, what he needed to do was the complete opposite.

"Interrupt!"

Lin Yu's consciousness transformed into the sturdiest dam, firmly blocking the exit of the energy torrent.

Hum!

The green sun vibrated violently, the violent energy having lost its outlet, began frantically assaulting Lin Yu's mental barriers.

Pain!

Pain far exceeding any previous cycle!

This was no longer simple mental energy consumption, but violent energy backlashing against its master!

Fine droplets of blood even began to appear on Lin Yu's body surface.

But he endured it.

Relying on his terrifyingly high 500-point mental attribute, he forcibly confined this world-destroying power within an infinitely small singularity at his fingertip!

First step successful.

Next, the even crazier second step!

"Store!"

Lin Yu's other hand suddenly raised, activating the Primordial Snap's skill storage function!

His consciousness split in two.

One half continued firmly suppressing the rampaging star of life.

The other half transformed into an invisible giant hand, attempting to drag this unstable bomb into the Primordial Snap's void conceptual slot!

"Get... in here!"

Lin Yu let out a silent roar.

He wasn't requesting.

He was commanding!

As a Myriad Forms Card Crafter, as a pioneer who had touched the "Primordial" rules, he was issuing commands to this world's laws!

That void storage slot was forcibly pried open under Lin Yu's tyrannical will.

That violent green sun was dragged into it by force!

Hum—

A soft sound seemed to come from the depths of his soul.

The world fell silent.

That terrifying energy sufficient to burst the entire room had disappeared.

That soul-tearing pain had also vanished.

Everything had returned to calm.

Lin Yu slowly opened his eyes and called up his skill panel.

[Primordial Snap]

[Storage Slots: 1/1]

[Stored Skill: Vitality Nourishment (1,048,576 times enhanced · Pending Release)]

Success.

But wait...

One snap, releasing one million-fold healing spell.

This was powerful.

But not enough.

Lin Yu's thoughts returned once again to the core of all his abilities.

[Joker Doubling Cycle].

And [Myriad Forms Card Crafter].

[Primordial Snap] was a skill.

The ability of [Myriad Forms Card Crafter] was to transform all things in the world into cards.

Then...

An idea crazy to the extreme, yet perfectly logical, exploded in his mind.

He was going to turn the [Primordial Snap] skill itself into a card!

A skill card.

A skill card that could be copied by [Joker] and amplified by [Doubling Card]!

If he succeeded...

What would that mean?

He would first use one [Joker Doubling Cycle] to amplify [Vitality Nourishment] a million times and store it in [Primordial Snap].

Then, he would turn this [Primordial Snap] that already stored million-fold energy into a [Primordial Snap · Skill Card].

Finally, he would activate another [Joker Doubling Cycle]!

This time, the amplification target would no longer be the tiny [Vitality Nourishment].

But that [Primordial Snap · Skill Card] that stored million-fold energy!

Million times of million times!

That would be trillions directly!

Holy shit, Lin Yu realized at this moment that he had still underestimated the tiny storage characteristic of Primordial Snap and its enhancement for him!

He no longer hesitated.

Do it!

Immediately!

Lin Yu's consciousness sank into his body, mobilizing the origin power belonging to [Myriad Forms Card Crafter].

Invisible golden threads spread out from his mental sea, precisely winding toward the skill panel, toward that skill rune named [Primordial Snap].

This was his most familiar operation.

Over the past five years, he had repeated it tens of thousands of times.

Turning [A Small Pebble] into cards.

Now, what he needed to do was turn a "Primordial" tier skill into a card!

Hum!

The moment the golden threads touched the skill rune, resistance far beyond imagination transmitted back.

The rune structure of [Primordial Snap] was billions of times more complex than he had imagined.

It was no longer a planar imprint, but a multi-dimensional three-dimensional structure composed of countless profound rules.

The threads formed by Lin Yu's mental energy could only move on its surface, completely unable to probe into its core.

Not enough!

Mental energy still not enough!

Lin Yu mobilized more mental energy, forcibly infiltrating into the rune's interior.

His high 500-point mental attribute erupted without reservation at this moment.

The golden threads suddenly tightened, forcibly pressing into the rune's structure!

The outline of a card began to slowly emerge in his consciousness.

It's working!

Chapter 103: Origin Level

Snap!

The golden threads emitted a groan of unbearable strain the moment they touched the Primordial Snap rune.

Then, they shattered inch by inch.

This experience was completely different from creating any card over the past five years.

It wasn't a flat skill imprint.

It was a living, multidimensional divine mountain woven from infinite rules!

Lin Yu's mental energy couldn't even leave a trace on its surface before being utterly crushed by that ancient and majestic force of law.

Not enough!

His mental energy was far from sufficient!

Instead of retreating, Lin Yu was provoked into unleashing the ferocity buried deep in his bones.

His 500-point mental attribute was pushed to the absolute limit at this moment!

More golden threads surged wildly from his mental sea, no longer tentatively coiling but transforming into billions of the toughest steel cables, forcibly digging into the structure of that "divine mountain" with an almost savage intensity!

Buzz—

Lin Yu's body trembled violently, blood seeping from all seven orifices.

This was backlash at the law level!

But he succeeded.

The outline of the card was finally forcibly sketched out in his consciousness.

Done!

Lin Yu's consciousness didn't relax for a moment, knowing this was only the first step.

Enduring the excruciating pain of his soul being torn apart, he accelerated the card creation process.

Finally, a brand new card slowly took form in his consciousness.

The card face was pitch black, like the deepest universe.

No ornate patterns, no complex designs.

Only an extremely simple action was imprinted at the very center of the card.

A hand, snapping its fingers.

[Primordial Snap · Skill Card]

Success.

Continue!!

Lin Yu didn't even have time to catch his breath before continuing his mad endeavor.

He was going to perform the Joker Doubling Cycle once more.

This time, what he intended to amplify wasn't that garbage Vitality Nourishment.

It was this freshly created [Primordial Snap · Skill Card] that already contained a million-fold energy!

A million times a million!

That was... one trillion!

Just the thought of this number made Lin Yu feel suffocated from the depths of his soul.

This was absolutely beyond his limits.

But he didn't hesitate.

The moment this idea emerged, he had already made his choice.

Do it!

Now! Immediately! Right away!

Lin Yu closed his eyes and, for the second time—the most insane attempt in his entire life—activated the Joker Doubling Cycle!

[Joker] duplication!

[Doubling Card] amplification!

This time, the consumption of mental energy wasn't just pouring out—it was a dam bursting!

His vast mental sea was completely drained within a single second!

Four times.

Eight times.

...

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six times!

When that familiar, soul-tearing amplification reached its peak, Lin Yu's consciousness had already blurred.

But relying on his final shred of determination, he precisely locked onto that new card.

[Primordial Snap · Skill Card (One million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six times enhanced · Ready for release)]!

Release!

Using the last bit of his strength, Lin Yu issued the command in his consciousness.

He didn't even raise his hand.

Because he no longer had the energy for any extra movements.

Snap.

A soft sound.

Not from the outside world, but from the depths of his soul.

That [Primordial Snap · Skill Card] containing a million-fold [Vitality Nourishment] was activated under yet another million-fold amplification.

Then.

There was no then.

No earth-shattering explosion.

No world-destroying light.

Not even the slightest energy leakage.

The trillion-fold energy, the moment it was released, followed some unseen causality and precisely, entirely, backlashed onto its releaser—Lin Yu's body.

Lin Yu's body was instantly blown apart.

From cells, to genes, to his soul.

Everything was completely washed away, decomposed, and turned into the most primitive particles under that immeasurably vast flood of life force.

Consciousness was dissolving.

Life was fading.

He died.

Completely.

As dead as one could possibly be.

However, at the very same moment Lin Yu's life flame was completely extinguished...

Streams of information began frantically refreshing on his skill panel.

[Detected skill 'Vitality Nourishment' cast count reached one million times, proficiency upgraded to 'Gold'!]

[Detected skill 'Vitality Nourishment' cast count reached one hundred million times, proficiency upgraded to 'Red'!]

[Detected skill 'Vitality Nourishment' cast count reached ten billion times, proficiency upgraded!]

[Detected skill 'Vitality Nourishment' cast count reached one trillion times, proficiency upgraded!]

...

In the deathly silent room.

Time seemed to stand still.

An unknowable amount of time passed.

A faint, extremely weak hint of green quietly bloomed within the void at the core of Lin Yu's body, which had turned to dust.

Then came a second hint, a third...

Countless green light points appeared out of thin air, attracting each other, converging, intertwining.

Flesh was reorganizing, bones were regenerating, nerves were reconnecting, soul was reuniting.

"Gasp!"

Lin Yu's eyes snapped open as he gasped for air, his entire body springing up from the floor into a sitting position.

He was still alive?

How was that possible!

He clearly remembered the moment he was blown apart by that terrifying energy, his consciousness completely dispersing.

That feeling of utterly returning to nothingness was definitely not an illusion.

Heart palpitations!

An unprecedented sense of heart palpitations gripped his heart.

It was a brand left only after truly touching death.

What exactly happened?

Forcing down the shock in his heart, Lin Yu immediately activated his [Eye of Analysis] to examine his body and skill panel.

Rows of fresh data entered his vision.

[Vitality Nourishment (Origin · One trillion times)]

[Skill Description: You have touched the origin of life.]

[Primordial Effect: Perpetual Flow. You gain continuous life force recovery. When recovering life, excess energy will temporarily enhance all your basic attributes until the next skill cast or energy depletion.]

[Origin Effect: Physical Control (Beginner). You have obtained absolute control over your own life form. You can consume mental energy to reconstruct your life essence to a certain extent.]

So that's how it was.

Looking at the description of the [Origin Effect], Lin Yu's back was instantly drenched in cold sweat.

A million times a million—one trillion casts—had directly pushed this garbage skill to an unimaginable tier.

[Origin]!

It was this effect, this terrifying ability called "Physical Control," that had forcibly pulled him back from nothingness at the moment of his death!

He had killed himself.

Then, he had resurrected himself.

A complete cycle of life and death.

Chapter 104: Redemption of Light!

Lin Yu slowly raised his hand, fingers spread open, then suddenly clenched tight.

An unprecedented, pure and powerful sense of strength flooded through his entire body.

This was the temporary attribute boost brought by the [Primordial Effect].

But what he cared about more was that feeling.

That absolute sense of control over every single cell in his body, every strand of life energy, knowing them as intimately as the palm of his hand.

Yet, deeper within this sense of control, lurked a discord that chilled him to the bone.

A cold, deathly still quality that didn't belong to the category of "life."

He was alive.

But it seemed he hadn't completely come back to life.

It was as if his state of existence was stuck in a superposition between life and death.

An undead wearing a living skin.

Cold sweat seeped from Lin Yu's back.

If not for the extraordinary perception brought by the [Origin Effect: Physical Control], he wouldn't have been able to detect this bizarre change himself.

This time's gamble had gone too far.

The trillion casts of [Vitality Nourishment], while pulling him back from the abyss of death, had also caused undeniable damage to his life origin.

He had won the bet, obtaining skills at the [Origin] tier.

He had also lost the bet, nearly falling into eternal damnation.

This feeling of dancing wildly on the edge of a blade made him feel a long-lost sense of fear.

He had to stay calm.

Lin Yu closed his eyes, quietly reflecting on his previous crazy action.

He had been too impatient.

His thirst for power had made him subconsciously ignore the enormous risks involved.

The million-fold amplification was already the limit of what his mental energy could withstand.

And a million times a million, the trillion-fold energy backlash, had completely exceeded the carrying capacity of his current life level.

Even with [Physical Control], he might not be so lucky next time.

Lin Yu silently felt the [Perpetual Flow] effect of [Vitality Nourishment] within his body.

Streams of warm life energy, like gentle brooks, continuously nourished his damaged life origin.

The recovery process was slow, but definitely effective.

Until his life origin was completely healed, he absolutely could not casually attempt that suicidal "million times million" operation again.

However...

Lin Yu's thoughts could never remain completely settled.

If million times million wasn't feasible, then... what about slightly lowering the specifications?

For example, first use the [Joker Doubling Cycle] to strengthen a skill eight times, or sixteen times, then store it in the snap, creating a [Skill Card].

Then apply a million-fold amplification to this card containing eight or sixteen portions of energy.

Eight million times, sixteen million times...

Could he withstand such intensity?

Or, to be even less hasty, what about storing just one instance?

[Primordial Snap].

Store.

Instant cast!

Exactly!

The core value of [Primordial Snap] wasn't about strengthening instant-cast skills at all.

But rather... turning all non-instant-cast skills into instant-cast ones!

That way, he could grind proficiency through the most formulaic method!

Lin Yu's thoughts became active again.

He had come up with another brilliant idea.

Since he was already nesting dolls to this extent...

[Primordial Snap] could store skills.

So, did [Primordial Snap] itself count as a skill?

If he stored the [Primordial Snap] skill into [Primordial Snap]'s own storage slot...

Would that mean he could snap his fingers to unleash another snap that contained a stored skill?

Infinite nesting, infinite possibilities.

Lin Yu immediately began to try.

He mobilized his mental energy, attempting to drag the skill rune of [Primordial Snap] into its own storage slot.

However, the skill panel showed no response.

That empty slot displayed absolute rejection toward its own essence.

As expected, it didn't work.

Just as he anticipated.

But this didn't matter anyway.

Lin Yu quickly put this failed attempt behind him.

Lin Yu opened the room's built-in paid skill learning system.

A light screen unfolded before him.

It displayed densely packed, available paid general skills.

[Fireblast], price: thirty thousand.

[Ice Peak Slash], price: thirty thousand.

[Wind's Lament], price: thirty thousand.

These were the most basic elemental attack skills - instant cast, low cost, small power, the standard equipment for most new practitioners.

Lin Yu's gaze swept right past them.

What he wanted wasn't these common items.

His gaze continued downward, passing over those rare skills costing hundreds of thousands, even millions.

Finally, it stopped at the very bottom of the skill list.

A skill priced as high as eight million.

[Light's Redemption]

[Skill Tier: Gold-Epic]

[Skill Type: Healing-Blessing]

[Learning Conditions: 200 points Spirit, 200 points Constitution]

[Skill Description: Channel sacred light energy to perform a thorough life baptism on the target. Can purify most negative statuses, repair moderate injuries, and provide the target with a continuous recovery 'blessing' effect for one hour afterward.]

[Casting Time: Ten seconds.]

[Cooldown Time: Ten minutes.]

This was it.

A typical skill with powerful effects but extremely demanding casting conditions.

Of course, most importantly, this was the most expensive skill this room could provide.

Lin Yu couldn't be bothered to choose himself; his time was too precious.

For ordinary practitioners, this was an extremely cost-ineffective skill.

But for Lin Yu, this wasn't a problem at all.

His current money was all replicated out of thin air; he didn't care how much he spent.

And that lengthy casting time and cooldown time would all vanish before [Primordial Snap].

"Purchase."

Lin Yu confirmed the payment.

Eight million was instantly deducted from his account.

The next second, a massive flow of information poured into his mind.

It was an incredibly complex skill rune filled with sacred and solemn charm.

Countless rune details, construction methods, energy circulation routes slowly unfolded in his mental sea.

If it were an ordinary person, just understanding and mastering this skill would probably take several weeks.

But Lin Yu was different.

His high 500-point spirit attribute allowed him to completely master this gold epic-level skill in less than three seconds.

Done.

Lin Yu raised his hand, attempting to cast it once following the normal procedure.

He began to chant ancient, difficult-to-pronounce syllables.

Light elements in the air began gathering at his fingertips.

However, he stopped after just completing the first syllable.

Too slow.

It was simply too slow.

Completely unbearable.

Lin Yu's thought moved.

[Primordial Snap], activate!

His consciousness precisely locked onto the brand new [Light's Redemption] skill rune in his mind.

"Store!"

Chapter 105: All Ancient Times

Buzz—

An invisible fluctuation forcibly dragged the skill rune of [Light's Redemption] into the empty storage slot of [Primordial Snap].

Success.

Lin Yu didn't rush to release it immediately.

He quietly contemplated the changes brought by that half-successful, half-failed "trillion casts" from earlier.

[Physical Control].

Absolute mastery over his own life form.

But more importantly, the trash skill [Vitality Nourishment] had leaped to become an [Origin]-tier existence.

Because of one trillion casts.

Proficiency.

The information from both skills—Snap and Nourishment—served as factual proof.

As long as the number of casts was sufficient, any skill could potentially touch the threshold of [Origin].

His trillion self-destructive casts, seemingly insane, had unintentionally illuminated a broad path to divinity for him.

[Origin] was still quite difficult for now, but after being able to store instant skill releases with the snap...

He wanted to grind all useful skills to the [Primordial] tier!

Lin Yu's thoughts returned once again to his core abilities.

[Joker Doubling Cycle].

[Primordial Snap].

The former could provide multiplication factors, while the latter allowed him to ignore casting time and cooldown, achieving infinite instant casting.

This was practically the perfect combination for grinding proficiency!

The problem lay in cost.

One complete [Joker Doubling Cycle], reaching a million-fold amplification, would completely drain his mental energy and require time to recover.

Using million-fold amplified skills to grind proficiency was too extravagant and inefficient.

What he needed wasn't ultimate single-cast power, but ultimate casting frequency!

Cost-effectiveness.

He needed to find the perfect balance point between mental energy consumption and proficiency gains.

Lin Yu opened the software that came with Bug Residence and began performing precise calculations.

One complete cycle involved twenty multiplications.

If he only performed four multiplications, that would be sixteen-fold.

The mental energy consumption would be almost negligible.

If he performed five multiplications, thirty-two-fold, the consumption would begin rising exponentially.

That's it.

Sixteen-fold!

This was currently the most cost-effective choice for him!

Step one: Use the initial stage of [Joker Doubling Cycle] to boost the multiplier to enhanced sixteen-fold.

Step two: Use [Myriad Forms Card Crafter] to solidify the selected skill into a skill card for sixteen-fold enhanced release.

Step three: Interrupt the release of this enhanced sixteen-fold skill and store it in [Primordial Snap].

Then, infinite instant casting!

Grind!

Grind it to death!

Grind each skill for over a billion times!

Thinking this, Lin Yu's mind completely opened up.

He needed more skills.

Attack, defense, healing, blessing, curse, control, movement...

The more the better, the stronger the better.

This was his best method to grow stronger when his basic attributes couldn't be temporarily improved and his level couldn't increase!

Lin Yu opened the paid skill learning system again.

"Purchase [Fireblast]."

"Purchase [Ice Peak Slash]."

"Purchase [Wind's Lament]."

"Purchase [Rock Shield]."

"Purchase [Slow Spell]."

"Purchase [Blink]."

...

A series of purchase commands made his account balance plummet rapidly.

But Lin Yu didn't care at all.

His room began to showcase a bizarre spectacle.

His left hand continuously created [Doubling Cards], [Skill Cards], and [Jokers] out of thin air, while his right hand rapidly performed the cyclic operations of card creation, storage, instant casting, and card switching.

Although he had bought all the decent skills without even looking, he still made distinctions during practice.

Currently, he only trained defensive, enhancement, and functional skills...

He didn't want to repeat the tragedy of Lightning Spell.

Even so, Lin Yu estimated that by the end of this training session, he would be almost ready to walk sideways through the world.

All preparations complete, seclusion begins!

...

Meanwhile.

Linzhou, Black Market, Old Ghost Hall, underground.

The dim basement was filled with a strong medicinal scent and the burnt smell of overheating electronic components.

"Gulp."

Old Ghost tilted his head back and poured an entire bottle of blue [Lucid Potion] down his throat, then expressionlessly picked up another bottle of green [Physical Enhancement Potion] and drank it all.

After consuming two potent potions that could keep ordinary people awake for ten days and nights, the bloodshot lines in his eyes barely faded slightly.

In front of him, there were no medicinal ingredients, no alchemical furnaces.

Only three parallel-arranged, heavily modified encrypted servers, and an enormous curved light screen connected to the servers.

On the light screen, waterfall-like data streams were refreshing at a speed barely visible to the naked eye.

Old Ghost's ten fingers flew across the specially made keyboard, so fast they almost left afterimages.

He was calculating accounts.

Or rather, reconciling accounts.

Since that boss left, the entire underground world of Linzhou and surrounding areas had gone completely crazy.

Countless orders poured in like snowflakes from every dark corner of the city, converging into his small pharmacy.

Those practitioners who once stood high above, those wealthy individuals who usually cherished their lives like gold, those desperadoes living on the edge—now they all resembled the most devout believers, holding cash, just to purchase a potion with effects identical to the three major pharmaceutical companies but priced at only a fraction.

Business was explosively good.

Money was so abundant it burned his hands.

In one corner of the light screen, several startling numbers updated in real time.

Average unit price: 100,000.

Average customer transaction: 300,000.

Today's turnover: 1.37 billion.

And this was just today's.

Old Ghost didn't dare imagine what terrifying scale the funds passing through his hands had reached in these past few days.

This was a gold mountain.

Also a volcano that could erupt at any moment.

He didn't dare entrust these matters to anyone else; all order processing, fund transfers, and goods distribution had to be handled personally by him alone.

As for Old Seventh, he was still running around outside.

Fortunately, before leaving, the boss had given him authorization for the Black Card, allowing him to access funds, so Old Ghost had trusted people create a complete set of absolutely secure custom software and hardware.

Otherwise, he would have likely been overwhelmed by this flood of information long ago.

Old Ghost stopped his movements, leaned back in his chair, and let out a long, heavy sigh.

The money from this lifetime, no, the next lifetime, and the lifetime after that—he had counted it all in these past few days.

This feeling was both unreal and incredibly thrilling.

At the same time, it made him feel...

This time, he had bet absolutely right!

Damn it, what if he couldn't earn money in this lifetime?

As long as he followed the right person once, hugged the right thigh once!

Never mind this lifetime, even the next lifetime would be enough!

Just as he was thinking this, the heavy metal door of the basement was pushed open from outside.

Seventh Master had returned.

Behind him followed a figure as massive as a mountain.

Zhao Tianyang.

Old Ghost instinctively stood up, his movements somewhat stiff.

The current Zhao Tianyang was completely different from before, like night and day.

Chapter 106: Notify the Boss First

First was his physique.

His body had grown another size larger, standing nearly three meters tall like an insurmountable wall. The dark red mysterious patterns on his exposed skin flickered faintly, flowing slowly like living creatures, emanating a heart-palpitating aura of brutality.

His bones were probably comparable to the highest-grade alloys by now.

The only thing unchanged was his face - still taciturn, even somewhat wooden.

"Old Ghost." Seventh Master nodded to him, his face showing a trace of weariness from traveling.

Zhao Tianyang also gave a muffled greeting.

"You two..." Old Ghost opened his mouth but didn't know what to say for a moment.

"Boss's family, and Tianyang's family, have all been settled." Seventh Master proactively explained, "Found an absolutely safe place where no one can find them."

Zhao Tianyang added from the side: "I went looking for Master, but couldn't find him."

His logic was simple.

If you can't find someone, use the most basic method.

"So I came here to wait."

Old Ghost and Seventh Master exchanged glances, both seeing a hint of inevitability in each other's reactions.

That was so Zhao Tianyang.

Loyal, simple, direct, but not stupid.

"Boss has his own arrangements. He'll appear when he wants to." Seventh Master walked to the side and poured himself a glass of water, "I've already expanded the market outside. Underground channels in several second-tier cities around Linzhou have all been opened."

"But." Seventh Master's tone shifted.

"Tianyang and I discussed it and decided that all distributors must come to Old Ghost Hall in person to collect goods."

Old Ghost immediately understood the deeper meaning.

"First, for safety." Seventh Master said gravely, "Once the goods leave Old Ghost Hall's door, whatever happens on the road has nothing to do with us. Let them handle robberies among thieves or official crackdowns themselves."

This completely transferred the risk to downstream distributors.

Very reasonable.

After all, they were selling gold at cabbage prices.

If you want to make money, you have to bear the risks yourself.

"Second." Seventh Master's voice lowered further, "To concentrate influence."

He looked at Old Ghost, then glanced at the silent Zhao Tianyang.

"This is Boss's intention."

"Boss said before that he wanted the three major medicine companies to come knocking on our door themselves."

"We have to let people know where the door is, right?"

Old Ghost's heart suddenly skipped a beat.

Right.

Boss's vision was never about secretly selling some medicine to make small money.

What he wanted was to completely overturn the entire market!

He wanted to drag those three high-and-mighty monopoly giants down from their thrones, trample them underfoot, and force them to come to Old Ghost Hall, begging for mercy!

"How's the momentum building?" Old Ghost asked eagerly.

"Big enough." Seventh Master's reply carried a strange tone, "So big... it's a bit abnormal."

"Abnormal?"

"The three major medicine companies haven't shown any intention of coming to us yet." Seventh Master frowned, "Logically speaking, our shipment volume should have been enough to collapse their price system and make them restless."

Old Ghost also felt something was wrong.

In recent days, the cash flow he handled had reached astronomical figures.

The three major medicine companies couldn't possibly be unaware.

Their silence was itself a problem.

"Not only haven't they come, they've started other moves instead." Seventh Master sneered coldly and pulled up several news reports, projecting them on the light screen.

"Rising Star Project?"

"Joint discounts?"

Old Ghost looked at the headlines on the light screen, his face full of disbelief.

"Wind Rider Technology taking the lead, jointly with Giant Force and Bedrock, announced the launch of the 'Rising Star Project,' claiming they want to sign this year's top newcomers and support the Practitioner system ecosystem."

"At the same time, they announced that to give back to society, the three companies will jointly launch an unprecedented promotional event with Qingyun. All basic medicines will be sold at half price, with additional discounts, coupons, and ten-billion subsidies."

Unfortunately, even with all the discounts stacked, they still couldn't match Old Ghost Hall's prices.

Not to mention few people could actually stack all the discounts.

But the momentum was indeed substantial, and public opinion control was excellent.

At least the stock market had stabilized.

"They... might still be holding onto some illusions." Old Ghost murmured to himself.

Perhaps in the eyes of those giants, they were just a ragtag group that luckily obtained a formula and wanted to make a quick profit before running away.

They weren't seen as real competitors at all.

"Illusions?" Seventh Master scoffed, "If they could see our current inventory, they probably wouldn't even have the courage to dream."

Old Ghost deeply agreed.

Seventh Master shared the same thought as he looked at the mountain-like silent Zhao Tianyang and remembered that elusive boss who appeared and disappeared mysteriously.

Following the right person was more important than anything else.

Just then.

"Beep beep beep—"

A sharp, urgent communication request sound broke through the trio's conversation in the basement.

This was the internal emergency communication line connecting to the front desk.

Old Ghost frowned and casually answered.

"What is it? Didn't I say we're suspending supplies today? Tell them to come back tomorrow!"

His tone carried some impatience.

Too many individual customers and middlemen had flooded in recently, seriously affecting his accounting efficiency.

From the other end of the communicator came the somewhat nervous voice of the front desk assistant.

"G-Ghost Lord, it's not someone coming for supplies."

"He says... he says he's from the Black Market Management Office."

Black Market Management Office?

"Make them wait."

Seventh Master's reaction was very calm. He said this into the communicator, then directly hung up.

No matter what, they couldn't lose face for the boss.

The communicator was hung up.

The basement returned to a suffocating dead silence.

Only the three servers running at maximum capacity emitted a continuous, monotonous hum, like some kind of anxious whisper.

Old Ghost looked at Seventh Master, and Seventh Master looked back at him.

Both read the same heavy information from each other's reactions.

"Black Market Management Office..." Old Ghost's throat felt somewhat dry, "Chen Ao's people?"

"Who else could it be." Seventh Master's reply was calm.

But beneath this calmness surged undercurrents.

They both clearly understood what the name Chen Ao meant in Linzhou's underground world.

Rules.

Order.

And absolute violence.

"Why is he getting involved?" Old Ghost was utterly puzzled, "The medicine we're selling impacts the three giants. What does it have to do with him? Shouldn't he be happy to see the market disrupted? This only benefits the black market!"

Theoretically, that was true.

Breaking monopolies and having more cheap goods flowing in would greatly promote the black market's prosperity.

As the black market's highest administrator, Chen Ao should be sitting back and reaping the benefits.

They didn't know Chen Ao's purpose, but this news had to be reported to the boss first!

Chapter 107: Zhao Tianyang Makes a Move

Old Ghost and Seventh Master exchanged glances, both seeing the gravity in each other's reactions.

This was indeed no small matter.

But the more critical the situation, the more they couldn't lose their composure.

"Let's leave a message for the boss first."

Seventh Master was the first to calm down. He walked to the corner, opened an extremely well-hidden encrypted communicator, and quickly typed a line of information.

[Black Market Management Office representatives have arrived, purpose unknown. We will handle initial contact.]

After sending the message, he put away the communicator and looked at Old Ghost and Zhao Tianyang.

"Let's go, head upstairs to see."

"Whatever they want, we'll deal with it."

"If it's fortune, it won't be misfortune; if it's misfortune, it can't be avoided."

Old Ghost also steadied his mind and nodded firmly.

The boss had entrusted them with such a large operation—that was trust in them.

They couldn't disgrace the boss's reputation.

Zhao Tianyang didn't speak, just silently followed behind the two. His massive frame brought a reassuring sense of pressure in the narrow underground passage.

The three quickly ascended the stairs and returned to the pharmacy's front hall.

However, the scene before them instantly ignited their fury, sending rage shooting straight to the top of their heads.

In the front hall, two men dressed in black combat outfits stood before the counter.

One of them, of average build with a vicious scar on his face, was currently gripping a girl's hair—the receptionist girl.

The girl's scalp was being brutally pulled, forcing her head back. Her face was full of pain and tears, her body trembling violently from fear.

"Damn it, cat got your tongue? I'm asking you a question!"

The scar-faced man looked impatient, adding more force to his grip.

"Told you to announce us, and you drag your feet for ages. Do you think we from the Management Office are pushovers?"

"Ghost Master! Seventh Master!"

The girl saw Old Ghost and the others emerge as if spotting saviors, calling out in a tearful voice.

Only then did the scar-faced man release his grip, shoving the girl aside with disgust.

The girl staggered, nearly falling to the ground.

The scar-faced man turned to look at Old Ghost and Seventh Master who had come out, showing not a trace of apology but instead wearing a mocking smile.

"Well, look who finally decided to show up."

"Any later and I would've had to teach your unruly employee some manners for you."

He pointed at the girl shivering in the corner as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"You're welcome."

The other man, who had remained silent the whole time, just stood quietly to the side, arms crossed, watching coldly.

Old Ghost's fists instantly clenched.

All calmness vanished from Seventh Master's face.

This was going too far!

This wasn't just a show of authority anymore—this was blatant humiliation!

This was grinding the face of their Old Ghost Hall into the dirt!

However, before they could speak.

A burly figure had already stepped out from behind them.

It was Zhao Tianyang.

This newly awakened youth, whose thinking was still very straightforward, had simple logic.

Our people are being bullied.

Not acceptable.

"Let her go."

Zhao Tianyang's voice was deep and muffled, yet carried an undeniable tone of command.

His tall frame directly positioned itself between the scar-faced man and the girl, his shadow completely enveloping the scar-faced man.

The scar-faced man froze for a moment, then burst out as if hearing the biggest joke.

"Hah? Kid, who do you think you are? Do you even have the right to speak here?"

He looked Zhao Tianyang up and down, sensing the not-yet-fully-contained violent aura around him, a trace of contempt appearing on his face.

"Just awakened, little brat? Feathers not even fully grown, and you dare play the hero saving the beauty?"

"Do you think this is your place to talk?"

With that, he reached out to push Zhao Tianyang aside.

However, the moment his palm touched Zhao Tianyang's chest, it felt like pushing against an immovable mountain.

Zhao Tianyang didn't budge an inch.

Instead, the scar-faced man himself felt his wrist go numb from the recoil force.

"Huh?"

The scar-faced man's smile finally faded.

He realized this big guy before him might not be as simple as he thought.

"Kid, you think you're something, huh?"

His expression darkened, a fierce aura erupting from him.

"I'm telling you for the last time, get lost!"

This time, he didn't push.

He formed his five fingers into a claw, carrying a sharp whistling sound, directly grabbing for Zhao Tianyang's shoulder!

This claw could easily crush steel plates!

Old Ghost and Seventh Master's hearts leaped to their throats.

They knew Zhao Tianyang was strong, but the other party was after all one of Chen Ao's elite enforcers, a ruthless character who had crawled out of mountains of corpses and seas of blood!

Tianyang had just awakened, with almost zero combat experience. What if he got hurt...

However, Zhao Tianyang's reaction was faster and more direct than they imagined.

Facing that vicious claw, he didn't even look at it.

He simply extended his own large, fan-like hand, arriving later but striking first, firmly grabbing the scar-faced man's wrist.

As dark red patterns flowed, Zhao Tianyang's entire aura seemed to grow increasingly violent.

"Crack!"

A light sound.

The scar-faced man's movement abruptly stopped.

His wrist was firmly clamped by Zhao Tianyang, unable to move.

"You!"

For the first time, shock appeared on the scar-faced man's face.

He tried to break free, but found the other's grip like the strongest alloy shackles—no matter how much strength he exerted, he couldn't budge it at all.

A piercing pain transmitted from his wrist.

He could feel his wrist bones groaning under the terrifying grip pressure, on the verge of breaking.

How was this possible!

This brat's strength... was actually greater than his?!

"Looking to die!"

The scar-faced man was completely enraged. His other hand formed a fist, fiercely punching toward Zhao Tianyang's face!

Zhao Tianyang remained expressionless. The hand gripping the wrist suddenly twisted and pulled!

"Ah!"

The scar-faced man let out a scream, losing his balance completely as he was violently dragged forward by immense force, his arm completely dislocated.

The punch aimed at Zhao Tianyang's face consequently went off course, swinging past Zhao Tianyang's ear.

Zhao Tianyang raised his knee, preparing to drive it upward.

If this knee connected solidly, the scar-faced man would probably spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

"Tianyang, come back!"

At the critical moment, Seventh Master's deep voice commanded.

Zhao Tianyang's movement stopped abruptly, less than an inch from the scar-faced man's abdomen.

He looked back at Seventh Master somewhat confused.

But out of trust for Seventh Master, he still released his grip, pulled the terrified girl behind him, then retreated to stand beside Old Ghost and Seventh Master.

He knew that Old Ghost and Seventh Master had more experience with such matters.

He should listen to them.

The scar-faced man clutched his nearly broken wrist, staggering back several steps before barely steadying himself.

The look he gave Zhao Tianyang no longer held the previous contempt and mockery.

Instead, it was replaced by deep wariness and a trace of disbelief.

Chapter 108: Isn't this blatant robbery?

Dead silence.

Inside the front hall, the air seemed to have solidified into lead blocks, so heavy it was suffocating.

Scar-face clutched his deformed wrist, cold sweat dripping from his forehead. He stared fixedly at Zhao Tianyang, his previous arrogance completely gone, replaced by shock and an incomprehensible sense of humiliation.

Him, a gold-level enforcer of the Black Market Management Office, had actually been subdued in one move by an unknown brat?

Although he hadn't used his full strength, it still shouldn't be something a newly awakened kid could withstand.

How was this possible!

However, despite his surprise, he didn't react with the same aggression as before, instead choosing to lie low.

He didn't even show anger at being injured.

His words, actions, and demeanor completely lacked the thuggish quality from moments ago.

The other man, who had remained silent the entire time, finally moved.

He didn't approach Zhao Tianyang, nor did he go to help his companion.

He simply took half a step forward, his entire being like a sculpture merging with the shadows. His presence was extremely low, yet he brought an intangible pressure.

Seventh Master's heart tightened.

Old Ghost's muscles also tensed up.

This man was much more dangerous than Scar-face.

However, Seventh Master then did something no one expected.

He directly walked past the two confronting parties and approached the girl still huddled in the corner, quietly sobbing.

The girl flinched in fear, thinking she was about to be scolded.

"You did very well."

Seventh Master's voice was as calm as ever, yet it carried a soothing power.

"You didn't do anything wrong. There's no need to be afraid."

He took a black card from his pocket and gently placed it in the girl's trembling hand.

"There's five hundred thousand in here, compensation for your emotional distress. Take a few days off to rest well. Come back to work whenever you feel ready."

The girl was stunned. She looked at the card in her hand, then raised her head to look at Seventh Master, tears flowing even more heavily, but this time, no longer out of fear.

Five hundred thousand.

For an ordinary person like her, it was an astronomical sum.

Seeing this scene, Scar-face felt even more humiliated.

This wasn't just consolation; it was a demonstration!

It was using money to slap him hard across the face!

"The people of our Old Ghost Hall aren't to be disciplined by outsiders."

Old Ghost's voice came from the side, cold and stiff.

He stepped forward, standing shoulder to shoulder with Seventh Master, fearlessly staring straight at the two men from the Black Market Management Office.

"As for what just happened."

Old Ghost glanced at Zhao Tianyang, then turned his gaze back to Scar-face.

"Consider it a small punishment for you."

"To let you know that not every place is suitable for causing trouble."

His words were resolute and decisive.

He redefined Zhao Tianyang's action from passive self-defense to active punishment.

With this, the nature of the incident completely changed.

The atmosphere in the front hall shifted from confrontational tension to an almost provocative firmness.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master showed not the slightest intention of backing down.

"Now, we can discuss official business."

Seventh Master took over the conversation, looking at the silent man.

"Did you come here on Chen Ao's orders?"

The question, like a sharp blade, went straight to the core.

Chen Ao.

The king of Linzhou's black market.

The moment this name was spoken, even the flow of air seemed to halt.

Scar-face's breath caught.

The silent man finally reacted.

He first looked at Zhao Tianyang—it was an appraisal, a reassessment.

Surprise.

His reaction clearly conveyed these two words.

Obviously, the strength Zhao Tianyang had displayed completely exceeded their expectations.

A youth who could easily overpower Scar-face was definitely no ordinary newcomer.

Old Ghost Hall was hiding a monster.

Only then did he turn his gaze to Old Ghost and Seventh Master. Their firm attitude also surprised him.

He had originally thought this was just some makeshift operation that had gotten lucky and secured some channel.

A little pressure would squeeze them flat like a soft persimmon.

But now it seemed this wasn't a persimmon at all, but steel wrapped in spikes.

"Heh heh."

The silent man suddenly laughed, though the laughter didn't reach his eyes.

"Gentlemen, don't misunderstand."

He finally spoke, his voice flat, devoid of any emotional fluctuation.

"We are from the Black Market Management Office. Our duty is to maintain the order and rules of the black market."

He carefully avoided mentioning Chen Ao's name.

But this statement itself was an implicit acknowledgment.

In Linzhou's black market, the Management Office was Chen Ao's will.

But as long as it wasn't verbally admitted, there was always room for maneuver—this was the unspoken rule of the underground world.

"Our visit carries no ill intent." The man continued, "It's just that recent market fluctuations have been too significant, so we're routinely coming to understand the situation."

"Understand the situation?" Old Ghost sneered, "Starting by laying hands on my people—is that your way of understanding the situation?"

"That was an accident." The man glanced at Scar-face, "My companion here is a bit impatient. I've already disciplined him on your behalf."

As he spoke, he gave a signal to Scar-face.

Scar-face's body stiffened for a moment, then he very obediently and stiffly bowed his head toward Old Ghost and Seventh Master.

"Apologies."

This scene made Old Ghost and Seventh Master exchange another meaningful look.

Everything today, from beginning to end, had been a test.

First using arrogant attitudes and violent methods to apply pressure, testing their reactions and limits.

Then deciding the approach for engagement, judging the power behind them.

"Gentlemen, don't misunderstand."

The silent man spoke again, pulling the topic back on track.

"We came here not to create conflict, but to solve problems."

"Solve problems?" Old Ghost gave a hollow laugh, "I feel like you are the problem itself."

The man paid no mind to Old Ghost's sarcasm, continuing on his own.

"The prices of Old Ghost Hall's medicines are too low."

"So low that they've disrupted the market balance Linzhou City has maintained for over a decade. The three giants are overwhelmed, and the small medicine vendors in the black market are full of complaints. This is damaging the overall ecosystem of the black market."

"So, what is the Management Office's intention?" Seventh Master asked calmly, wanting to see what the other party truly coveted.

"Simple." The silent man extended one finger.

"First, to verify the authenticity and effectiveness of your medicines, and prevent inferior products from entering the market, we need to conduct sampling inspections on all your currently sold medicines."

"One hundred units of each type."

One hundred units of each type?

At Old Ghost Hall's current selling prices, this batch of goods would be worth thirty million!

This wasn't sampling!

This was outright robbery!

Scar-face looked at Old Ghost and Seventh Master's shocked expressions, a triumphant sneer reappearing on his face, as if he hadn't just been humiliated.

However, this wasn't the end.

The silent man slowly extended a second finger.

"Second, and most importantly."

His voice was flat, yet carried an undeniable weight.

"Given that your emergence has caused massive shock to the market, to ensure you have the capability to maintain stable subsequent supply rather than making a quick profit and running, leaving behind a mess..."

"The Management Office has decided that you need to hand over fifty percent of your total inventory as a security deposit."

"This deposit will be held in custody by the Management Office. When necessary, we will use it to stabilize market prices and maintain the black market's stability."

"Of course, if you can maintain stable supply continuously, this deposit will eventually be returned to you."

Chapter 109: Chen Ao and Li Mo

Fifty percent?

This was no longer just a lion opening its mouth wide.

This was smashing their bones to make soup!

Old Ghost and Seventh Master's bodies both stiffened.

The thirty million sampling fee was already blatant extortion, and this fifty percent deposit was practically daylight robbery!

Based on their current inventory and daily turnover, the value of these goods had already reached astronomical figures.

A number that would drive any force in Linzhou City mad with greed.

Moreover, so-called "temporary custody" and "eventual return" - such nonsense wouldn't even fool a three-year-old.

Once it entered the Black Market Management Office's pockets, once it entered Chen Ao's pockets, did they really think they could get it back?

Wishful thinking!

Scar-face watched the two men's expressions that looked like they'd swallowed flies, finally feeling much of his pent-up frustration dissipate, that disgusting sneer returning to his face.

The humiliation of being subdued in one move by some young punk earlier seemed to have been compensated for at this moment.

So what if he was strong?

In Linzhou territory, before the rules set by Chen Ao, even a dragon had to coil up!

"What? Do you two have objections?"

Scar-face deliberately raised his voice, with a sick sense of pleasure, "This is Management Office regulation, for the stability of the black market. You wouldn't want to defy it, would you?"

Zhao Tianyang's massive frame leaned forward slightly again, the dark red patterns on his body beginning to flow faintly, a violent aura uncontrollably spreading out.

He didn't care about market balance or deposits.

He only knew that these two people were bullying Ghost Master and Seventh Master.

They were bullying the boss's people.

Seventh Master calmly raised his hand and gently pressed it on Zhao Tianyang's arm, stopping his impulse.

Now was not the time for violence.

Since the other party dared to propose such conditions, it meant that Chen Ao standing behind them was already prepared to tear off all pretenses.

Once they took action, there would be no room for maneuver left.

Old Ghost took a deep breath, forcibly suppressing the anger in his heart.

He knew that the other party's purpose today was to test and apply pressure.

Of these two conditions, the first was extortion, but the second was the real goal.

They wanted to get their hands on the medicine supply channel, even swallow the entire Old Ghost Hall in one gulp.

But Old Ghost also understood that this definitely wasn't the other party's final price.

This was just the beginning of an outrageous demand.

If they started bargaining with them here now, they would fall into the other party's rhythm and be gradually eroded away completely.

They couldn't rush.

More importantly, Old Ghost couldn't make the decision - he didn't know the boss's intentions.

If he made a rash decision now that went against the boss's wishes, that would truly ruin everything!

Old Ghost's mind raced rapidly. He glanced at the man who had remained silent the whole time, then slowly spoke.

"Sir, we understand both conditions you mentioned."

His voice was somewhat dry but still steady.

"However..."

He changed his tone.

"Such a major matter has already exceeded what Old Seventh and I can decide."

The silent man neither approved nor disapproved of Old Ghost's statement.

He didn't nod or shake his head.

The two men remained in place without moving, as if waiting for something, or as if silently passing judgment.

Scar-face flexed his recently reconnected arm, joints making crisp cracking sounds. The way he looked at Old Ghost and Seventh Master was filled with sick satisfaction.

...

Meanwhile.

Deep in the black market, in a luxurious private room isolated from the chaos outside.

The air was filled with the elegant scent of expensive incense.

In the center of a huge circular sofa made of unknown metal, floated an irregular black crystal.

The crystal's surface clearly projected everything happening in Old Ghost Hall's front room.

The images and sounds were reproduced with perfect clarity.

The king of Linzhou's black market, Chen Ao, was half-lying on the sofa, toying with two smooth metal balls in his hand.

Inside the balls, several elements flashed back and forth, each time leaving different burn marks, blade marks, freeze marks... on Chen Ao's hands, which quickly repaired themselves.

He watched the scene in the crystal with great interest, as if watching an entertaining play.

And across from him, Li Mo from Qingyun Pharmaceuticals stood perfectly straight, a faint, elusive smile on his face.

"Quite interesting."

Chen Ao spoke, the metal balls clinking crisply in his palm.

"A newly awakened Myth-level profession, though he looks reckless, his strength is indeed good. A promising seedling."

He was referring to Zhao Tianyang.

"And those two old guys, one playing the good cop, the other the bad cop, quite coordinated too. Facing pressure from both our sides, they can still hold out until now - they have some courage."

Li Mo bowed slightly: "They're just grasshoppers after autumn, they won't last much longer."

"Can't say that." Chen Ao shook his head, sitting up straight, his gaze shifting from the crystal to Li Mo's face. "What I'm more curious about is the person behind them."

Chen Ao's fingertips lightly tapped on the sofa armrest.

"Li Mo, tell me, what kind of person would choose to cooperate with these two old guys?"

This was a question.

And one that had puzzled him for a long time.

"Old Ghost Hall's medicine, whether in quality or quantity, is terrifyingly good. Someone who can produce something like this must have financial power and background that places them among the absolute top tier on the entire Blue Star."

"But such a person, why?"

Chen Ao's voice carried a trace of confusion.

"In Linzhou City, the forces wanting to cooperate with him could line up from the black market all the way outside the city gates. Those more capable, better connected, with better channels than Old Ghost and Seventh Master - if not ten thousand, at least eight thousand."

"Why did he specifically choose two old guys who have nothing?"

"These two people, besides having muddled around at the bottom of the black market for decades without achieving anything, what other value do they have?"

This didn't make logical sense.

The strong only associate with the strong.

This was an unshakeable truth.

Yet Old Ghost Hall's boss's choice completely violated this truth.

Listening to Chen Ao's analysis, the smile on Li Mo's face deepened.

"Master Ao, perhaps your perspective on the problem is different from that mysterious boss's."

"Oh?" Chen Ao raised an eyebrow.

Li Mo walked unhurriedly to the wine cabinet, poured himself a glass of red wine, and gently swirled it.

"Master Ao, what do you think is the most important quality in a partner for someone who truly stands at the peak, holding absolute power?"

Chen Ao didn't answer immediately, he was thinking.

Ability? Resources? Connections?

They all seemed important, yet none seemed the most crucial.

"Loyalty?" he tentatively offered one word.

"No." Li Mo shook his head, rejecting this answer.

"Loyalty can change. When the benefits are large enough, any loyalty will develop cracks."

He raised his glass toward the light, admiring that rich red color.

"That boss chose Old Ghost and Seventh Master precisely because they have nothing."

This sentence made Chen Ao's movements pause.

Chapter 110: Maybe the Abyssal Domains

Those words made Chen Ao's movement pause for a moment.

Li Mo continued: "A powerful partner can certainly bring a lot of conveniences. But at the same time, he has his own ambitions, his own calculations, and his own bottom line."

"When you need him to do something... that crosses the line, he will weigh the options, he will hesitate, and he might even refuse."

"Because he has too many things to lose."

Li Mo turned and looked straight at Chen Ao.

"But Old Ghost and Seventh Master are different."

"Their lives have already fallen to rock bottom; there's nothing left for them to lose. What that boss offered them is a rebirth they never dreamed possible."

"So they have no bottom line, no ambitions, and no hesitation."

"Their greatest advantage is that they themselves own nothing. That's why they are willing, and only able, to hand everything over."

Li Mo's analysis cut straight to the heart of the matter like a razor-sharp blade.

"That boss doesn't need a 'partner' at all."

"What he needs is an absolutely obedient 'tool' who will carry out any order for him."

"A perfect tool that won't betray him."

Li Mo hit the nail on the head.

"You, Master Ao, can't do that. Neither can I."

"Because we have too much already."

The private room fell into a long silence.

Chen Ao, playing with the metal sphere, unconsciously stopped his actions.

Li Mo's words left him with a chill.

Not because of the words themselves, but because of what they revealed about that mysterious boss's way of operating.

Extreme confidence.

An absolute confidence in his own strength that crushes everything!

He doesn't care who his collaborators are, because in his eyes, anyone is just a chess piece in his plan.

People like that are more terrifying than any powerful opponent.

Because you never know where their trump cards lie.

Li Mo's words sent an invisible ripple through the luxurious private room.

Chen Ao's movements came to a complete halt.

He was not a fool; on the contrary, the fact that he sat as Linzhou's black market king proved his intellect far exceeded the ordinary.

He instantly understood the deeper meaning behind Li Mo's words.

"Your analysis is interesting."

After a long while, Chen Ao spoke again, placing the metal sphere on the table with a dull clack.

"But that raises a bigger question."

Chen Ao leaned forward, radiating a dangerous aura.

"Who exactly is he?"

That question was the core.

"I reviewed every family and company with a name in Linzhou and the surrounding cities in my head."

Chen Ao spoke each word deliberately.

"None of them match."

Li Mo swirled his wine glass gently, his face still wearing that composed, unhurried smile.

"Master Ao, your scope is still too narrow."

"Expand it a bit—cover the whole Greater Xia, or even the entire real world."

Chen Ao's eyebrow twitched.

"What gives you such certainty?"

"Their way of doing things." Li Mo took a sip of wine. "Those true leviathans at the top have pride and rules. They might covet Linzhou's market, but they wouldn't use such a crude method."

"They have a hundred more elegant, more covert ways to swallow things silently."

"For the sake of this profit, they wouldn't personally step in and hire two low-level black market trash as agents. That doesn't fit their identity or their interest logic."

Chen Ao fell into thought.

He couldn't refute Li Mo's words.

"Could it be some nouveau riche who got lucky and suddenly rose up?" Chen Ao offered another possibility.

Li Mo smiled.

"Master Ao, the market economy leaves traces. If he could produce so many high-quality medicines, there must be a massive production line, raw material supply, and R&D team backing him."

"Those things don't appear out of thin air."

"Unless..."

A playful edge crept into Li Mo's smile.

"He can, like a god, conjure these things from nowhere."

The air quieted again at that sentence.

Someone who could create things out of nothing?

Absurd.

"Impossible." Chen Ao dismissed it outright.

"Yes, impossible." Li Mo nodded in agreement. "So after eliminating all impossibilities, whatever remains, however unbelievable, must be the truth."

He set down his wine glass.

"Now, only two possibilities remain."

"First, some ancient family that has remained hidden for centuries and is unknown to the world wants to reemerge."

Chen Ao tapped his knuckles on the table with a staccato sound.

"Unlikely." He refuted his own guess. "Those ancient monsters guard their reputation more than anyone. If they were to reveal themselves, it would be with thunder and spectacle, drawing everyone's attention. They wouldn't choose a small place like Linzhou and use two mouse-like lackeys to carry out such low-level covert moves."

"You are wise, Master Ao."

Li Mo bowed slightly in agreement.

"Then only the final possibility remains."

The light in the private room seemed to dim at that moment.

Li Mo looked at Chen Ao and slowly uttered two words.

"The Abyssal Domains."

Those two words fell like two invisible mountains and crashed down!

Chen Ao's fingers stopped tapping the table abruptly.

The private room was deathly silent.

Since the age of practitioners began, the Abyssal Domains had become a place no one could avoid.

It runs parallel to the real world and is the destination for practitioners.

Instances, equipment, treasures, secret realms—all lie within the Abyssal Domains. Likewise, countless monsters and endless battles are found there.

The private room remained deathly quiet.

On the floating crystal, the standoff in front of Old Ghost Hall continued—the arrogant shouts of Scar-face and Seventh Master's steady maneuvering had become a silent pantomime.

All of Chen Ao's attention focused on Li Mo.

He sat up slowly, and the oppressive aura that belonged to the black market king, for the first time, was aimed without reservation at Li Mo.

"You're connected?"

His tone was flat but carried the weight of a storm about to break.

Li Mo did not answer yes or no.

Chen Ao did not need him to answer.

"Recently, haven't your Abyssal Domains people been too active?"

This worried him as well—people from the Abyssal Domains... their strength had no upper limit!

The resources and combat power controlled by Abyssal forces were beyond others' comprehension.

Normally, Abyssal forces would look down on the paltry gains of the real world, but lately, things seemed different.

Li Mo fell silent for a moment. He glanced at the crystal's image of Zhao Tianyang standing behind Old Ghost and Seventh Master like a silent demonic statue.

In the end, he seemed to make a decision.

He didn't look at Chen Ao again, instead turning his gaze toward the window, toward the black market—the part of the sky that would never see sunlight, perpetually murky.

"Because..."

Li Mo's voice became a bit ethereal, as if coming from another world.

"Monsters have completely, utterly changed from enemies to be resisted into resources."

Chapter 111: Abyssal Domains Past

Li Mo's words created invisible ripples in the luxurious private room.

Abyssal Domains.

A special space that appeared alongside the world's transformation and the job change system.

In the first hundred years, it was synonymous with natural disasters.

It was the bottomless chasm that countless heroes filled with their flesh and blood, the Sword of Damocles hanging over Blue Star's reality.

The Abyssal Domains would slowly invade and corrode reality.

But with the emergence of twelve legendary heroes who would be remembered throughout history, and after eight eras of struggle, humanity's declining momentum was completely reversed.

The horn of counterattack sounded—humanity was no longer passively defending, but for the first time established permanent strongholds within the Abyssal Domains, achieving permanent residence.

From that moment on, the times had changed.

The once clearly divided ideological conflict between the "Guardian Faction," which advocated protecting Blue Star's homeland, and the "Pioneer Faction," which advocated developing the Abyssal Domains, gradually lost its meaning.

Because the Abyssal Domains were no longer merely a threat.

They had become a treasure trove.

Chen Ao sat up completely straight, staring at Li Mo as he waited for what came next.

Li Mo didn't keep him in suspense—he knew that what Chen Ao needed now was information, the most complete and core information.

"The Abyssal Domains are currently divided into seven Stable Zones and three War Zones."

"Stable Zones, as the name implies, have been completely controlled by humanity. The internal monster ecosystem has been entirely transformed, becoming 'pastures' that stably produce materials, experience, and equipment."

"And the three War Zones are the true frontlines where humanity clashes with the main forces of the Abyssal Domains monsters."

Li Mo's voice remained steady, yet carried a grand narrative sense that made one's heart palpitate.

"The current situation is that humanity's main forces in the Abyssal Domains have been stuck in the Third War Zone for hundreds of years."

"According to calculations from the top think tanks, it might be impossible to advance even one step further within a thousand years."

Chen Ao didn't speak.

Having reached his position as the black market king, he naturally understood what this meant.

When an expanding incremental market turns into a saturated market, what happens next is inevitable.

Involution.

And even more brutal internal competition.

"Outside the War Zones, monsters have completely become resources farmed by humanity, their only value being to be squeezed dry to the last drop of marrow."

Li Mo picked up the glass of red wine but didn't drink it.

"When something is a resource, it faces competition."

"Where there's competition, there are winners and losers."

"And so, within the Abyssal Domains, new factions have emerged."

Chen Ao's fingertips tapped lightly on the table, emitting dull sounds.

This was his habit when thinking.

"The first faction, I call them the 'Resource Conservation Faction,'" Li Mo continued. "They advocate that since resources are limited, they should be concentrated to supply the most elite experts, hoping they can break through first and lead humanity to shatter the shackles of the Third War Zone."

"Sounds noble on the surface," Chen Ao snorted coldly. "In reality, it's just stripping resources from the majority to give to a small handful. This will only make the strong stronger and the weak weaker—the conflicts will only become sharper."

"Master Ao hits the nail on the head," Li Mo nodded. "So the second faction emerged in response."

He paused briefly, and the air in the private room seemed to grow heavier.

"The Resource Transfer Faction."

Chen Ao's movements stopped.

Li Mo looked at him and spoke word by word: "The people in this faction believe that since resources within the Abyssal Domains are becoming saturated and competition is fierce, why not turn their gaze... back to Blue Star?"

"Their core philosophy is to treat Blue Star practitioners—who are far weaker than Abyssal Domains humans—and even ordinary people, as 'resources' to be processed like monsters."

Even Chen Ao couldn't help feeling a bone-chilling cold when he heard these words.

Treating their own kind as resources like monsters?

"This... this kind of rhetoric is allowed?"

"Of course it's not allowed," Li Mo smiled. "In public opinion, this faction has always been despised by the mainstream, nailed to the pillar of shame. After all, we all share the same origin—we're all Blue Star humans."

"But..." Li Mo's tone shifted.

"As internal conflicts within the Abyssal Domains become increasingly severe, this voice hasn't disappeared—instead, it's shown signs of resurgence."

"After all, compared to the differences between Abyssal Domains humans and Blue Star humans, Abyssal Domains humans themselves are obviously more closely related, yet now they frequently kill and compete against each other."

"When survival becomes the issue, morality is the cheapest thing."

Deathly silence filled the private room.

On the crystal screen, Scar-face was still throwing his weight around, while Old Ghost and Seventh Master's faces were extremely grim.

But in Chen Ao's eyes, this scene had taken on a completely different meaning.

He had always thought this was just commercial suppression, a conflict of interests between an outsider and the local powers.

Now it seemed he was wrong.

Terribly wrong.

This might be... civilization plundering civilization.

A higher civilization hunting a lower civilization.

Even though they shared the same origin.

Now, the difference was enormous.

"And there's a third faction," Li Mo's voice pulled Chen Ao back from his thoughts.

"The Hedonist Faction."

"The people in this faction lack the courage to continue fighting in the Abyssal Domains, look down on the Resource Conservation Faction's scheming, and feel disgusted by the Resource Transfer Faction's ideology."

"Their only thought is to return to Blue Star with the enormous wealth and power they've accumulated in the Abyssal Domains."

Li Mo swirled his wine glass, the rich red liquid leaving trails on the glass walls.

"For them, the future of the Abyssal Domains no longer concerns them. Returning to Blue Star and relying on their far superior strength and knowledge compared to local practitioners to live as privileged elites enjoying wealth and luxury is the best choice."

"So..." Chen Ao's voice was somewhat dry.

He finally understood what Li Mo was trying to say.

"Exactly," Li Mo confirmed his guess.

"This mysterious boss behind Old Ghost Hall—regardless of which faction he belongs to—his intentions are definitely not pure."

"If he's from the Resource Transfer Faction, then Linzhou, and even the entire Blue Star, are just fattened livestock waiting to be slaughtered in his eyes—a massive resource package."

"If he's from the Hedonist Faction, then he's a shark returning to a fish pond. He'll use the most brutal methods to establish his own absolute order to satisfy his desire to lord over others."

Li Mo set down his wine glass heavily.

"Either way, it's not good news for us."

"Because in his world, Blue Star's rules are worthless."

"He doesn't care about market balance, doesn't care about the Three Giants, and certainly doesn't care about any black market king."

The strong only associate with the strong.

What Li Mo had said earlier—that Old Ghost Hall's boss chose Old Ghost and Seventh Master because they had nothing and were perfect tools.

Chapter 112: Suggests Showing Weakness

Now, Chen Ao had reached a deeper level of understanding.

It wasn't because he needed tools.

But because in his eyes, everyone in the entire city of Linzhou, even the entire Blue Star, aside from himself, were all just tools.

There was simply no option for "cooperation."

Only "using" and "being used."

Chen Ao closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, they held a profound, bottomless calm.

"So, what is your suggestion?"

Chen Ao took the initiative to speak, breaking the suffocating silence.

Li Mo picked up the glass of red wine that had already gone cold, gently swirling it.

"Show goodwill."

He uttered two words.

"Before understanding the other party's core objective, any hostile action could invite devastating retaliation."

"Master Ao, I might speak a bit harshly this time."

Li Mo put down the wine glass, straightened his posture, and for the first time, did not adopt that humble stance.

"You are the king in Linzhou."

"Looking across the entire Blue Star, yes, you are also considered a significant figure."

"But..."

Li Mo's tone suddenly turned sharp.

"In the eyes of those who have returned from the Abyssal Domains, your current foundation, your current strength, amounts to nothing."

"Even..."

"You don't even qualify to be a stepping stone beneath their feet."

As his words fell.

The air in the private room seemed to instantly solidify.

On the floating crystal, the two subordinates at the entrance of Old Ghost Hall were still swaggering and making a show of their strength; their arrogant shouts now sounded so grating and foolish.

Chen Ao's hand resting on the table slowly lifted.

The metal ball composed of several elements in his hand began to flicker wildly with internal light, violent energy surging within it, as if it could explode at any moment.

A terrifying pressure erupted with Chen Ao at its center, spreading outwards!

This was the wrath of the Linzhou Black Market King.

Yet, Li Mo simply stood quietly, as if the pressure strong enough to crush steel was merely a gentle breeze against his face.

"Master Ao, you are angry."

He stated a fact.

"Bang!"

A dull thud.

The elemental sphere in Chen Ao's hand was crushed by him with sheer force!

The violent elemental energy exploded instantly, but did not spread outwards in the slightest. Instead, it was tightly confined within Chen Ao's palm by an even greater force, forming a chaotic vortex of energy.

Flames, frost, lightning, wind blades...

Several types of forces tore at each other, annihilated, and emitted a grating sizzling sound within his grasp.

"Li Mo."

Chen Ao spoke word by word, each syllable seeming to be squeezed out from between his teeth.

"Do you think that just because I've been talking pleasantly with you, you have the right to boss me around?"

Li Mo did not answer.

He simply raised his right hand.

There was no earth-shattering aura, nor any dazzling, brilliant visual effects.

He just simply opened his five fingers.

The next second.

The violent elemental vortex in Chen Ao's palm suddenly stilled.

It wasn't suppressed, nor was it dispersed.

It just... stopped.

As if time had been paused in that small space.

The flames no longer danced, the ice crystals no longer spread, the lightning solidified mid-air, and the wind blades ceased their howling.

All the violent energy seemed like specimens sealed in amber, frozen in their final moment before detonation.

Chen Ao's body jolted violently.

He could feel it—his control over those elements had been forcibly snatched away by a more advanced, more domineering power!

How was this possible!

Li Mo!

This man who had always been overly cautious in front of him, seeming more like a senior advisor than a powerful individual!

How could he possess such strength?

Chen Ao was utterly astounded; for the first time in a true sense, he looked squarely at the man before him.

He had always believed his judgment of people was accurate.

This Li Mo was scheming, profound, but of average strength, relying more on the backing of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals.

Now it seemed.

He was wrong.

Extremely wrong!

"Master Ao, your judgment of people isn't wrong."

Li Mo seemed to see through Chen Ao's thoughts, his five fingers slowly closing.

The energy vortex in Chen Ao's palm then vanished silently into nothingness, dissipating into the purest particles in the air.

"I am indeed as you thought, overly cautious, accustomed to living under someone else's thumb."

A trace of self-mockery appeared on Li Mo's face.

"You just... are far from realizing the sheer magnitude of the difference between an ordinary human from the Abyssal Domains and a powerhouse standing at the apex of Blue Star."

"Someone like me..."

Li Mo paused, as if searching for an appropriate word.

"...in the Abyssal Domains, can only be considered a barely surviving maggot, scrambling for the next resource meal every day, constantly at risk of dying in some inconspicuous corner."

Maggot?

Chen Ao's heart contracted violently.

A powerhouse who could easily strip him of his elemental control, in the Abyssal Domains, was merely a maggot?

The impact of these words was far more terrifying than the display of power moments ago!

"A failure who found it incredibly difficult to even survive in the Abyssal Domains, was consequently eliminated, and had no choice but to flee back to Blue Star..."

Li Mo extended his own hand, looking at his palm lines.

"I've developed such a humble style of conduct, but the power I command is also not something the humans of Blue Star can easily handle."

His words were like a heavy hammer, blow after blow, shattering all of Chen Ao's pride as the Black Market King.

Li Mo raised his head, looking at Chen Ao again.

It was a gaze mixed with pity and indifference.

"Master Ao, now, you should think carefully."

"A maggot like me, who fled back from the Abyssal Domains, possesses such strength."

"Then..."

"What are the chances..."

"That the person behind Old Ghost Hall is weaker than you?"

Dead silence filled the private room.

Li Mo's lightly spoken rhetorical question felt like an invisible mountain, pressing down heavily on Chen Ao's heart.

What are the chances that he is weaker than you?

Chen Ao's body froze in place; he could even hear the frantic beating of his own heart.

Li Mo's strength had completely overturned his perception.

And such a person, whom he already considered a top-tier powerhouse, in the Abyssal Domains, was actually just... a maggot?

A struggling failure fighting to survive?

Then how terrifying must the true Abyssal Domains powerhouses be?

And was that mysterious person behind Old Ghost Hall truly someone who returned from the Abyssal Domains?

Which level did he belong to?

Countless thoughts collided wildly in Chen Ao's mind, making his head feel like it was splitting open.

The cunning, strength, and status he had always prided himself on as the Linzhou Black Market King seemed so laughable, so fragile, at this moment.

After a long time, Chen Ao finally found his voice, which was extremely dry.

"Why?"

He stared intently at Li Mo.

"With your strength, why live like a dog?"

This wasn't just a question; it was an incomprehensible anger.

A powerhouse should have the dignity of a powerhouse!

For someone like Li Mo to grovel before the directors of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals, to fawn over him, the Black Market King, at every turn—this was simply an insult to the very term "powerhouse"!

Chen Ao could not accept it.

Chapter 113: I Don't Accept

"Dog?"

Hearing this word, Li Mo didn't get angry. Instead, he laughed.

It was a laugh that came from deep within, carrying a sense of relief and worldly weariness.

"Master Ao, that's an excellent question you've asked."

"In the Abyssal Domains, many people have asked themselves the same question."

He raised his hand, looking at his palm lines as if recalling something.

"And then, they all died."

Li Mo's answer was simple, yet brutal.

"In the Abyssal Domains, the cheapest thing is dignity. The easiest to die are those arrogant experts who think too highly of themselves."

"Even the current strongest Executors prioritize caution above all else in their fundamental character..."

"We've all struggled at the brink of death, understanding that arrogance is the greatest enemy."

"Maggots like me know how to retract our claws, how to wallow in the mud, how to cling to life beneath the feet of giant beasts - that's how we survive."

"Only by surviving do we earn the right to compete for the next resource."

"Only by surviving do we earn the right to see the sun of the next day."

Li Mo turned his head, looking back at Chen Ao with a gaze that was terrifyingly calm.

"Living is everything."

"Everything I do is for the sake of better survival."

"So I never consider humility as something shameful. On the contrary, I see it as wisdom, a kind of... secret to longevity."

Secret to longevity.

These five words pierced into Chen Ao's heart like five red-hot iron needles.

He was completely speechless.

Everything he held firm to, everything he took pride in, appeared as fragile as paper before Li Mo's survival principles forged from mountains of corpses and seas of blood.

Li Mo seemed quite satisfied with Chen Ao's reaction.

He sat back down and refilled Chen Ao's already empty wine glass.

"So, Master Ao, my suggestion is simple."

"Show goodwill."

"Take the initiative to extend our friendly intentions toward Old Ghost Hall and the person behind them."

Chen Ao didn't move, only watching the swirling red liquid in his glass.

Li Mo continued, his reasoning frighteningly clear.

"This brings us nothing but benefits with no drawbacks."

"First possibility: the other party truly is someone we can't afford to offend. Then our goodwill gesture at least ensures we won't be immediately marked as enemies. With good luck, we might even establish a connection and gain unexpected benefits."

"After all, if he wants to operate in Linzhou, he'll need a local guide. Old Ghost and Seventh Master are too low-profile to handle major affairs, while we are the better choice."

Chen Ao's Adam's apple moved slightly.

Li Mo's words were quite tempting.

"Second possibility."

Li Mo's tone shifted, a playful smile appearing on his face.

"If, and I mean if, we get incredibly lucky and the other party is actually just a soft target who stumbled upon some kind of lucky encounter?"

"Then our goodwill becomes the perfect disguise."

"We can use this opportunity to openly approach him, figure out his background, and probe his true capabilities."

"Then..."

Li Mo made a subtle gesture, running his thumb across his neck.

"When he's least prepared, we swallow him whole."

"His lucky encounter, his wealth, everything he has will become ours."

The atmosphere in the private room instantly shifted from solemn to chillingly cold.

Chen Ao finally looked up, staring at Li Mo.

"Stabbing someone in the back - that's too low-class."

He spoke word by word.

This was his bottom line as the Black Market King.

You could be ruthless, you could be vicious, but you couldn't be without principles, you couldn't betray trust!

"Low-class?"

Li Mo seemed to have heard the biggest joke of his life, unable to hold back his laughter.

"Hahahaha..."

He laughed so hard he rocked back and forth, completely shedding his previous humble demeanor.

"Master Ao, oh Master Ao, you're really... too adorable."

He wiped tears of laughter from his eyes, leaning forward closer to Chen Ao.

"So what if we do?"

His voice dropped low, yet brimmed with unrestrained audacity.

"Even if we really backstab them, so what?"

"In Linzhou, who can punish you?"

"On Blue Star, how many people could possibly punish you and me working together?"

"Rules? Character?"

Li Mo extended a finger, gently shaking it.

"These things are just shackles that the strong use to bind the weak."

"When we stand high enough, our words become the rules!"

"Our actions define character!"

"Rules?"

Chen Ao repeated these two words as if hearing them for the first time.

Then he laughed.

Not laughter born of anger, but pure, bone-deep mockery and disdain.

"Haha... Hahahaha!"

The laughter echoed through the luxurious private room, yet carried a chilling, murderous coldness.

Li Mo didn't speak, just watched him quietly, the humble yet playful smile on his face completely unchanged, as if appreciating a play with a predetermined script.

"Li Mo, you're talking to me about rules?"

Chen Ao's laughter cut off abruptly.

He stood up.

His tall figure instantly overshadowed Li Mo, the cast shadow making the latter's smile appear dim and unclear.

"Your way of doing things isn't called rules."

Chen Ao spoke word by word, each syllable seeming dredged from an ice cellar.

"That's called clinging to life."

"It's the way dogs live."

He extended his finger, almost poking Li Mo's nose.

"Wagging your tail begging for mercy, surviving in cracks, picking up scraps at your master's feet, then baring your teeth at weaker stray dogs."

"Is this the survival wisdom you learned in the Abyssal Domains?"

"Is this the longevity secret you're so proud of?"

Faced with these nearly insulting words, Li Mo's reaction was terrifyingly calm.

He even picked up his wine glass, raising it in a toast to Chen Ao.

"Master Ao is right."

"But at least the dog is still alive."

Li Mo drained his glass in one gulp.

"While those dignified wolves have long since rotted away to nothing."

Chen Ao stared at him, saying nothing.

The air in the private room stagnated, the arrogant cursing from Scar-face on the floating crystal seeming distorted by the overwhelming pressure.

"So this is your suggestion?" Chen Ao asked.

"Yes." Li Mo answered crisply.

"Very well."

Chen Ao withdrew his hand, turning away, no longer looking at Li Mo.

As if looking at him any longer would be an insult to himself.

He admitted that Li Mo's displayed strength had shocked him.

He admitted that the existence of the Abyssal Domains weighed on him like a massive mountain, making it hard to breathe.

But so what?

Chen Ao had climbed from a street thug to his current position as Linzhou's Black Market King not through caution and carefulness, and certainly not through backstabbing!

It was through blood!

Through fists!

Through trampling all who dared challenge him, along with their bones and dignity, deep into the mud!

Show goodwill?

Disguise?

Then find an opportunity to swallow them whole?

Too troublesome.

And too degrading.

This wasn't his style.

Chapter 114: Direct Confrontation

If originally, Chen Ao was still considering whether to think twice, test several times, before deciding his attitude.

Then Li Mo's words now undoubtedly provoked him.

"I've heard your suggestion."

Chen Ao walked over to the floating black crystal.

"But I don't accept it."

He stood with his back to Li Mo, his voice calm yet carrying an unquestionable finality.

"My way of doing things isn't that complicated."

"In my territory, if you're a dragon, you coil. If you're a tiger, you crouch."

"I don't care if he's some fierce dragon returned from the Abyssal Domains, nor do I care if he's from that damn 'Resource Transfer Faction' or 'Hedonist Faction'."

Chen Ao reached out and gently pressed his hand against the cold crystal surface.

"When you come to my Linzhou territory, you follow my rules!"

Li Mo watched Chen Ao's back, a barely noticeable glint flashing deep in his eyes.

He seemed to want to say something, but Chen Ao didn't give him the chance.

A massive surge of mental energy flowed from Chen Ao's palm into the black crystal.

"No more testing."

His voice exploded directly in the minds of Scar-face and the silent man in front of Old Ghost Hall!

"Let them see Chen Ao's style!"

...

Old Ghost Hall.

The standoff continued.

The ferocious grin on Scar-face's face grew wider and wider, he was enjoying Old Ghost and Seventh Master's expression of anger they dared not show.

The dark red patterns on Zhao Tianyang's body glowed like branding irons, his violent aura almost materializing into substance.

Just as he was about to lose control.

The expression on Scar-face's face suddenly froze.

Beside him, the man who had been as silent as a stone statue showed an almost imperceptible tremor.

The two exchanged glances.

Both saw shock in each other's reactions.

And a hint of... uncontrollable fervor!

Master Ao's command?

No more testing?

Let them see... Master Ao's style?

Although they didn't know what had happened, Chen Ao saying this meant...

He didn't care about consequences, didn't care about the situation, they could go all out!

Scar-face slowly, very slowly, withdrew that disgusting ferocious grin from his face.

Replacing it was an emotionless, pure coldness.

He no longer looked at Old Ghost and Seventh Master, but focused all his attention on Zhao Tianyang who stood like a demon god.

Slowly, he moved the arm that had just been restrained, joints making cracking sounds.

"Just now..."

He spoke, his voice raspy like two pieces of sandpaper rubbing together.

"The two conditions I mentioned are all cancelled."

Old Ghost and Seventh Master's hearts skipped a beat, before they could feel any relief.

Scar-face's scar-crossed face split into what could be called a ferocious curve.

"Master Ao gave you a chance."

"You yourselves didn't cherish it."

He twisted his neck, bones cracking loudly.

"Now, I've changed my mind."

The silent man also slowly took a step forward.

One step.

The entire floor of Old Ghost Hall trembled slightly.

A pressure far more terrifying and profound than Scar-face's suddenly descended!

Scar-face extended a finger, first pointing at the mountain of medicine piled on the ground, then pointing at Old Ghost and Seventh Master.

"All these goods, we're taking."

"Your lives, we're taking too."

His final finger landed on Zhao Tianyang, carrying a sick excitement.

"As for you..."

"Master Ao said your bones should be quite hard."

"Perfect for his newly raised pet to sharpen its teeth."

The moment his words fell.

Scar-face's figure disappeared.

Not moving so fast it became blurry.

But vanished into thin air.

As if he had never been standing there.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master's hearts skipped a beat.

Space-based skill!

This was an extremely rare and troublesome ability even among Practitioners!

Zhao Tianyang's massive body instinctively tensed, the dark red patterns on his surface flowing wildly, his violent aura exploding without reservation, trying to sense the opponent's position.

But it was all in vain.

No trace of energy remained in the air.

The next moment.

A deadly chill exploded behind Zhao Tianyang!

Scar-face's figure appeared like a ghost, his intact arm transforming into a pale claw, fingertips gleaming with cold light capable of tearing through metal, directly aiming for Zhao Tianyang's back!

This strike was fast, vicious, leaving no room for retreat!

"Die, kid!"

In that split second, Zhao Tianyang had no time to turn around.

But he didn't turn around either.

He simply channeled all that violent aura into his back.

"Boom!"

A dull, extreme impact.

The claw solidly slammed into Zhao Tianyang's back.

No blood splattered.

Only the sound of a sledgehammer hitting steel plate, and the grating sound of bones being forcibly compressed.

Zhao Tianyang's massive body shook violently, stumbling forward one step.

The floor beneath his feet cracked inch by inch.

"Blocked it?"

Scar-face, failing to achieve results with his strike, looked completely stunned.

His claw could pierce through thirty-centimeter thick alloy steel plate!

How could this big guy's physical defense be this strong?

Just as Old Ghost and Seventh Master breathed a sigh of relief.

The silent man suddenly spoke, uttering one word.

"Shock."

Buzz!

An invisible vibration traveled along Scar-face's arm, instantly penetrating into Zhao Tianyang's body!

Zhao Tianyang's massive body was as if hit by a battering ram from inside, his chest violently caving inward, his entire body uncontrollably falling forward.

"Pfft!"

A mouthful of dark red blood sprayed out, splattering on the ground, actually making sizzling corrosive sounds.

"Tianyang!"

Seventh Master cried out in alarm.

Attack from both inside and outside!

Scar-face's physical attack was just a feint, this silent man's vibration skill was the real killing move!

"Hahaha! Scared now?"

Scar-face, having succeeded with his strike, laughed arrogantly.

He was about to pursue and deliver a fatal blow to the fallen Zhao Tianyang.

But his laughter abruptly stopped.

Because, Zhao Tianyang, stood up again.

He slowly, climbed up from the ground.

His movements were slow, even somewhat stiff, but each movement carried a heart-palpitating oppressive force.

Even more bizarre.

His aura had changed.

That pure, violent Asura energy was rapidly receding.

Replaced by something deeper, more ominous.

"Huh?"

Scar-face stopped in his tracks, the silent man also showed a serious expression for the first time.

They both sensed something wrong.

Zhao Tianyang kept his head down, his expression unclear.

They could only see the dark red patterns on his body suddenly brighten.

Not flickering.

But glowing to the extreme like red-hot branding irons!

Sizzle! Sizzle! Sizzle!

Countless fine blood threads suddenly emerged from his pores!

These blood threads weren't liquid, more like living red silk threads. After leaving his body, they didn't drip down, but eerily floated around Zhao Tianyang's body, wriggling gently like living creatures.

Myth-level profession... how could it be that simple!

Chapter 115: The Showdown Begins!

"What the hell is this?"

Scar-face instinctively took a step back.

The scene before him had completely exceeded his understanding.

But what horrified him even more was yet to come.

As those blood threads continuously left his body, Zhao Tianyang's originally massive, hill-like frame was visibly... shrinking!

His muscles were withering, his skin tightening, his entire body becoming increasingly dark and emaciated.

Within just a few breaths.

The formerly muscular giant had transformed into a figure of the same height but with a withered build, skin clinging tightly to bone, his entire body radiating an ominous blackish-red hue—a "zombie"!

It was as if all his flesh and moisture had been drained away, leaving only the most refined skeleton and sinews.

Yet the dangerous aura emanating from him had surged at least tenfold compared to before!

"This..."

Not just the enemies, even Old Ghost and Seventh Master felt their scalps tingling with terror.

They had been by Zhao Tianyang's side for some time, yet they had never witnessed him display such a bizarre and horrifying form!

Was this the true power of the Myth-level profession [Asura]?

Zhao Tianyang slowly raised his head.

His eyes had completely turned a pure dark red, devoid of any emotion, containing only the most primitive instinct for slaughter.

He moved.

Ignoring Scar-face, he locked his target onto the silent man.

Whoosh!

The countless blood threads floating around him, like a swarm of snakes receiving commands, instantly straightened, transforming into a sky-blanketing rain of crimson arrows that shot toward the silent man!

Every blood thread carried a piercing shriek as it tore through the air!

The silent man finally showed a change in expression.

He brought his hands together in front of him.

"Shield."

Hum!

An invisible air barrier instantly formed before him.

However.

Thump thump thump thump!

Those blood threads actually passed through the air barrier as if it weren't there, penetrating it effortlessly!

Their target wasn't the man's body at all, but the ground beneath his feet, the walls behind him, the ceiling above!

In just an instant.

The entire front hall of Old Ghost Hall was thoroughly pierced by these blood threads, woven into a massive, all-encompassing crimson spiderweb!

The silent man and Scar-face were completely trapped at the center of the web.

"Not good!"

The silent man's expression changed drastically; he finally realized what the other intended to do.

He wanted to detonate these blood threads!

"Too late."

A dry, hoarse voice, completely unlike that of a human, squeezed out from Zhao Tianyang's withered throat.

He extended his hand, which had become like a desiccated corpse's claw, and gently clenched it.

"Bind."

Hum—

The crimson spiderweb spread throughout the space abruptly tightened!

The terrifying binding force made the very space groan under the strain.

Scar-face let out a strange cry, wanting to use his spatial ability to escape again, but found the surrounding space completely locked down by these blood threads, becoming harder than steel!

"Break!"

The silent man roared, powerful energy surging from his entire body as he attempted to use vibrational force to snap the blood threads.

But those seemingly slender blood threads were unbelievably resilient; no matter how his power impacted them, they only trembled slightly without any signs of breaking!

Instead, they tightened even further!

"Damn it!"

Scar-face and the silent man felt panic for the first time.

They were trapped!

Trapped by a kid who had just awakened not long ago, using some unheard-of bizarre ability!

Old Ghost and Seventh Master were completely stunned.

Fighting one against two!

And overwhelming them!

Was this the person the boss had taken notice of?

This potential couldn't even be described as terrifying!

Just as Zhao Tianyang prepared to fully tighten the blood web and shred the two men to pieces.

The silent man suddenly gave up resistance.

He just coldly stared at Zhao Tianyang through the gaps in the blood web.

Then, with all his strength, he roared out a single word.

"Advance!"

The voice wasn't loud, but it carried a special frequency that penetrated the entire room.

The next second.

"Boom!"

"Boom rumble!"

The already precarious main door of Old Ghost Hall was violently smashed open from the outside!

Heavy door panels mixed with brick fragments exploded inward!

Amid the billowing dust.

Countless figures, like a black tide, surged madly through the doorway!

Their uniforms were identical, their auras fierce, and each carried a strong scent of blood.

Black uniforms, black killing intent, instantly filled the entire Old Ghost Hall.

The leaders moved swiftly, their targets clear, charging straight toward Scar-face and the silent man trapped in the blood web.

The remaining individuals formed a semicircular encirclement, tightly surrounding the emaciated-form Zhao Tianyang in the center.

The dust-filled air, mixed with a strong bloody scent, was suffocatingly oppressive.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master were forced back several steps by this sudden assault, leaning against the medicine cabinet behind them.

Looking at this group of well-trained, murderous black-clad individuals, Old Ghost's first thought wasn't fear.

It was disdain.

Chen Ao's men?

This is it?

So unrefined in their methods?

Starting a gang fight in someone else's territory, breaking down doors, smashing things—this is street thug behavior.

True underworld magnates kill without a trace, emphasizing "dignity."

Making such a big commotion, are they afraid people won't know Chen Ao is moving against Old Ghost Hall?

Stupid.

However, Old Ghost could accept this answer.

There are always foolish gamblers in this world; their current success exists only because their stupid decisions have won so far.

But such unrefined individuals will inevitably lose one day!

Disdain aside, the current situation was indeed perilous.

Originally, they had made some preparations to deal with possible underhanded moves from the three major medicine suppliers.

But who could have predicted that the first to strike would be Chen Ao, the manager of the black market.

And in this most ruthless, most brutal manner.

"Old Seventh, get ready."

Old Ghost's voice was very low as he pulled out a palm-sized, heavily scratched brass compass from his chest.

The compass needle was spinning wildly and erratically.

Seventh Master understood, discreetly slipping his hand into his sleeve where several small array discs, ready to be activated at any moment, were hidden.

Their gazes both fell on Zhao Tianyang in the center.

At this moment, Zhao Tianyang had become the eye of the storm.

"Kill!"

Without any extra words, from within the encirclement, the closest black-clad man roared, a flaming long sword materializing in his hand as he swung it down overhead.

This strike triggered everyone else's attacks.

Instantly, ice spikes, wind blades, shadow arrows, earthen spikes...

Dozens of skills of different attributes rained down from all directions, bombarding Zhao Tianyang!

They clearly intended to use the most direct focused fire to instantly obliterate this bizarre individual!

Chapter 116: Old Ghost's Black Hand

Facing this attack powerful enough to level an entire building, Zhao Tianyang's gaunt frame merely shifted slightly.

He raised his head.

Those pure crimson eyes swept over every person surrounding him.

No anger, no fear.

Only a deathly stillness of indifference.

As if he were looking at a group of... dead objects.

In the next instant.

He vanished.

Not the spatial teleportation disappearance like Scar-face.

But charging out from his original position with a speed that exceeded the limits of visual perception!

Boom!

The flaming longsword sliced through empty air, smashing hard into the ground and sending shattered stones flying everywhere.

Meanwhile, the black-clad man who had swung the sword stood frozen in place.

A gaping hole had somehow appeared through his chest.

Zhao Tianyang's figure materialized behind him.

The withered claw-like hand still held fragments of warm flesh.

One strike, instant death!

"He's behind!"

"How is that possible!"

Someone exclaimed in shock.

But it was already too late.

Zhao Tianyang's body transformed into a black-crimson afterimage, weaving through the confined space while leaving behind a series of deathly illusions.

He completely abandoned defense.

Every movement was a lethal attack.

Every attack inevitably claimed a life.

His body was the most terrifying weapon.

Most of the skills aimed at him struck empty air, riddling Old Ghost Hall's walls and floor with holes.

The few skills that did hit him merely left shallow marks on his black-crimson skin, unable to even make him pause.

The blood threads filling the space provided him with unparalleled perception and mobility, buffering any skills and attacks used by enemies.

Combined with his considerable attributes, he actually held the upper hand in the current situation.

Thud!

A burly man attempting to block with his shield was pierced through, shield and all, by Zhao Tianyang's claw.

Rip!

An Agility-type practitioner who tried to create distance was suddenly entangled by a blood thread that appeared out of nowhere, dragged back forcefully, and torn in half.

Zhao Tianyang single-handedly held off everyone's assault!

Even Scar-face and the silent man trapped in the blood web watched in stunned disbelief.

They had anticipated Zhao Tianyang would be troublesome.

But they never expected him to be troublesome to this degree!

"We can't wait any longer!" the silent man finally spoke, urgency coloring his voice. "Combine our strength, break this damned web!"

Scar-face snapped back to reality, a ferocious ruthlessness appearing on his face.

"Agreed!"

No longer holding back, the energy accumulated within their bodies erupted violently, fiercely impacting the blood threads binding them!

Buzz buzz buzz—

The crimson spiderweb emitted a piercing wail and began shaking violently.

Zhao Tianyang seemed to sense something too, his slaughter pausing slightly as those crimson eyes turned back toward the two men in the web.

"Block him!"

"Don't let him get distracted!"

The surviving black-clad practitioners seized this opportunity, mustering their courage again to launch a new wave of attacks.

This time, they had learned their lesson.

Several Support Department practitioners stepped forward, layering various slowing, weakening, and confusion auras onto Zhao Tianyang.

The main attackers maintained distance, beginning to chant more powerful, wider-range skills.

The moment the auras took effect, Zhao Tianyang's ghostly speed noticeably slowed for an instant.

His gaunt frame swayed, and for the first time, a hint of struggle appeared in his crimson eyes.

Now!

The energy fluctuations inside Old Ghost Hall had reached their peak of chaos.

Old Ghost shielded Seventh Master, his expression grim as water.

Just a little longer, and their arranged backup would arrive.

With those reinforcements, they should be able to hold out until the boss arrived!

But Old Ghost's breathing suddenly became rapid.

No.

They couldn't just think about holding out.

This was an opportunity!

A once-in-a-lifetime chance to prove their value to the boss!

They weren't just old men who could only mind the shop!

They weren't useless trash who could only rely on the boss's reputation!

Thinking this, a terrifying gleam erupted from Old Ghost's turbid eyes.

"Old Ghost?" Seventh Master started in surprise.

But Old Ghost ignored him, his withered fingers swiftly tracing the edge of the compass as a barely visible ghostly light shot out and silently entered a black-clad man chanting a fire spell.

The black-clad man was guiding a massive fireball to form, about to release it.

Suddenly, his entire body stiffened.

The highly concentrated fireball fizzled out with a soft poof right in front of him.

Spell backlash!

The black-clad man grunted, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, his face filled with disbelief.

The energy flow within his body felt like it had been forcibly severed by an invisible hand!

This bizarre scene made the surrounding companions pause momentarily.

Seventh Master's heart jumped even more violently.

This old guy...

The Old Ghost he had known for decades actually had this side to him!

That wasn't a simple support skill.

That was precise, malicious destruction!

A dirty underhanded trick!

He didn't know Old Ghost's profession, nor what he did before coming to Old Ghost Hall, but he was quite certain that Old Ghost's professional characteristics leaned toward exploration, treasure hunting, setting up beneficial formations, and researching item properties—a supportive lifestyle profession with almost zero direct combat capability.

But who would have thought that the feng shui secrets he used in reverse could be so vicious and ruthless!

"Heh."

Old Ghost let out a dry chuckle while continuously muttering words ordinary people couldn't understand.

His fingers kept adjusting the compass.

One ghostly light after another shot out.

A black-clad man preparing to cast an earthen wall stumbled inexplicably, falling flat on his face.

Another burly man swinging a giant axe suddenly felt his weapon become a hundred pounds heavier, nearly dropping it on his own foot.

Zhao Tianyang's frontal assault became the perfect cover.

Everyone's attention was drawn to that slaughter deity, nobody noticing the gaunt old man in the corner continuously pulling these small tricks.

With Old Ghost's secret assistance, Zhao Tianyang's pressure drastically reduced.

He roared, forcibly breaking free from several negative auras as his gaunt frame once again transformed into the scythe of death, unleashing a storm of blood and carnage among the crowd.

A support practitioner responsible for healing tried to heal a companion but found his skill wouldn't activate, as if the rules of that area had been tampered with.

He could only watch helplessly as his companion was torn apart by Zhao Tianyang's claw.

"Damn it! What's happening!"

"Something's wrong!"

The black-clad practitioners finally noticed something amiss, their attacks becoming disorganized.

Meanwhile, Old Ghost became even more proficient.

Seventh Master watched nearby, utterly dumbfounded.

Was this still the same Old Ghost who usually smiled cheerfully and avoided conflict?

This ruthlessness and foul-mouthed demeanor seemed more practiced than street thugs!

Old Ghost's professional characteristics made direct confrontation his absolute weakness.

But now, with Zhao Tianyang—this Asura who could both tank and deal damage—holding the front line, it perfectly compensated for his deficiencies.

This allowed him to completely unleash himself, bringing the insidious aspects of his profession to their ultimate expression!

Chapter 117: End of Seclusion

Lin Yu slowly opened his eyes.

The luxurious suite was already in complete disarray.

Expensive carpets were scorched with large patches of blackened marks from dissipated energy, and the air was filled with the pungent smell of elements running out of control.

But his sea of consciousness was unprecedentedly clear and tranquil.

Even with the heaven-defying leveling tool that was the Primordial Snap, this period of arduous cultivation had still consumed immense mental effort from him.

The seclusion was temporarily over.

With a thought, Lin Yu summoned his skill panel.

Rows of skill icons that were originally just white, blue, or even gold now contained a collection radiating with brilliant and mysterious red light.

[Light's Redemption (Primordial)]

[Rock Shield (Primordial)]

[Slow Spell (Primordial)]

[Blink (Primordial)]

...

These basic or advanced skills, after undergoing the tempering of billions of proficiency points, had undergone earth-shaking qualitative changes in their effects.

The instant-cast Primordial-tier [Light's Redemption] contained vast and majestic life energy, enough to forcefully drag someone on the verge of death with only one breath left back from the underworld, and it was even more stable and controllable than the previous self-destruct-style [Vitality Nourishment].

The Primordial-tier [Slow Spell] was no longer simply reducing enemy speed, but could distort the flow of time within a small area, trapping enemies in a stagnant hell where time was infinitely stretched.

And the Primordial-tier [Blink] allowed him to perform instantaneous movement ignoring spatial laws within a kilometer range within his line of sight, almost equivalent to a short-distance space jump.

But this wasn't the greatest harvest from his seclusion.

His attention finally settled on two brand new, equally powerful skills that had also reached the Primordial tier.

[Divine Remains Armament (Primordial)]

This was a pure defense and close-combat skill.

Once actively activated, a set of formidable battle armor composed of pure energy, shimmering with divine radiance, would instantly cover his entire body.

The effects were terrifying.

First, immunity to all known control-type effects.

Second, providing massive fixed damage reduction and percentage damage reduction, enough for him to withstand attacks far exceeding his own level.

Third, and most crucially, this armor could condense temporary weapons of any form according to his will. Sabers, spears, swords, halberds, axes, dagger-axes, hooks, forks... all eighteen traditional weapons were included and mastered.

This was the ultimate armament born for pure slaughter.

However, what truly delighted Lin Yu was the unique passive characteristic unlocked after this skill advanced to the Primordial tier.

[Still Water Reflects].

This was a passive effect.

Immunity to all mental-type attacks, immunity to most basic illusions, and permanent, significant enhancement of one's own mental stability.

Lin Yu carefully sensed his sea of consciousness.

Stable as eternal bedrock, clear as an ancient well without ripples.

The fatigue and stinging pain that felt like it could tear apart at any moment due to long-term use of million-fold amplification had completely vanished without a trace.

Replacing it was an absolute calmness and control.

He even felt that he had completely rid himself of dependence on [Mental Stabilizer].

A purely physical armament skill, its ultimate pinnacle characteristic turned out to be absolute defense on the mental level.

This was truly... an enormous and unexpected delight.

This meant his greatest weakness had been completely filled.

Lin Yu's thoughts turned to another skill, an equally interesting existence.

[Eight Directions Return to Origin (Primordial)]

At first glance, it seemed like an unremarkable all-attributes buff skill.

When activated, it provided massive damage bonuses for different elemental attributes like wind, fire, thunder, lightning, while significantly increasing attack speed and movement speed.

But its most powerful aspect was that it could freely convert any of Lin Yu's attacks into any attribute he needed.

Light, dark, space, even mental.

All attributes, full coverage.

This meant he no longer had so-called attribute weaknesses.

No matter what type of enemy he faced, no matter what strange resistances they possessed, he could instantly find the attack method that countered them.

And its Primordial characteristic made Lin Yu somewhat amused.

[Treading Snow Without Trace].

Also a passive effect.

Effect one, significantly increases movement speed in non-combat states.

Effect two, gains permanent [Concealment] effect, extremely difficult to detect by detection skills.

Effect three, when traversing any terrain, will not trigger trap-type skills, and can even be immune to some environmental damage.

Effect four, provides massive effect bonuses to all stealth and assassination-type skills.

A ferocious combat skill that encourages Practitioners to face enemies head-on and unleash myriad elemental changes.

Its ultimate destination actually taught one how to be a top-tier ambusher, engaging in sneak attacks and assassinations.

This skill tree progression was quite skewed.

It also gave Lin Yu some food for thought—this skill system was probably not as simple as he had imagined.

Lin Yu closed the skill panel and slowly stood up from the disarrayed ground.

His character attribute panel, those numbers representing strength, constitution, and spirit, showed no changes at all.

But he clearly understood that his comprehensive strength was at least ten times stronger than before the seclusion.

[Origin-Vitality Nourishment].

[Primordial-Rock Shield].

[Primordial-Still Water Reflects].

[Primordial-Divine Remains Armament].

With four layers of protection stacked, Lin Yu even felt confident standing still and letting an army bombard him with heavy firepower without suffering the slightest injury.

This was absolute defense.

And [Primordial-Slow Spell], with a single snap, could create an absolute slow field covering several kilometers that no one could escape.

Group control, acquired.

The combination of [Primordial-Blink] and [Treading Snow Without Trace] brought his mobility to an unimaginable level.

If he wanted to leave, probably no one in this world could stop him.

Mobility, also acquired.

The dual enhancement of [Eight Directions Return to Origin] and [Divine Remains Armament] could instantly skyrocket his basic damage to a terrifying level.

Attack amplification, likewise not lacking.

Now, he could be called an all-around versatile warrior without weaknesses.

The only pity.

Lin Yu's fingertips lightly tapped the armrest, emitting a very rhythmic sound.

He still lacked some sufficiently powerful offensive skills that could fully unleash the amplified power from [Eight Directions Return to Origin] and [Divine Remains Armament].

He also lacked a true hard control skill that could instantly deprive enemies of their ability to act.

Although [Slow Spell] was strong, it was ultimately only "slowing," not "imprisonment."

However, these weren't urgent matters.

Lin Yu slowly stood up, feeling the surging and docile power within his body that was almost overflowing.

Right now, he was extremely itching for action.

Chapter 118: Making Your Own Decision

Urgently needing a suitable location to test the results of his recent seclusion.

And while at it, see if he could grind some proficiency for his attack-type skills.

In the suite at Bug Residence?

Lin Yu's mind instantly conjured the image of a million-fold [Lightning Spell] going out of control and charring the entire Bug Residence core system to ashes.

No.

Absolutely not.

Bug Residence's defense system couldn't withstand his current "routine" operations.

He needed to go out and find a place.

Somewhere sturdy enough, remote enough, where he could really let loose and go wild without holding back.

Lin Yu walked to the adjacent room.

His younger sister Lin Yao was sitting cross-legged before the massive floor-to-ceiling window, eyes closed, her entire body enveloped in a faint, almost tangible glow of magical radiance.

The elements in the air were being drawn into her body at a speed far beyond normal comprehension, transforming into the purest magical energy.

Lin Yu could sense his sister's basic attributes were significantly increasing...

Damn, getting stronger just by breathing the air without even taking medicine...

Ridiculous!

This cultivation speed was simply unheard of.

Truly worthy of being an [Omni-Arcanist].

A faint smile appeared on Lin Yu's face.

He didn't disturb her verbally, instead leaving a brief voice message for Lin Yao through the room's communication system.

"Yao Yao, I'm heading out to take care of something, I'll be back soon, no need to worry."

After speaking, he turned and left the suite.

Stepping out the door, the luxurious yet empty corridor was completely silent, the thick carpet absorbing all footsteps.

Lin Yu walked casually while rapidly calculating in his mind.

Testing skills.

He had to find an appropriate place.

Although the black market had dedicated dueling arenas and training rooms, those places were too small.

Plus they were mixed environments with too many eyes watching.

Any skill he used now, even when instantly cast through [Primordial Snap], had power far beyond what it used to be.

The world-destroying scene of the million-fold amplified [Lightning Spell] was still vividly imprinted in his mind.

If Bug Residence's defense system couldn't handle it, those small venues in the black market would probably shatter at the slightest touch.

He needed somewhere sufficiently large, sufficiently sturdy, preferably sufficiently remote, where he could be completely unrestrained and operate without holding back.

A name suddenly emerged from the depths of his memory.

"Sky Dome Summit."

The largest and most renowned private training ground outside Linzhou City.

Rumor had it the owner had extraordinary connections and had spent enormous sums collecting unique spatial materials from around the world, creating dozens of completely realistic simulated environments.

Volcanoes, glaciers, primal jungles, even zero-gravity spaces.

They had everything one could imagine.

Only what you couldn't think of, nothing they couldn't provide.

Of course, the price was equally astronomical.

But for him now, money was just a number.

Perfect timing to go there and properly test the results of his recent seclusion.

Just as he made this decision, his phone vibrated slightly.

Lin Yu raised his hand to look.

It was a series of urgent communication requests and encrypted messages from Old Ghost and Seventh Master.

He casually opened them.

"Boss, Black Market Management Office personnel have arrived, purpose unknown."

Only one message - Old Ghost currently had no time to send anything else.

Black Market Management Office...

Lin Yu's movements didn't pause in the slightest as he continued toward Bug Residence's exit.

His heart remained completely calm.

Weren't they people from the three major medicine companies?

Since this was an internal black market dispute, then let black market rules resolve it.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master, having been entrenched in the black market for years - one skilled in unorthodox methods, the other proficient in formations and contracts - neither were pushovers.

What he needed were capable subordinates who could handle matters independently, not burdens who needed him to clean up after everything.

Thinking this, Lin Yu quickly tapped his phone a few times, edited a message, and sent it to both Old Ghost and Seventh Master.

The message content was extremely simple.

"Complete freedom to make decisions, no need to consult me."

After sending, he closed the communication interface.

No matter how poorly they handled it, it probably wouldn't come to fighting, right?

If it was just negotiations, whether he was there or not didn't make much difference.

To put it bluntly, his life experience and worldly knowledge couldn't compare to those two old foxes, Old Seventh and Old Ghost.

Trust sometimes held more power than physical presence.

He believed in his own judgment.

Passing through the long corridor, he arrived at Bug Residence's exclusive elevator.

Lin Yu's figure suddenly paused.

He slowly raised his hand, fingers spread open, then slowly closed them.

Just moments before, as his thoughts flowed, the vast yet docile life energy within him brought by [Origin-Vitality Nourishment] had produced a strange stirring.

He could clearly "see" every muscle fiber beneath his skin, every inch of bone, even every cell, undergoing extremely subtle, controllable changes according to his will.

Was this...

An extension of the [Physical Control] ability?

An interesting idea sprouted in his mind.

He tried to concentrate, channeling his willpower into his face.

The muscles beneath his skin began shifting in an inhuman manner, the height of his cheekbones changed, the line of his jaw became more angular, even his nose bridge quietly became more prominent.

Within mere seconds.

A completely different yet equally handsome face with a somewhat cold demeanor appeared reflected on the elevator's mirror-like metal door.

This was no longer simple disguise technique.

This was fundamentally altering his physical form.

Interesting.

Lin Yu released control over his facial features, restoring his original appearance.

This new discovery was undoubtedly a huge surprise.

This meant he now possessed an absolutely safe trump card for moving through the world.

But...

Not needed for now.

He was just returning to Linzhou City's urban area, going to a publicly operated training ground - no need for such secrecy and concealment.

Ding.

The elevator door slowly opened.

Lin Yu, wearing the disguise outfit provided by Bug Residence, stepped inside.

As the elevator descended smoothly, that unique black market atmosphere - mixed with various medicines, metals, and desires - once again washed over him.

He didn't linger in Bug Residence's lobby, heading straight for the exit.

The black market residents he encountered along the way - whether fierce-looking mercenaries or hurried businessmen - all instinctively made way when they saw Lin Yu, casting respectful glances his way.

The identity of being a lavish guest staying in Bug Residence's premium suites was itself a sufficiently weighty calling card in the black market.

Lin Yu passed through that heavy door that seemed to separate two different worlds, returning to the black market's main street that was forever brightly lit and bustling with activity.

When you possess strength and confidence, versus when you don't.

Standing in the same place, your state of mind is completely different.

When he knew that probably everyone in this entire black market combined wouldn't be qualified to exchange more than a few moves with him.

He felt incredibly free, confident, and at ease.

Lin Yu naturally exuded an aura known as that of a true powerhouse.

Chapter 119: The Top of the Sky

The black market's exit was an inconspicuous hidden door.

When Lin Yu passed through that door and returned to the surface, Linzhou's night wind mixed with the city's bustle swept over him.

Compared to that chaotic, primitive, desire-filled world underground, the city above seemed so orderly, even somewhat dull.

But Lin Yu's state of mind was completely different.

Before, he had been a lurking beast, every step taken in the shadows.

Now, he was a fierce tiger patrolling its territory, where both sunlight and darkness were open roads.

He casually hailed a vehicle and gave an address.

"Sky Dome Summit."

The vehicle started smoothly, merging into the endless stream of traffic, speeding toward the city outskirts.

Sky Dome Summit.

Rather than calling it a private training ground, it was more like an independent fortress city built on the outskirts of Linzhou.

Its area was almost equivalent to an entire district of Linzhou.

Towering alloy structures reaching into the clouds shimmered with cold technological luster in the night, surrounded by massive energy shields that emitted heart-palpitating pressure.

This place was far more legitimate than the Bug Residence where Lin Yu had stayed in the black market.

Because it was legitimate, its expansion speed was extremely fast, swallowing large market shares, which actually effectively lowered costs.

The vehicle stopped at the designated area of Sky Dome Summit.

As soon as Lin Yu stepped out, a young attendant dressed appropriately and wearing a work badge approached him.

"Welcome to Sky Dome Summit, sir. Is this your first visit?"

The attendant's attitude was impeccable—professional yet distant.

"Yes." Lin Yu was brief and to the point.

"Very well, please follow me. I'll guide you through the entry procedures."

The attendant led the way, bringing Lin Yu into a magnificent hall.

The hall's dome was so high it seemed boundless, with countless light strips weaving into patterns resembling a starry river. The floor was polished like a mirror, clearly reflecting everyone's figures.

Coming and going were all Practitioners with powerful auras, but everyone maintained order with no loud disturbances.

Everything was perfectly organized.

The attendant guided Lin Yu to an available counter.

"Hello, sir. How may I assist you?" asked a female staff member behind the counter with a professional smile.

"I need a training field," Lin Yu stated. "The highest specification, and I need it now."

His request was direct and clear.

The female staff member's smile remained unchanged as she skillfully pulled up the operation interface.

"Certainly, sir. For first-time use, real-name registration is required along with a security deposit. Additionally, for the safety of all clients, we need to conduct a simple background verification process."

"Verification?" Lin Yu paused momentarily.

"Yes, this is Sky Dome Summit's regulation," the staff member explained. "The verification process is usually quick, taking approximately three hours to three days depending on the complexity of your information. Once verified, you'll receive notification on your personal terminal."

Three hours to three days?

Lin Yu didn't have that much time to waste here.

He was itching to find a place to properly vent his energy right now.

"I'll pay extra," Lin Yu said calmly. "Make the process faster."

In the black market, money could solve ninety-nine percent of problems.

However, the staff member shook her head with a smile.

"My apologies, sir. This isn't a matter of cost—it's a security protocol. Sky Dome Summit treats all clients equally. We must ensure absolute safety within the training fields; this is our bottom line."

Her attitude was firm, leaving no room for negotiation.

Lin Yu: "..."

Money couldn't buy everything here?

This place's rules were actually stricter than the black market's.

He didn't insist further but changed his question.

"What about membership?"

"Can membership expedite the verification?"

Hearing the word "membership," the staff member's eyes lit up, and her smile became more genuine.

"Of course, sir! Becoming our member grants you access to numerous VIP services, including 'priority verification channels!'"

As expected, legitimate places had legitimate solutions.

She immediately began enthusiastically introducing the options.

"We have three membership tiers: Silver, Gold, and Diamond. Diamond membership is our highest-level VIP status, offering the fastest verification speed—usually completed within an hour."

"Besides priority verification, Diamond members can reserve our special environment simulation fields not open to the public, enjoy one-on-one exclusive consultant services, and receive twenty percent discounts on all consumption items..."

Before she could finish, Lin Yu interrupted directly.

"Sign me up for Diamond."

"Besides this, are there any other premium services that can make the process faster and give me better treatment? Add them all."

His tone was flat but carried an undeniable authority.

As if he wasn't making a purchase but handling some trivial matter.

The staff member was visibly stunned.

She had seen big spenders before, but never one this decisive.

Not even asking about the price?

She took a deep breath, forcibly suppressing her excitement, and spoke at her fastest pace. "Yes... yes! We also have the 'Supreme Service Package,' which includes access to exclusive lounges, free rental of advanced equipment, and... our internal 'risk assessment level' will be directly elevated to the highest, meaning your verification will be almost instantaneous!"

"Then this one." Lin Yu took out his identity card. "Charge it."

This entire set of procedures cost him nearly three million.

This amount of money wasn't even enough for two days in the outrageously priced suite at Bug Residence.

It could even be said to be quite cheap.

Lin Yu currently had little concept of money, but he cared about efficiency.

If he could buy time with money, then this transaction wasn't a loss.

"Alright... alright! Sir, please wait a moment!"

The staff member's voice trembled slightly as she quickly called over her supervisor.

The supervisor was a shrewd and efficient-looking middle-aged man who hurried over. Seeing Lin Yu's bill, he was also surprised.

But he quickly adjusted and personally handled all procedures for Lin Yu.

"Mr. Lin, is it? We warmly welcome you as a Supreme client of Sky Dome Summit. Your verification has entered the highest priority channel, with results expected within ten minutes."

The supervisor's attitude had become much more respectful.

"Please wait in the VIP lounge for a short while."

Lin Yu was guided through an exclusive passageway to a luxuriously decorated private lounge.

Lin Yu casually sat down and picked up a glass of water.

His heart remained completely calm.

So-called rules ultimately became flexible in the face of absolute financial power.

Just through different methods.

The only thing he cared about now was whether this training field, touted as Linzhou's most elite, was actually sturdy enough.

Chapter 120: Uncle Tianqing

Ten minutes.

For ordinary people, it might only be enough time to scroll through two short videos.

But for Lin Yu now, it was enough time to go through all the public information about the Sky Dome Summit.

On the lounge's light screen, introductions to the various training grounds were rolling by.

The nature of this place was more or less what he had expected.

A vast, modified, self-contained space.

Using top-tier formations and technological means, this space was peeled away from the main world, then reinforced and given environmental simulations.

According to the official claims, the internal spatial strength matched the native spatial strength of Blue Star exactly.

Plus, it had an ultra-efficient energy absorption and matter reconstitution system that could repair most physical damage in an extremely short time.

Sturdy enough.

Lin Yu was fairly satisfied with that.

With his current strength, although he could already easily level a building, he was still far from tearing open space with his bare hands.

This place should be able to hold up, he figured.

As he was thinking about which skill to use first as an "appetizer," a loud, pleasantly surprised, and somewhat uncertain voice rang out from behind him.

"Xiao Yu?"

"Lin Yu? Is that really you, kid!"

"Holy—if it weren't for my outstanding talent, I wouldn't have recognized you!"

Lin Yu paused.

He turned around.

A slightly portly middle-aged man in casual clothes was walking toward him with a face full of delight; despite his relaxed outfit, he still carried the bearing of someone long used to being in a high position.

Trailing beside the man was a young girl about Lin Yao's age.

She wore simple sportswear, her hair tied in a high ponytail, with a clear, delicate face and a somewhat cool temperament; she looked at Lin Yu with mild curiosity.

Uncle Wang.

That name surfaced in Lin Yu's memory.

A childhood friend of his father, a director at Heaven's Pillar Group—Wang Han.

"Uncle Wang." Lin Yu stood up and offered a polite nod.

"Hahaha! It really is you!" Wang Han strode over and, with no ceremony, clapped Lin Yu hard on the shoulder; the force was considerable.

He sized Lin Yu up and down; in those shrewd eyes were sincere smiles and heartfelt astonishment.

"Good kid, haven't seen you in years and you've bulked up! You're way sturdier than your dad, who looks like a walking stick!"

He was far more enthusiastic than Lin Yu had anticipated.

"I actually went to your place a few days ago and got nothing—nobody home. Didn't expect to run into you here!"

Lin Yu said nothing, just listened.

He could feel the girl's gaze lingering on him the entire time—no malice, just observation.

"By the way, let me introduce you." Wang Han pulled the girl closer.

"This is my daughter, Wang Qingxuan. Qingxuan, go greet him—this is your Brother Lin Yu."

Wang Qingxuan merely gave Lin Yu a slight nod—an acknowledgement, but she didn't speak; her manner was calm and restrained.

Wang Han didn't mind; he sighed, half complaint, half reminiscence.

"Your old man—such a stubborn one. He called me a couple days ago, hemming and hawing; I thought something serious had happened."

"Turns out he just wanted me to look after you a bit more. Like it's some huge responsibility, as if he's entrusting me with his affairs."

"He kept saying he understood, that the jade token can only be used once, that once used the favor is gone... Bah! What does he know!"

Wang Han spoke loudly, paying no heed to the public setting.

"I treated him like a brother for life—what does he treat me as? A one-time-use tool? Is our relationship that shallow?"

"You tell him to keep that broken jade token for himself! Your business is my business! I'll treat you as my own nephew!"

He spoke with full force, his words sharp and carrying genuine indignation.

Lin Yu's Eye of Analysis quietly activated.

[Wang Han: emotions (sincere, delighted, slight grievance toward old friend), no malice...]

The result was as expected.

Uncle Wang wasn't putting on an act.

A faint, inexplicable warmth rose in Lin Yu's chest.

His father's personality was exactly like that—stubborn, proud, and he valued favors and face above almost everything.

Although he said Lin Yu should use that favor, he had already swallowed his pride and made the arrangements in advance.

"That's how your dad is." Lin Yu offered a rare explanation.

"I know!" Wang Han waved a hand. "I've known him for decades—do you think I don't know? I'm just angry at him!"

"When I see him later, you'll see how I scold him!"

Wang Han ranted loudly, spittle almost spraying Lin Yu's face.

Lin Yu didn't pull away.

That rough, coarse, yet intensely sincere enthusiasm left him somewhat at a loss.

After all, those five lost years had changed him quite a bit.

Seeing Lin Yu silent, Wang Han smacked his shoulder again.

"Your dad is the type who insists on saving face and makes life hard for himself. If he hadn't insisted on carrying things himself back then, Heaven's Pillar Group's shares—he would have had his share!"

"Enough, enough—mentioning him makes me mad."

Wang Han shifted his tone and finally took in the surroundings.

"What are you doing here? This place isn't cheap. Coming here for a pre-College Entrance Exam boost?"

He suddenly remembered something and slapped his thigh.

"Oh right! I remember now. That whole fuss online about you and Yao Yao—your dad mentioned it to me."

There was none of the sneer or pity he might have picked up from outsiders on his face; instead, he seemed to regard the matter as perfectly natural.

"No big deal."

"Coincidentally, Qingxuan is taking the College Entrance Exam this year too. I'm planning to get her the best tutors and the finest resources."

He gestured broadly, first at his silent daughter Wang Qingxuan, then at Lin Yu.

"So there's no need to separate things between you two."

"Whatever setup my daughter gets, you and Yao Yao will get the same!"

"All pre-College Entrance Exam training resources, tutor fees, advanced potions... your Uncle will cover it all!"

"Did you hear me? No refusals allowed!"

He said it with absolute certainty, his tone flush with unchallengeable generosity.

Lin Yu was completely stunned.

Cover it all?

Whatever configuration his daughter used, he'd give the two siblings the same?

This kind of spending...

This was no mere favor.

This was treating them as his own blood—son and daughter to be raised.

What kind of resources would the only daughter of a Heaven's Pillar director receive? It was obvious even without thinking—it would be prohibitively expensive beyond ordinary reach.

This favor was weighty.

"Uncle Wang, this..."

Lin Yu started to explain that he didn't need the money or the resources.

"Cut the crap!"

Wang Han glared and cut him off.

"Don't pick up your dad's bad habits! What favor debt, what awkwardness! I'm your uncle—this is my decision!"

Chapter 121: Let's go buy gifts!

Wang Han glanced around the luxurious lounge and noticed the consumption receipt on Lin Yu's table.

He instinctively assumed Lin Yu was hesitating over the expense, which explained why he had been standing there frozen for so long.

"Whatever you spent here goes on my tab. I'll have my secretary come handle it later."

"Listen to me!"

Lin Yu: "..."

He realized that the logic he used to deal with enemies and businessmen was completely ineffective with Wang Han.

This was a pure, almost command-like care from an elder to a younger generation.

Simple, crude, but effective.

Wang Han asked again: "By the way, where's that girl Yao Yao? Why didn't she come with you?"

Lin Yu snapped back to reality and replied: "Yao Yao is cultivating, so I didn't disturb her."

"Cultivating?" Wang Han was momentarily stunned, then burst into hearty laughter. "Good! Good! Ambitious! Just like me!"

His self-praise came completely out of nowhere.

Wang Qingxuan beside him seemed already accustomed to this, merely tilting her head slightly to the other side as if admiring the scenery.

Lin Yu rarely felt the need to explain: "Uncle Wang, I'm not hesitating about the money. I'm just waiting for the review process—they said it would take about ten minutes."

He felt it necessary to clarify.

Although he currently had no real concept of money, being mistaken for a poor kid who couldn't afford to pay felt somewhat strange.

"Ten minutes?!"

Wang Han's voice immediately boomed again, vibrating through the lounge.

"Bullshit! Those bastards are just judging people by their appearance! What fucking review process—they're just stalling to make you sign up for more services!"

He cursed furiously, spittle flying everywhere.

"Last time I came here, it was the same damn story! They forced me to book Qingxuan's ten-year training plan in advance before they'd approve it!"

"Fucking ridiculous, such ugly behavior!"

The more Wang Han spoke, the angrier he became, rolling up his sleeves as if ready to go argue with someone.

Lin Yu quickly stopped him.

Being with this unruly elder was truly headache-inducing.

"Alright, alright, let's not stoop to their level." Once Lin Yu held him back, Wang Han's anger mostly subsided.

He waved his hand dismissively, then suddenly had a new idea.

"Waiting around here is pointless. Let's go out!"

"Perfect timing—I haven't seen that girl Yao Yao in ages. Now that both you siblings are making something of yourselves, your uncle needs to show his appreciation."

"Let's pick up Yao Yao first, then find a place to have a proper feast! Celebrate properly!"

Wang Han's plans changed rapidly, leaving no time for anyone to react.

"Your uncle's in a good mood today—my treat!"

Lin Yu was about to say he had other matters to attend to, wanting to test his skills.

But Wang Han's large, fan-like hand was already on his shoulder, half-pushing and half-guiding him toward the exit.

"Don't dawdle! You didn't inherit your father's terrible temper, but you sure got his hesitation down to a tee!"

"Let's go, let's go! Kid, why are you being so distant with me!"

"You peed on my lap more times as a child than you did on your father's!"

Pushed along by him, Lin Yu didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

This level of enthusiasm was truly impossible to refuse.

Oh well.

Testing his skills wasn't that urgent anyway.

He simply gave up resisting and let Wang Han take charge.

As they exited the VIP lounge, the supervisor from earlier was waiting at the door with a professional smile.

"Chairman Wang, Mr. Lin, where are you..."

"Go to hell!" Wang Han opened with profanity. "I'm not waiting! Your efficiency moves like a snail—if you can't run a proper business, just close up shop already!"

The supervisor's smile froze on his face, but he still forced an explanation: "Chairman Wang, the procedure is..."

"Procedure my ass!" Wang Han wouldn't hear it. "My secretary will settle the bill later—charge me for the most expensive stuff you've got! Hear me? Don't be fucking stingy, or I'll file a complaint against you!"

With that, he ignored the petrified supervisor, grabbed Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan, and strode confidently toward the exit.

Wang Qingxuan followed behind, completely oblivious to the astonished stares from those around her, walking calmly as if she were an emotionless walking machine.

Lin Yu finally understood.

Wang Qingxuan's aloof personality was probably forced upon her by her overly enthusiastic father.

Otherwise, it would be difficult for any normal person to maintain emotional stability in such an environment.

The group arrived at the Sky Dome Summit parking lot.

Wang Han pressed his car key, and a menacing black armored SUV with exaggerated lines and fierce contours emitted a low growl.

"Get in!"

Wang Han pulled open the door and got in first.

Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan followed into the back seat.

The interior was incredibly spacious but decorated simply, full of metallic textures.

"Before we pick up Yao Yao, we need to buy some gifts." Wang Han muttered while starting the car. "Haven't seen her in so long—showing up empty-handed would be inappropriate."

He suddenly remembered something and turned to look at Lin Yu.

"Oh right, I originally brought Qingxuan here today to test her constitution and attributes, so we could arrange her follow-up sprint medicine."

"Perfect timing—since we ran into you today, let's get yours and Yao Yao's done too!"

"Three kids, get everything at once! Saves me another trip!"

Wang Han slapped the steering wheel, settling the matter just like that.

Lin Yu's heart stirred.

Medicine?

He was particularly sensitive to that word now.

After all, he was personally responsible for the crisis facing Linzhou's three major medicine companies.

Pretending to be curious, he asked: "Uncle Wang, where are we going to buy them? Are we going to Giant Force, Wind Rider, and those places? I heard they're running promotions lately, with pretty big discounts."

Upon hearing this, Wang Han, who was driving, let out a derisive snort.

The laugh was filled with disdain and contempt.

"Promotions?"

"Xiao Yu, you're still too young."

Wang Han glanced at him through the rearview mirror, as if teaching an inexperienced junior.

"A merchant's words are a devil's lies. Their so-called 'promotions'—just listen, but never take them seriously."

"Buy one get one free, limited-time discounts—they're all traps."

Wang Han skillfully turned the steering wheel as the car smoothly merged into the main road.

"Take that Wind Rider Technology, for example—their 'Rising Star Signing Package' sounds great, right? Sign up and get a full set of premium medicine."

"But have you seen that contract? It's full of unfair terms—a servitude contract! Once you sign it, you become their dog—they tell you to go east, you can't go west. They take the lion's share of all profits, leaving you with scraps."

"As for Giant Force and Bedrock, they're about the same. Their promotional medicines are either nearly expired or defective products—not only are the effects greatly reduced, but they might even have side effects."

"I fell for that kind of loss when I was young—I won't be fooled again now."

Wang Han's words surprised Lin Yu.

He never expected this seemingly rough Uncle Wang to be so meticulous.

It seemed that no one who reached the position of director at Heaven's Pillar Group was a simple character.

Chapter 122: Mysterious Location

"Then... where are we going?" Lin Yu followed up with his question.

Wang Han grinned, revealing a set of white teeth, his smile carrying a hint of mystery and pride.

"Of course we're going to a good place."

"The four major medicine suppliers? Hah, even dogs wouldn't go there!"

"Their so-called cutting-edge products don't even qualify to be on the shelves at the place we're headed."

"The items at that place are the real premium goods."

Wang Han deliberately kept the location secret, not revealing it directly, instead suddenly stomping on the accelerator.

The black armored off-road vehicle roared, instantly accelerating, nimbly weaving through traffic as it sped toward a direction completely unfamiliar to Lin Yu.

The car headed west the whole way, gradually leaving the bustling city center and entering a desolate old industrial zone in Linzhou's suburbs.

Abandoned factories and rust-stained pipes formed the dominant color palette here, with the air permeated by the smell of decaying metal.

"Hold on tight."

While skillfully driving, Wang Han observed the two young people in the back seat through the rearview mirror.

Wang Qingxuan sat in a very proper posture, hands on her knees, her body gently rising and falling with the vehicle's bumps, but her entire demeanor exuded calmness. However, her gaze out the window still betrayed a hint of tension.

As for Lin Yu, he presented a completely different picture.

He leaned back in his seat, relaxed in posture, even somewhat lazy, as if he wasn't heading to some dangerous place but rather going for a leisurely drive in the suburbs.

Wang Han was quite satisfied with this.

"Xiao Yu, your courage is impressive! Better than Qingxuan."

"Remember, once we get inside later, speak less, observe more, and stick close to me."

Wang Han began his "pre-mission briefing," lowering his voice to create a tense and solemn atmosphere.

"The people inside come from all walks of life, everything you can imagine. Don't make eye contact with anyone, and definitely don't initiate conversation. Understood?"

"If anything happens, I'll handle it. You two just act like mutes."

Every word he spoke carried the gravity of "I've been through this before."

Wang Qingxuan nodded slightly, her body unconsciously tensing up a bit more.

Lin Yu also nodded along.

He did indeed nod, but internally he was almost numb.

This place...

This route...

All Wang Han's winding around...

had completely confused him, but now looking at it.

Wasn't this just the way to the western district entrance of the black market?

Before making his fortune, he had been a regular visitor here.

These past couple days, he had practically been treating the black market like his own home.

Uncle Wang's attitude of treating this like a major crisis reminded him exactly of a law-abiding good citizen mustering the courage to run a red light for the first time.

The contrast was so strong that Lin Yu momentarily didn't know how to react.

He could only continue maintaining his silence.

Wang Qingxuan noticed Lin Yu's calmness, which stood in stark contrast to the tense atmosphere her father was deliberately creating. She found it somewhat strange, but didn't ask anything.

The vehicle twisted and turned through numerous alleys, eventually stopping in front of a massive abandoned warehouse.

The warehouse's roll-up door was tightly shut, the walls covered in graffiti, looking completely ordinary.

"This is the place."

Wang Han turned off the engine but didn't immediately get out.

He took out his phone, fingers rapidly tapping on the light screen, as if verifying some code or procedure.

Once, twice, three times.

Fine beads of sweat even appeared on his forehead.

"Alright."

Wang Han let out a long breath, turning to the back seat to give one final reminder.

"Last time - stick close to me, don't wander off, don't look around randomly, don't speak!"

After saying this, he took a deep breath and pushed the car door open.

Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan also got out of the car.

Wang Han walked to an inconspicuous corner of the warehouse and knocked five times on a rusted iron plate according to a specific rhythm.

"Thump. Thump-thump. Thump. Thump."

From behind the iron plate came the light sound of gears turning, and a hidden door just wide enough for one person slowly slid open.

Inside the dark passageway, a few dim yellow lights illuminated the way.

"Let's go."

Wang Han took the lead, walking in first.

Lin Yu followed behind, his last bit of wishful thinking completely shattered.

This entrance, this code - he knew them all too well.

He had used this entrance to come and go countless times.

Passing through the narrow corridor, the chaotic yet somehow orderly sounds of human activity washed over them.

Neon signs of all colors, strangely shaped buildings, Practitioners of all kinds coming and going with varied auras...

The black market had arrived.

Wang Qingxuan, seeing this scene for the first time, froze completely. She instinctively moved closer to her father, not daring to look around.

Wang Han straightened his posture, shielding his daughter behind him, his face wearing an expression of "See, your dad's got this covered" pride.

He led the two "newbies," skillfully navigating through the crowd.

But he had even forgotten the most basic disguise, making Lin Yu wonder what exactly Uncle Wang had been verifying so carefully earlier.

Still, with him here, there was no need to be overly cautious anymore.

Since they had come here, Lin Yu could roughly guess Wang Han's destination.

He casually glanced at the navigation address displayed on Wang Han's phone.

[Old Ghost Hall (Headquarters)]

Just as expected.

Lin Yu's heart completely settled, and he even felt like laughing.

After all that circling around, the "good place" that Uncle Wang had described - where even the four major medicine suppliers' products weren't qualified to be on shelves - that "mysterious channel" with the real premium goods, was actually the pharmacy he supplied.

Well then.

Might as well go back and check the situation.

Weren't the Black Market Management Office people looking for him? Perfect timing to see what they wanted.

And he needed to arrange things properly for Uncle Wang's side too.

This elder's rough yet warm-hearted approach had genuinely touched Lin Yu.

That jade token from his father that could only be used once represented a debt of gratitude so heavy it needed calculation.

But Wang Han's actions seemed to be telling him that between family, no calculation was needed.

This kindness, Lin Yu would remember.

"See this? The quality of medicines here can't be compared to those common goods outside."

Wang Han continued his "education" for Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan as they walked.

"Every single bottle has gone through the strictest screening. They're expensive, but there's good reason for the price."

"Especially the new batch they recently released - the effects are simply miraculous! I pulled many strings to get internal purchasing privileges."

Wang Han's face was full of pride.

It was the pride of a middle-aged man showing off his connections and abilities in his area of expertise to the younger generation.

Lin Yu: "..."

If he hadn't been the one supplying the goods, he would have believed it.

Was this Old Ghost and Old Seventh's marketing strategy, or was Uncle Wang making up stories while boasting?

He vaguely remembered that his advantage had been low prices with quality no worse than the medicine suppliers.

The key point was affordability, being accessible to ordinary people.

Lin Yu barely restrained the urge to complain, simply following silently behind.

Wang Qingxuan had also recovered from her initial tension, curiously observing everything around her, then turning her gaze to Lin Yu.

She noticed that from the moment they entered this bizarre and fantastical place, Lin Yu hadn't shown any emotional fluctuation.

No tension, no curiosity, not even a trace of surprise.

He acted like he was strolling through his own backyard.

This Lin Yu brother whom she hadn't seen in so long... was somewhat strange.

Chapter 123: Requires the Black Card

Walking toward Old Ghost Hall, Wang Han remained in high spirits, continuing to play his role as the "black market know-it-all."

"See that guy on the left selling skeletons?"

"Don't go near him. All his goods are fakes made from pig bones soaked in potions, specifically designed to scam young people like you who don't know the trade."

Lin Yu followed his pointing direction.

It was a stall selling various exotic beast skeletons, run by a gaunt old man who was idly picking his teeth.

Lin Yu was familiar with this stall.

The old man's goods were indeed a mix of real and fake, but he had sharp eyes and specifically targeted self-proclaimed "experts."

As for young people, he actually didn't scam them much.

"And that one on the right, selling runes, definitely don't touch those."

Wang Han continued his live teaching session, his voice filled with the superiority of someone who'd been around.

"Those runes of his are all scrapped items picked from garbage dumps, just redrawn a few strokes before being sold. They're completely useless and might even explode!"

Lin Yu took another look.

He was familiar with that stall too - it sold some unstable fun runes like "Random Fart Runes" and "Trip on Flat Ground Runes."

They were indeed not very useful, but they wouldn't explode.

Uncle Wang's intelligence... half of it was hearsay, and the other half was his own imagination, right?

Wang Qingxuan followed by her father's side. At first, she felt somewhat reserved due to the unfamiliar environment, but soon, her girlish curiosity was completely aroused.

Glowing mushrooms, singing plants, miniature storms contained in bottles...

These wonders that couldn't be seen in the outside world kept her eyes darting everywhere.

She suddenly remembered when she was very young.

Her father was fighting for his career, and to prevent enemies from finding them, he sent her and her mother overseas to a distant place.

Those days were stable, but also very lonely.

Later, when her father achieved success, he brought them back, always wanting to pile the world's best things in front of her, as if trying to make up for those missing years.

His love, just like the man himself, was rough, direct, and even a bit clumsy.

Just like now, even though he only had a superficial understanding of this place, he still insisted on painting an imagined "dangerous world" for her and Lin Yu.

Thinking this, Wang Qingxuan became less concerned about Lin Yu's unfathomable calmness.

This bizarre and dazzling world was clearly more interesting.

"Dad, what's that?"

She suddenly stopped walking, pointing at a wind chime hanging at a stall.

The wind chime wasn't made of metal or bamboo, but rather slices of ice crystals as thin as cicada wings. They gently collided with the breeze brought by the passing crowd, emitting ethereal and pleasant sounds while giving off faint coolness.

"Oh! This!"

Wang Han immediately perked up when he saw his daughter's interest, leaning in to examine it for a long time.

"This is... this is a wind chime made from polished 'Northern Realm Ice Souls'! Hang it at home and you won't need air conditioning in summer! Good stuff!"

The stall owner was a veiled woman who just glanced at Wang Han upon hearing this and said nothing.

Wang Qingxuan was amused.

"Really or fake?"

"Of course it's real! Would your dad lie to you?"

Wang Han patted his chest in assurance, then waved grandly at the stall owner, "This one, and that one, and that glowing stone, wrap them all up for me!"

He was delighted to see his daughter showing such a lively side.

But Wang Qingxuan pulled his arm.

"Dad, I'll buy it myself."

Wang Han was stunned: "What's the difference between you buying and me buying? Come on, put it on my account!"

"It's different." Wang Qingxuan shook her head, her attitude firm. "I want to buy gifts for Lin Yao."

She paused, then glanced at the silent Lin Yu beside them.

"And... also one for Brother Lin Yu."

"This is our first formal meeting, I can't come empty-handed."

Upon hearing this, Wang Han first froze, then burst into hearty laughter, laughing with immense joy.

"Good! Good! My daughter has grown up, become sensible! Fine! Buy it yourself! Buy whatever you like!"

Though he said this, he was calculating in his heart that he would buy an even more expensive set later - he couldn't let his daughter lose in the "gift" department.

Wang Qingxuan browsed through the stall's items, finally selecting two bracelets.

One was an ice crystal bracelet made of the same material as the wind chime, crystal clear.

The other was woven from some unknown black metal, engraved with intricate patterns, looking very cool.

"Just these two." She handed the bracelets to the stall owner.

The stall owner took them, scanned them with a peculiar instrument, and quoted a number.

"Twelve thousand total, Black Card transaction."

"Ah? Black Card..."

Wang Qingxuan's hand, which was about to take out money, froze.

"Can we use cash? I'll give you double." Wang Han casually pulled out his wallet. He was clearly here for the first time and had no idea about the black market's rules.

He thought money could solve everything.

The stall owner looked up, her eyes beneath the hood showing some impatience.

"If it were normal times, of course you could, but the management is making some big moves right now. Nobody knows what they're planning, sorry, Black Card transactions only."

Having just seen Chen Ao's group of unregistered enforcers clearing out a large area with imposing manner, she didn't want to make any risky moves at this time.

"We're a proper black market, not some shabby street stall. We only accept Black Card transactions."

"If you don't have one, don't waste time."

Wang Han's movements froze.

His face, which had been slightly flushed with pride, instantly turned even redder, though this time from embarrassment.

He, a director of Heaven's Pillar Group worth billions, was actually being looked down upon here because he couldn't pay?

"I..."

He opened his mouth, wanting to say he could go exchange for one, but felt he couldn't swallow his pride.

He had just been boasting to the two youngsters about his extensive connections and numerous channels.

Now, he was stuck at a small stall because of the most basic payment problem.

This was quite embarrassing.

Wang Qingxuan was also at a loss. She hadn't expected this and looked at her father with a pleading expression.

The atmosphere became extremely awkward all at once.

Just as Wang Han was stammering, preparing to say something to save face.

A hand reached out from beside him.

That hand was holding a pure black card with no markings except for a small emblem in one corner.

It was Lin Yu.

He said nothing, just quietly slipped that card into Wang Han's hand.

The movement was so natural it seemed like he was just helping adjust his sleeve.

Wang Han looked down at the cool card in his palm, completely stunned.

This "poor nephew" whom he had treated as needing all kinds of care actually had the black market's exclusive Black Card?

And judging by the card's texture and emblem...

A pure black card body with no extra patterns, only stamped in the corner with a burning skull emblem he had never seen before.

This probably wasn't ordinary merchandise, was it?

Chapter 124: We're Family

What... is this?

Wang Han looked blankly at Lin Yu.

Lin Yu simply returned his gaze calmly, offering no explanation, as if he had just handed over an insignificant napkin.

This matter-of-fact calmness made the storm of shock raging in Wang Han's heart surge even more violently.

The stall owner nearby was already growing impatient.

"Are you buying or not? If you don't have a card, move aside and don't block the people behind you."

Wang Han jolted, his face burning with embarrassment.

Almost instinctively, he mechanically handed over the black card in his hand.

"Use... use this."

The stall owner reached out impatiently, muttering under his breath, "What kind of crappy card are you pulling out..." His words cut off abruptly mid-sentence.

His movements froze.

The black card lay quietly in his palm.

The stall owner's previously slouched body, which had been leaning lazily against his chair, instantly straightened as if spring-loaded. He stood up so abruptly that he knocked over a pile of miscellaneous items beside him.

But he couldn't care less about that.

He cradled the card in his hands, bringing it close to his eyes, turning it over and over as if appraising a priceless treasure.

Beneath his hood, those originally dull eyes were now filled with shock and disbelief.

The surrounding air grew still.

Wang Han and Wang Qingxuan were completely stunned.

The stall owner's attitude change was simply too dramatic.

"My, my honored guest!!!"

The stall owner's voice trembled as he held the card with both hands, respectfully bowing as he returned it to Wang Han, his posture lowered to the absolute extreme.

"Great one, great one, this humble one failed to recognize Mount Tai! I've offended you! I beg for your forgiveness!"

Wang Han was utterly bewildered.

He instinctively took back the card but didn't know what to say.

Seeing no reaction from Wang Han, the stall owner grew even more panicked. He quickly pulled out a brand new, high-end looking card reader from under his stall and carefully operated it.

"Twelve thousand... no no no! For an honored guest like you to grace my humble stall is my greatest honor! These two bracelets are my humble gift to you, as a token of my respect!"

He actually wanted to give them away for free.

Wang Qingxuan tugged at her father's sleeve and whispered, "Dad, we can't just take things from people for free."

Wang Han finally snapped out of it, cleared his throat, and tried to maintain his "important person" demeanor.

"No need. Charge the proper amount."

"Yes! Yes!"

The stall owner acted as if granted amnesty, quickly entering the amount, then presenting the card reader with both hands.

Wang Han took the card that didn't belong to him and lightly tapped it against the reader.

"Beep."

Transaction completed.

Throughout the entire process, the stall owner didn't dare to lift his head.

Lin Yu watched from the side, roughly understanding the situation.

The black market's Black Card automatically upgrades based on transaction volume and spending amounts.

His previous purchases of skills, materials, room rentals, and various services had already amounted to considerable spending.

But that shouldn't have caused such a significant upgrade.

The more important factor was "Old Ghost Hall."

As the sole supplier and actual controller of "Old Ghost Hall," all the massive transaction volume from medicine sales would ultimately be credited to his account.

After the transaction completed, the stall owner carefully placed the two bracelets in an exquisite box and presented them with both hands.

"Honored guest, please take care! Please come again! All merchandise in my humble stall will be 50% off for you!"

His waist bent at a ninety-degree angle, his posture reaching the pinnacle of humility.

Wang Han held the card, looked at the stall owner, and remained completely confused.

What exactly was going on?

He pulled Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan along, practically fleeing in panic.

Even after walking quite far, they could still hear the stall owner's enthusiastic shouts from behind.

"Great one! Next time you come, be sure to check my goods first! I'll save the best for you!"

Wang Han stumbled in his steps, nearly tripping on flat ground.

He had never been this embarrassed in his entire life.

Wang Qingxuan, walking beside him, finally couldn't hold back and burst out laughing.

Her laughter was like the first thaw of ice and snow, making the bizarre neon lights around them seem to pale in comparison.

"Dad."

She leaned close to Wang Han's ear, whispering in a volume only the three of them could hear.

"Why didn't you take out the card earlier?"

"You made me lose face along with you."

Wang Han's old face turned bright red, flushing from his neck all the way to the tips of his ears.

Having lived half his life and dominated in business circles, when had he ever been this embarrassed? And in front of two kids at that.

"Ahem... this, this was Dad's mistake."

He stammered an apology, wanting to explain something but unable to get a single word out.

However, Wang Qingxuan didn't dwell on the issue for long.

She soon became attracted to a nearby stall selling glowing sprites and curiously stopped to look.

Wang Han seized this opportunity to pull Lin Yu aside, lowering his voice with an extremely serious expression.

"Xiao Yu, tell your uncle the truth."

He pressed the Black Card back into Lin Yu's hand, his movements cautious as if it weren't a card but a red-hot branding iron.

"How much money... is actually in this card? Or rather, how much is it worth?"

"Don't be afraid, tell your uncle. I'll pay you double, no, triple the amount back!"

"We can't take advantage like this, people would laugh at us if word got out!"

His face was stern, trying to use this method to recover the dignity he had just lost.

Lin Yu looked at him, not answering immediately.

This Uncle Wang was really an interesting person.

Rough yet attentive, concerned about face, yet honestly adorable.

"Uncle Wang."

Lin Yu finally spoke.

"The money isn't important."

"Ah?" Wang Han was stunned. "How can money not be important?"

Lin Yu smiled and continued leisurely, "Didn't you just teach me this before?"

He imitated Wang Han's earlier manner, patting the other's arm with grave concern.

"Between family, there's no need for calculations."

"If you keep being this calculational with me, I really won't consider you family anymore."

The exact same words.

Word for word.

Returned completely unchanged.

Wang Han froze completely in place.

His mouth hung open, eyes wide as copper bells, staring straight at Lin Yu.

His face, already flushed from embarrassment and awkwardness, now took on an even more complex coloration.

A few seconds later.

"Pfft..."

He deflated like a punctured ball, his tense shoulders instantly slumping.

Then, earth-shaking explosive laughter erupted on the noisy black market street.

"HAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Wang Han held his stomach, laughing so hard tears nearly came out.

"Good kid! Good kid! You got me!"

He threw an arm around Lin Yu's shoulder, patting him so hard Lin Yu felt his bones rattling.

"Fine! Your uncle will listen to you! From now on we're family, no formalities between us!"

However, Wang Han soon disappeared for a while, returning to subtly show off the Black Card in his hand to Lin Yu with a hint of pride.

Then he took his daughter and Lin Yu on a major shopping spree before finally heading toward their original destination.

Chapter 125: Black Market Informant

The group had just turned a corner when a middle-aged man in a gray jacket quickly approached them.

The man wore a trace of anxiety on his face as he looked around the crowd. When he spotted Wang Han, he seemed to let out a sigh of relief and immediately jogged over to meet them.

"Chairman Wang! Ah, I finally found you!"

The man wiped sweat from his forehead while bowing apologetically.

"I'm truly sorry! I was waiting for you at the entrance the whole time, but you never showed up no matter how long I waited. I couldn't reach you by phone either, so I thought something might have happened to you. That's why I rushed in to look for you!"

Wang Han looked at the newcomer, momentarily stunned before realizing who he was.

This should be the person arranged by the black market contact he had previously reached out to.

Normally, such small procurement matters wouldn't require Wang Han's personal attention, and even if he did come, everything would have been arranged in advance.

But he had gotten carried away in the moment and directly dragged Lin Yu and the others in early, completely forgetting about this arrangement.

This person had probably rushed over in a hurry.

However, being "searched for" so anxiously, especially in front of his daughter and Lin Yu, actually helped restore some of the dignity he had lost during the black card incident.

He waved his hand grandly, completely unconcerned.

"No problem, no problem. I was just too impatient and came in early to look around. It's not your fault."

Seeing that Wang Han wasn't blaming him, the man became even more grateful and immediately seized the opportunity to climb the social ladder, launching into a series of flattering remarks.

"Chairman Wang, you truly have a magnanimous heart! I knew it—someone like you who accomplishes great things must act with lightning speed, not waiting for us slow-moving mortals!"

He then shifted his focus to Wang Qingxuan, his eyes instantly lighting up.

"This must be the young lady? Ah, seeing you in person is far better than just hearing about you! This elegance, this appearance—you're simply a celestial fairy descending to the mortal realm! The pearl of Linzhou truly lives up to your reputation!"

Although this praise was rather blatant, it perfectly scratched Wang Han's itch.

Besides his career, what he took most pride in was his precious daughter.

Wang Qingxuan felt somewhat embarrassed by the compliments, but the smile at the corners of her mouth was impossible to hide.

Wang Han laughed heartily, the previous awkwardness from the payment incident long since tossed to the far corners of the earth.

He was thoroughly enjoying this.

After lavishing praise on the Wang father and daughter, the "contact" man finally turned his attention to Lin Yu, who had been standing silently nearby.

He looked Lin Yu up and down.

Ordinary clothing, average aura, the young man stood there quietly without much presence.

Clearly just a junior tagging along with important figures to see the world.

"And this young brother is?" he asked politely.

Wang Han wrapped an arm around Lin Yu's shoulder, introducing him with full pride: "This is my nephew, Lin Yu! My own nephew!"

He particularly emphasized the word "own."

"Oh! So it's Young Master Lin!"

The man immediately switched to an even more enthusiastic smile, cupping his hands toward Lin Yu.

"Pleasure to meet you! Young Master Lin is so accomplished at such a young age. Being able to follow Chairman Wang for experience means your future prospects are limitless!"

His words were flawlessly smooth, both complimenting Lin Yu and simultaneously elevating Wang Han once again.

Lin Yu simply nodded faintly.

"Mhm."

One word, and that was it.

The atmosphere momentarily turned somewhat chilly.

The man's smile stiffened slightly as he thought to himself:

This kid has quite the attitude.

But being a shrewd person, he immediately laughed it off and moved past the moment.

"Chairman Wang, where would you like to go next? I'm very familiar with the Black Market Western District. Whether you want to buy materials, trade for equipment, or experience some exciting scenes—just say the word, and I'll arrange everything perfectly for you!"

Wang Han had now fully stepped into the "leader" role. With his hands behind his back, he pondered for a moment before speaking in a profound tone.

"Take us to 'Old Ghost Hall.'"

"Old Ghost Hall?"

Hearing this name, the man visibly paused, then his expression became even more respectful.

"Chairman Wang truly has excellent taste! 'Old Ghost Hall' is currently the hottest spot in our Linzhou black market! The effects of their newly released batch of medicine are simply miraculous! Everyone's scrambling for them outside—ordinary people have to queue up to buy them, and even then they might not get any!"

As he spoke, he mysteriously leaned in closer.

"But don't worry! With me here, I'll guarantee everything is perfectly arranged! I can actually exchange a few words with Seventh Master of 'Old Ghost Hall'! We can go directly through the VIP channel!"

Wang Han was quite satisfied with this response and nodded.

"Mhm, then lead the way."

"Right away! Please come this way, esteemed guests!"

The man immediately took the lead, continuing to exercise his "know-it-all" function as they walked.

This time, his introductions were far more professional than Wang Han's earlier amateur attempts.

"Chairman Wang, look—that alley on the left houses the black market's largest fighting arena. It's quite bloody, so I don't recommend the young lady going there."

"That place on the right with the bone sign is a branch of 'Abyss of Bones.' They sell genuine exotic beast materials, but their prices are predatory, specifically targeting new customers."

He even pointed toward a heavily guarded tall building in the distance.

"That's Chen Ao's territory. He's the manager and founder of the entire black market, quite a figure comparable to you, Chairman Wang. But although his business is large, it's not very legitimate, and he has a bit of a fiery temper."

Wang Han listened, nodding occasionally with the composed air of someone who "already knew all this but couldn't be bothered to mention it."

Wang Qingxuan, however, listened with great interest, gaining another layer of understanding about this world.

Under the enthusiastic guidance of the "contact" man, the group passed through several branching paths. The surrounding noise gradually gave way to a peculiar sense of order.

"Chairman Wang, Young Lady, Young Master Lin—we're almost there!"

The man pointed into the distance, his face filled with a smile that sought credit.

"See that? That sign with the gourd is 'Old Ghost Hall'! Don't let the modest storefront fool you—the inside is a completely different world!"

He spoke with flying spittle, as if he owned the place himself.

"Let me tell you, this place is incredibly popular right now. To get medicine from here, you not only need money but also connections! Ordinary people who come here can't even get through the door!"

Wang Han listened to this with satisfaction, stroking the string of beads he had just bought with an air of great importance.

However, when they actually approached, everyone clearly froze.

The expected scene of a bustling, crowded entrance with lively chatter was completely absent.

Instead, they found an eerily empty space.

The entrance to "Old Ghost Hall," along with a large surrounding area, had been roughly cordoned off with barrier tapes.

Over a dozen men dressed in uniform black martial attire stood expressionlessly at various intersections, emanating an aura that warned others to keep their distance.

Their positioning was quite deliberate, subtly blocking all possible approaches.

Chapter 126: Clearing the Area in Front of Old Ghost's Hall

The vendors who had originally set up stalls here had all vanished without a trace, leaving only some scattered items that hadn't been packed up in time, proving that this place had been bustling not long ago.

The entire area was eerily quiet.

"What... what's going on here?"

The smile on the guide's face froze solid.

The scene before his eyes formed an incredibly ironic contrast with what he had just been boasting about.

Wang Han's expression also darkened.

He had brought his daughter and Lin Yu here with great enthusiasm, showing off his connections, flaunting his wealth, going through all this trouble, only to find their destination sealed off?

This made him feel like a complete fool.

If this trip ended in failure, the face he lost today would be truly irrecoverable.

Sensing Wang Han's displeasure, the man instantly broke out in a cold sweat on his forehead.

"Chairman Wang, please don't worry, I... I'll go ask what's happening!"

He didn't dare waste any more words, quickly straightened his clothes, and steeled himself to approach a black-clothed man guarding the intersection.

He forced the friendliest smile onto his face and pulled out a pack of premium cigarettes from his pocket.

"Brother, you're working hard. Could I ask you about... what's happening here?"

The black-clothed man didn't even glance at him, merely squeezing out one word from his throat.

"Scram."

Simple, direct, completely emotionless.

The man's smile completely froze on his face, his extended hand awkwardly suspended in mid-air.

He sheepishly withdrew his hand, unwilling to give up, and leaned in closer, lowering his voice.

"Brother, could you make an exception? I've brought important guests, we had an appointment with your Seventh Master, you see..."

"Didn't you hear me?"

The black-clothed man finally moved, slowly turning his head, a pair of completely emotionless eyes fixed on the man.

"Old Ghost Hall has major business today, area's cleared. If you want to buy medicine, come another day."

The man's legs felt a bit weak.

He sensed the undisguised murderous aura emanating from the other party, the kind that only someone who had truly seen blood could possess.

But Wang Han was still standing behind him - he couldn't just slink back in defeat.

"Brother, could you please check again..."

He was practically begging now, even considering secretly offering something.

But the black-clothed man gave him no opportunity, directly reaching out to shove him.

The force wasn't great, but the humiliation was intense.

"Don't get in the way here, or you'll bear the consequences."

The man staggered, nearly falling, the blood draining from his face.

He knew that if he said anything more, it might not be just a shove next time.

He could only scurry back to Wang Han in disarray, his face filled with panic and apology.

"Chairman Wang, I... I asked." The man's voice trembled.

He kept his head down, not daring to look directly at Wang Han.

"They said Old Ghost Hall has major business today, the area's cleared."

"No entry allowed, they said... they said to come back another day."

Wang Han's face darkened further.

The air pressure around him dropped several degrees.

He looked at the man, displeased.

He had brought his daughter and Lin Yu here today specifically to showcase his influence.

Instead, he got stopped at the door, completely humiliated.

This made him feel like a complete clown.

"Business?" Wang Han snorted coldly.

His tone carried clear dissatisfaction.

"What kind of business requires sealing off the entire area?"

Fine beads of sweat appeared on the man's forehead.

He knew Wang Han was angry.

"Chairman Wang, I... I don't know the specific details either." He hurried to explain.

"But those people, they carry a murderous aura about them, not people to mess with."

"I didn't dare ask more."

His voice grew quieter and quieter, almost inaudible.

Wang Han clenched his fist.

His gaze swept over Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan.

This black market trip had already been humiliating enough.

First getting stuck with the Black Card at the small stall.

Now getting shut out at their destination.

When had he, a director of Heaven's Pillar Group, ever suffered such disrespect?

"Chairman Wang, please don't worry!" the man said urgently.

Seeing Wang Han's dissatisfaction, he quickly tried to find a solution.

"The black market has more than just Old Ghost Hall selling medicine!"

"I know several other bosses, their goods are pretty good too!"

"Although not as... as popular as Old Ghost Hall's, the quality is absolutely guaranteed!"

He enthusiastically recommended other options.

"No need to insist on this place, shall we go check out somewhere else?"

Wang Han remained silent.

He knew the man was trying to save face.

But this kind of remedy felt rather pathetic to him.

He had come here today with a clear target - Old Ghost Hall's medicine.

The effects of that medicine had already spread throughout Linzhou.

If he just settled for some random substitute, what difference would it make from not coming at all?

Could he still recover his lost dignity?

Seeing Wang Han unmoved.

The man grew even more anxious.

Wang Han's expression grew increasingly unpleasant.

He knew that if this continued, he would also suffer the consequences.

He leaned in closer, his voice dropping even lower.

"Chairman Wang, I heard... the people clearing the area today are from Chen Ao's side."

He spoke cautiously.

He knew Chen Ao's status in the black market.

Wang Han's body stiffened slightly.

Chen Ao.

That name in Linzhou's black market was like a massive boulder.

The Black Market King.

His influence was deeply entrenched.

He, a director of Heaven's Pillar Group, could command wind and rain in the outside world.

But in the black market, Chen Ao was the local emperor.

No matter how powerful Heaven's Pillar Group was, they couldn't control the black market's rules.

Besides... they couldn't afford to.

A direct confrontation would only bring trouble upon themselves.

Wang Han tightened his fist.

Then slowly relaxed it.

No matter how angry he was, he had to suppress it.

The name Chen Ao represented an insurmountable chasm.

He cleared his throat lightly.

He clasped his hands behind his back.

He tried to make his voice sound calm.

"Oh? Chen Ao's people."

His tone carried a hint of disdain.

"No wonder. Forget it, this kind of place isn't worth coming to anyway."

He tried to act like he didn't care.

He looked at Lin Yu.

Lin Yu still maintained his usual calm demeanor.

As if everything around him had nothing to do with him.

Wang Qingxuan spoke up at this moment.

She tugged at Wang Han's sleeve.

"Dad, I think Old Ghost Hall doesn't sound like a good name anyway." Her voice was clear and crisp.

"Sounds pretty creepy."

She stuck out her tongue.

"Let's go check out other places instead, okay?"

She looked at Wang Han.

Wang Han nodded accordingly.

He felt relieved inside.

His daughter's timely intervention had given him the perfect way out.

"Qingxuan is right." Wang Han's tone lightened somewhat.

"This kind of place isn't interesting at all."

He waved his hand, making a decision.

"Let's go, we'll check out somewhere else."

He gave the man a look.

The man breathed a long sigh of relief.

He quickly nodded and bowed.

"Yes, yes, yes! Chairman Wang is wise! I'll take you to a great place right away!"

He walked ahead, his body bent even lower.

Wang Han turned around.

He brought Wang Qingxuan and Lin Yu, following the man as they left.

In his heart, he still felt stifled anger.

Lin Yu walked at the very back.

He glanced back at the sealed-off Old Ghost Hall area.

Those black-clothed men still stood there, expressionless as ever.

Chapter 127: Sudden Outbreak

The guide man had just turned around, his face still wearing an ingratiating smile as he prepared to lead these distinguished guests away from this troublesome place.

"Chairman Wang, this way please, let me take you to..."

Before he could finish speaking.

A series of rapid and heavy footsteps suddenly erupted from behind them.

The dozen or so black-clothed men who had been standing like statues at various intersections, as if receiving some unified command, abruptly changed their expressions.

They were no longer lazy gatekeepers; each face now carried a hint of urgency and solemnity.

Then, under the astonished gazes of the surrounding people, they turned in unison and quickly rushed into the sealed-off "Old Ghost Hall" area.

Their movements were perfectly synchronized, carrying a military-like iron-blooded quality.

Clearly, Chen Ao had some skill in managing his personnel.

Wang Han, who had been about to step away, paused his footsteps.

Wang Qingxuan also curiously stopped.

Lin Yu, from the very beginning, hadn't intended to move at all.

The guide man's heart sank with dread, feeling extremely anxious.

Gossip is human nature, he understood that.

But this commotion was clearly not the good kind.

"Chairman Wang, Chairman Wang, we should still..." he approached, wanting to persuade.

But Wang Han raised his hand, stopping him.

The man's words got stuck in his throat.

Wang Han didn't turn around, just stared in the direction where the black-clothed men had disappeared, a cold, mocking curve forming at the corner of his mouth.

The arrogant attitude of those people just now, that emotionless "get lost," still echoed clearly in his ears.

Now, seeing them in such a frantic hurry, it was likely something had gone wrong.

He wanted to wait and see properly.

To see what exactly had happened with this so-called "big business," and how it would end.

If he didn't see anything useful, he'd just treat it as entertainment.

If he saw them making fools of themselves, then he'd have plenty to mock.

Going further, if he happened to witness some secret information, it might even be greatly useful.

Too bad.

If his daughter and Lin Yu weren't here with him, he might have even wanted to go inside the cordoned area to take a look.

"Dad, what's wrong with them?" Wang Qingxuan asked quietly, her big eyes filled with curiosity.

"Don't know." Wang Han said with his hands behind his back, putting on a completely composed posture. "Just watch."

Though he spoke lightly, inwardly he was secretly pleased.

The bigger the mess, the better.

Seeing Wang Han's determined stance to watch the show, the guide man's face twisted into a bitter melon expression.

"Chairman Wang, this... Chen Ao's people act domineeringly, what if they offend you..."

"Offend me?" Wang Han glanced sideways at him. "Would they dare?"

The man was left speechless.

How could he say that they had already offended him just moments ago?

Wang Han ignored him further, instead looking with interest at Lin Yu beside him.

"Nephew, what do you think?"

He noticed that from beginning to end, Lin Yu had been too calm.

This calmness made him, someone who had struggled in the business world for half his life, feel somewhat peculiar.

Combined with Lin Yu's possession of the Black Card, it made him feel that this nephew of his was anything but ordinary.

Lin Yu met Wang Han's probing gaze with complete composure.

"Watching a good show."

He lightly uttered these five words.

These five words, though spoken lightly, fell like a massive boulder into the guide man's heart.

A good show?

Oh heavens, what kind of time is this to be watching a show?

The man's face turned pale, cold sweat streaming down his temples, almost on the verge of tears.

"My young master! This is no good show!"

He stamped his feet anxiously, forgetting all about etiquette as he grabbed Wang Han's arm, his voice trembling.

"Chairman Wang! Let's leave quickly! Really, let's go!"

"You are an outstanding figure, a big shot who can make Linzhou tremble with just a stomp! But this is the black market! That Chen Ao, he's a madman! He doesn't care who you are!"

The man spoke incoherently, practically begging.

"For something like this, what if they offend you and the young lady? It's not worth it! Really not worth it!"

He lowered his posture to the minimum, but the meaning in his words was clear.

Chen Ao's people don't play by the rules.

Here, the identity of Heaven's Pillar Group director might not be a protective charm, but rather a target that attracts trouble.

Especially when he saw Wang Qingxuan beside Wang Han, who was clearly somewhat frightened by his words and instinctively tightened her grip on her father's sleeve, he found his breakthrough.

"Chairman Wang, look at the young lady... this place is filled with foul atmosphere, don't let it scare her! Let's quickly leave this troublesome place!"

Wang Qingxuan was indeed somewhat afraid.

Having grown up in a different environment than domestically, she was more sensitive to such conflict situations.

The man's words immediately evoked some unpleasant impressions in Wang Qingxuan.

The faint murderous aura around the black-clothed men, and that oppressively strange atmosphere, all made her feel intensely uneasy.

She said quietly, "Dad... maybe we should leave?"

One word from his daughter was more effective than a hundred from the guide man.

The slight interest Wang Han had felt from watching the commotion instantly dissipated.

Face was important, but his daughter's safety was more important.

He snorted heavily, giving himself a way out.

"This foul and chaotic place really isn't worth watching."

He put on a disdainful attitude, as if not being scared away but actively feeling disgusted.

"Let's go."

One word, crisp and decisive.

The guide man felt as if granted amnesty, so excited he nearly knelt before Wang Han.

"Yes, yes, yes! Chairman Wang is wise! This way please, this way please!"

He quickly led the way ahead, wishing he could grow wings and fly away from this area immediately.

Wang Han turned, protecting his daughter, preparing to follow.

Just as they took their first steps, when everyone thought this farce was about to end.

"ROAR—!"

An inhuman roar of fury suddenly exploded from the direction of "Old Ghost Hall"!

The sound was filled with endless brutality and madness, like a ferocious beast imprisoned for a thousand years breaking free from its cage.

The sound waves transformed into tangible shockwaves, sweeping outward.

Some nearby stalls, their bottles and jars, were instantly shattered by the vibration!

Wang Han's body also stiffened abruptly, he instinctively shielded his daughter behind him, his face showing unprecedented gravity.

Before anyone could react to this roar.

Sudden mutation!

BOOM!

A thick crimson light pillar burst through the roof of "Old Ghost Hall," shooting straight into the night sky!

When the light pillar reached its highest point, it suddenly exploded.

Instantly, countless crimson threads spread out in all directions like a spider web, instantly covering the entire sky above the Black Market Western District.

Every thread emitted an overwhelmingly thick bloody scent and ominous aura.

The entire black market was dyed with a strange bloody hue.

Pedestrians on the street all stopped in their tracks, looking up in terror at this apocalyptic scene in the sky, screams and cries rising and falling.

"What... what kind of monster is that!"

"Run quickly! People are going to die!"

Chapter 128: Reverse Speed

Chaos erupted in an instant.

Yet, this was only the beginning.

The scattered crimson threads in the sky, as if guided by some will, began twisting and converging frantically.

They entwined, wove, and reconstructed with each other.

In the blink of an eye, a scene that chilled everyone to the bone appeared above "Old Ghost Hall."

Some of the red lines combined to form a massive arm.

Then a second one.

A third.

...

Eight ferocious giant arms, completely composed of crimson energy, materialized out of thin air, blotting out the sky!

Each arm was immensely thick, with bulging muscles, radiating explosive power.

Even more terrifying, these eight arms weren't empty.

As the energy further condensed, eight weapons of varying shapes, all emitting equally dreadful fluctuations, slowly took form within the arms.

A massive zhanmadao gleaming with cold light.

A heavy meteor hammer covered in spikes.

A pitch-black chain entwined with resentment.

A thick shield carved with demonic reliefs.

...

Each weapon resembled a murderous tool dredged from the depths of hell, causing heart palpitations just from looking at them.

"Dad..."

Wang Qingxuan's voice trembled with tears, her body shaking violently.

She had never witnessed such a horrifying scene before.

Wang Han was completely stunned.

Having navigated the business world for half his life, he thought he had seen everything, but the spectacle before him completely surpassed his understanding.

The guide completely broke down.

His legs went weak, nearly collapsing to the ground, the last trace of color draining from his face.

He let out an inhuman shriek, desperately grabbing Wang Han's arm, his nails almost digging into the flesh.

"Chairman Wang! Run! Run now!"

His voice was shrill, thick with tears, his entire body trembling violently.

"It's over! It's all over! That madman Chen Ao has provoked something! We're all going to die here!"

The man screamed incoherently, spittle flying, completely losing his mind.

He tried to drag Wang Han away, but his legs refused to obey, just trembling uselessly on the spot.

Wang Han ignored him.

The Heaven's Pillar Group director was also frozen stiff.

He stared fixedly at the eight ferocious crimson giant arms in the sky and the ominous weapons they held, a chill shooting from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

This didn't seem like something human power could achieve.

Instinctively, he pulled Wang Qingxuan tighter behind him, his heart pounding wildly.

The surrounding black market had completely transformed into a living hell.

Screams, cries, and desperate howls mingled together.

The crowd surged like ants from a stirred nest, frantically pushing, trampling, and scattering in all directions away from the crimson sky.

Amidst this apocalyptic chaos.

Everyone was thinking of escape.

Only one person surged against the current.

Lin Yu moved.

Without any warning, his body slightly lowered, his feet stamping hard on the ground!

He transformed into an arrow released from its bow, without the slightest hesitation, charging straight toward the source of the chaos and terror!

Charging toward "Old Ghost Hall"!

"Lin Yu!"

Wang Han caught sight of that figure from the corner of his eye, his mind instantly blank.

He instinctively reached out, wanting to grab something, but only caught a handful of cold air.

Lin Yu was too fast.

In the blink of an eye, he had already dashed over ten meters, disappearing into the panicked counterflowing crowd.

"You're insane! Come back!"

Wang Han roared.

But his voice was instantly drowned out by the boiling clamor and screams.

The guide witnessing this scene was scared out of his wits.

The man screamed, released Wang Han, and scrambled to flee with the human tide.

Wang Han grabbed him by the back collar, lifting him up forcefully.

"Take my daughter away!" Wang Han's eyes were bloodshot, almost roaring, "Find a safe place to hide! If she comes to any harm, I'll make your whole family pay!"

He intended to entrust Wang Qingxuan to this man and charge in himself to drag out that reckless nephew of his!

However, Wang Qingxuan tightly grabbed his arm.

"No!"

The girl's face was streaked with tears and terror, but her grip was exceptionally strong.

"Dad! I'm not going! I'm coming with you!"

"Nonsense!" Wang Han was frantic with anxiety.

"I won't!" Wang Qingxuan cried out, her attitude incredibly resolute, "We leave together or stay together!"

Wang Han looked down again.

The guide he held by the collar had completely lost his mind.

He was limp as mud, his eyes unfocused, muttering "it's over, it's over" unconsciously.

Rely on him?

A wave of inexplicable fury surged in Wang Han's heart, mixed with extreme coldness.

He released his grip, letting the incontinent man collapse to the ground.

In that split second, he made a decision.

"Fine!"

Wang Han said no more.

He abruptly bent down and, with Wang Qingxuan's short gasp of surprise, directly scooped her up in a princess carry!

A standard princess carry, yet filled with strength and determination.

"Hold on tight!"

Before the words faded, he had already taken large strides, carrying his daughter, also charging toward the center of the chaos.

A director who strategized in boardrooms now erupted with astonishing physical prowess.

He charged like an angry lion, forcibly carving a path through the fleeing crowd.

"Lin Yu!"

"Lin Yu! Come back! It's dangerous!"

Wang Han roared, his voice becoming hoarse from urgency.

It's over, this phenomenon must have some hallucinatory effect, causing Lin Yu to lose his sense of direction and run the wrong way!

No, he had to find Lin Yu!

Wang Qingxuan in his arms also peered out, shouting with a tearful voice.

"Brother Lin Yu! Don't go over there!"

Their cries seemed so insignificant against the chaotic backdrop.

Father and daughter charged through, finally breaking through the most chaotic part of the crowd, returning to the cleared area in front of "Old Ghost Hall."

The scene before them was even more chaotic than before.

The ground was covered in cracks, broken debris everywhere, the air thick with a pungent smell of blood and scorching, stinging the nose.

In the sky, the eight crimson giant arms moved as if alive, slowly swinging, each movement stirring heart-palpating energy pressure waves.

Then, they saw Lin Yu.

Wang Han's steps abruptly halted.

Panting heavily, he stared ahead in disbelief.

Lin Yu stood right before the torn police line.

He didn't charge forward anymore, nor did he show any panicked movements.

He just stood there quietly, hands behind his back, slightly looking up, gazing at the apocalyptic terrifying scene in the sky.

His expression was unclear, and no one knew what he was thinking.

This only deepened Wang Han's judgment.

Holding his daughter, he stood dumbfounded about ten meters behind Lin Yu, his mind buzzing, completely blank.

Chapter 129: The Power of Asura

Those eight sky-obscuring crimson giant arms, and the vicious weapons slowly taking shape within them, plunged the entire Black Market Western District into a deathly silent terror.

Yet Lin Yu remained completely calm.

After seeing the source of this phenomenon, it was indeed Zhao Tianyang as expected.

Some kind of berserk form of the [Asura] profession.

Quite the impressive display, possessing the oppressive presence befitting a Myth-level profession.

It seemed that during his absence, Old Ghost Hall had indeed encountered significant trouble.

And the source of this trouble appeared to be Chen Ao.

Just then, several figures scrambled out from the wreckage of the "Old Ghost Hall" ruins.

They wore the same black uniforms as the guards outside, but now appeared utterly disheveled, with several bearing wounds deep enough to reveal bone.

They were Chen Ao's subordinates who had just escaped from the blood web.

"Damn it! What kind of cursed profession is this! Evil! Too evil!" shouted a black-clad man missing an arm, his face twisted with terror from his narrow escape.

"My 'Infernal Demon Battle Axe'! My weapon! It got melted by his damned bloody hands! Straight up stolen!" wailed another black-clad man clutching his empty right hand.

His bonded weapon had actually been forcibly seized by one of the crimson giant arms during the confrontation, then absorbed into that massive Zhanmadao.

Not only was the opponent's profession powerful, it could actually plunder others' equipment to strengthen itself!

"Everyone stay calm!" barked a man who appeared to be a squad leader—the previously silent man. His condition wasn't good either, with one sleeve hanging empty, clearly having paid a price.

Beside him, the Scar-face skilled in spatial abilities leaned against a wall gasping heavily, each breath bringing up large amounts of bloody froth.

The squad leader stared intently at the increasingly solid eight-armed blood shadow in the sky, his profession seemingly possessing analytical capabilities.

"I see it! He's burning his life force! Every second he maintains this form consumes his own lifespan!"

"This is definitely some forbidden technique with massive side effects! He won't last long!" he roared at his surviving subordinates.

"Drag it out! We just need to stall him, and he'll exhaust himself to death!"

Burning life force?

Lin Yu's eyebrow twitched almost imperceptibly.

That fit the [Asura] profession's setting quite well.

Proving the Dao through slaughter—no madness, no survival.

Wang Han had clearly heard the shouts from over there.

His heart sank to the depths.

Burning life force? Forbidden technique?

These terms combined made him instinctively sense extreme danger.

He sharply turned to look at Lin Yu.

Only to find his good nephew seemed to be spacing out.

Such a carefree heart...

The string of reason in Wang Han's mind snapped with an audible 'ping'.

"Lin Yu!" he shouted, rushing over in one swift step to grab Lin Yu's arm, nearly roaring.

"What are you doing! Are you crazy!"

"Can't you see what's happening here? Let's go! This place is about to be destroyed!"

Wang Han was so frantic that sweat poured down his face, his voice cracking with tension.

He had never lost his composure like this in his entire life.

But the current situation didn't allow him to maintain dignity.

These were Chen Ao's men!

That was a monster capable of creating this world-destroying spectacle!

Staying here meant waiting for death!

Staggered by Wang Han's pull, Lin Yu finally bothered to withdraw his gaze from the sky.

He looked at Wang Han, his demeanor still infuriatingly calm.

"Uncle Wang, don't rush."

"Don't rush?!" Wang Han felt his blood pressure spike instantly.

"I'm about to die from anxiety! And you tell me not to rush?!"

He pointed at the eight vicious blood arms in the sky, then at the black-clad men on high alert nearby.

"Look! Just look! Is this something we should be involved in? Gods fighting! Shouldn't we mortals run instead of waiting to be crushed to death?"

"Dad! Brother Lin Yu!" Wang Qingxuan also came running over crying, her small face deathly pale as she tightly grabbed Wang Han's other arm.

"Let's go quickly, I'm scared..."

His daughter's crying struck Wang Han's heart like a heavy hammer.

Without further words, he exerted force, attempting to forcibly drag away this reckless young man who didn't know his limits.

"Come with me! Now! Immediately! Right away!"

Just as Lin Yu was about to say something.

The situation on the field erupted again!

"ROAR—!"

Another deafening roar echoed.

The eight-armed blood shadow in the sky seemed thoroughly enraged by the escaped black-clad men.

One giant arm holding a heavy Meteor Hammer swung around fiercely, tearing through the air with a piercing shriek, and smashed down violently toward the squad leader and Scar-face's position!

BOOM!

The massive spiked hammer head didn't hit anyone.

It struck empty ground.

But the shockwave it created transformed into a visible white air current, spreading outward in a ring-like explosion!

The ground was instantly peeled back a layer!

Rubble, debris, and stall wreckage were swept up by this force, like small boats in a tsunami, shooting explosively in all directions!

"Watch out!" Wang Han's pupils contracted sharply.

Without time to think, acting almost on instinct, he spun around and firmly shielded Lin Yu and his daughter behind him.

He used his own back to withstand the flying rubble and debris.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

Several head-sized rocks smashed heavily into his back, producing dull thuds.

Wang Han grunted, his body shaking violently, yet he stubbornly maintained his footing without retreating half a step.

Intense pain shot from his back, but he had no time to care.

His heart had already chilled halfway.

And this was just the aftermath!

Merely the residual force of the attack possessed such power!

If struck directly, probably not even bone fragments would remain!

Wang Han pushed the two children away from his embrace, his eyes bloodshot as he stared toward the battlefield.

He no longer attempted to persuade Lin Yu.

He now had only one thought.

Run!

Take these two children and escape this death zone at the fastest speed possible!

Grabbing Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan's wrists with each hand, he began retreating step by step while remaining vigilant.

His movements were slow, steady, each step planted firmly.

As a veteran of business battles, even in such extreme terror, he maintained his final shred of calm.

Couldn't panic, couldn't turn and flee.

In battles of this level, exposing your back to the enemy was suicidal.

He could only use this method, bit by bit, attempting to move out of this death zone.

Wang Qingxuan trembled with fear, letting her father drag her along.

However, Wang Han soon noticed something wrong.

He couldn't pull Lin Yu.

Using all his strength, the hand grasping Lin Yu felt like it was holding onto a mountain.

Completely immovable.

Chapter 130: Primordial Shield

Wang Han felt like he wasn't grabbing an arm, but rather a colossal pillar rooted deep into the earth's core.

He exerted all his strength, his face turning crimson with effort, yet Lin Yu's feet seemed to have taken root, not moving an inch.

"You!"

Wang Han was both shocked and enraged, a breath caught in his chest, almost choking him.

What kind of situation was this!

Why was this nephew so stubborn!

"Uncle Wang."

Lin Yu finally spoke.

He gently placed his hand over Wang Han's wrist, which was bulging with veins from the strain.

A warm and gentle energy silently transferred through the point of contact.

Wang Han's heart, which had been frantically pounding from extreme fear and anger, suddenly slowed.

The string in his mind that had been stretched to its limit inexplicably relaxed.

That towering rage, that bone-chilling coldness, as if smoothed by an invisible hand, instantly subsided by more than half.

He was completely stunned.

What... was happening?

"You..." Wang Han opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but found his frantic emotions had vanished.

Lin Yu offered no explanation.

He simply raised his other hand and snapped his fingers crisply in front of Wang Han.

Snap.

The sound wasn't loud, but exceptionally clear.

A soft, warm white halo suddenly expanded from Lin Yu's fingertip, enveloping Wang Han.

[Primordial Snap] stored skill - Primordial-grade [Light's Redemption]!

Wang Han felt an indescribable warm current instantly wrap around his entire body.

The fiery, intense pain from his back, which had just been struck by rubble, vanished completely in an instant.

No.

It wasn't just these new injuries.

He felt his stiff lumbar spine from years of desk work now become incredibly comfortable.

Even an old injury from his younger days overseas, his left shoulder that would ache during rainy weather, now felt no discomfort whatsoever.

The accumulated ailments in his body from aging seemed to have been completely cleansed away by a mysterious force.

He felt as if he had become ten years younger!

Wang Han was utterly bewildered.

He subconsciously moved his shoulders, twisted his waist, his face filled with disbelief.

The pain, it was truly all gone!

"Dad!"

Wang Qingxuan's crying brought him back to reality. The young girl was still pale with fear, desperately clinging to his arm.

Even Lin Yu's strange soothing power couldn't dispel her instinctive terror of the apocalyptic scene before her.

Before Wang Han could process the astonishing changes in his body.

The area erupted with even more terrifying energy fluctuations once again!

Rumble!

This time's impact was at least ten times more violent than before!

It was no longer just simple shockwaves spreading.

The buildings on both sides of the street, those already precarious shops, crumbled and disintegrated instantly like paper constructions under this destructive force!

Steel bars twisted, bricks and stones exploded!

Countless building debris was swept into the sky, then transformed into an even more deadly "rubble rain," covering all directions!

"Watch out!"

Wang Han's body reacted faster than his mind.

He was about to repeat his previous tactic, using his own body to create a small safe zone for the two youngsters.

But a hand calmly and firmly pressed down on his shoulder.

It was Lin Yu.

Lin Yu stepped forward, positioning himself in front of Wang Han and Wang Qingxuan.

He didn't even look back.

He simply casually raised one hand, fingers spread, facing the oncoming torrent of building debris capable of crushing people into pulp.

"Rise."

One word.

The earth responded.

The ground beneath their feet began to tremble violently.

Deep cracks spread outwards from Lin Yu as the center.

Then, under the horrified gazes of Wang Han and Wang Qingxuan, an entire section of rock ground several meters thick was forcibly torn from the earth by an irresistible force, rising into the air!

It flipped and transformed mid-air, ultimately becoming a massive, thick rock shield, steadily blocking in front of the three!

Primordial-grade, [Rock Shield]!

The next second.

The world-destroying shockwave, carrying tons of construction debris, slammed fiercely into the shield!

Thud!

There was no earth-shattering roar.

Only an extremely dull impact sound, as if a meteor had crashed into an endless deep sea.

The rock shield didn't even tremble slightly.

All the impact, all the kinetic energy, was effortlessly absorbed and neutralized by it.

Wang Han and his daughter hid behind the shield, not even feeling a hint of wind pressure.

But it wasn't over.

The eight-armed blood shadow in the sky seemed to have entered a frenzied attack mode.

Its chaotic attacks triggered shockwaves like heartbeats, wave after wave, continuously surging forth.

Thud!

Another violent impact.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Each impact stronger than the last, madly hammering the solitary rock shield.

Wang Han's heart leaped into his throat.

He stared intently at the shield, fearing it would shatter the next second.

However, something bizarre occurred.

The shield made of ordinary rock, under repeated violent impacts, not only showed no cracks.

Instead, its surface began to emit a faint earthy yellow glow.

With each impact, the glow brightened slightly.

The shield's texture was visibly changing.

The originally rough rock surface began to smooth and solidify.

Its color also gradually shifted from ordinary gray-brown to a deep, warm-textured black jade hue.

Thud!

When another strongest wave of impact struck it.

The entire shield completed its transformation.

It was no longer rock.

But a massive, entirely black, yet crystal-clear jade barrier.

Through the obsidian-like smooth shield surface, one could clearly see the devastated world outside.

And in the sky, the still frantically waving eight-armed blood shadow.

Wang Han stared blankly at all this, his mind completely blank.

He slowly lowered his head, looking at his hand still resting on Lin Yu's arm.

Then, as if burned by fire, trembling, he gradually, bit by bit, released his grip.

Lin Yu paid no attention to the petrified Wang Han behind him.

His attention was completely captured by something else.

Through the obsidian-like barrier, though distorted, the outside scene was still visible.

He saw.

In the center of Old Ghost Hall's now-ruined shop.

There, a person was kneeling on the ground.

It was Old Ghost.

He knelt despondently in the rubble, his graying hair disheveled, his signature robe covered in dust and bloodstains.

In his arms, he held someone tightly.

Someone who no longer had any signs of life.

Seventh Master.

This was probably the reason for Zhao Tianyang's rampage.

Chapter 131: Chen Ao Arrives

So that's how it is.

Everything makes sense now.

Zhao Tianyang's reckless rampage, that sky-piercing rage—the source was right here.

Seventh Master was dead.

Killed by Chen Ao's men.

The last trace of leisurely entertainment in Lin Yu's heart completely vanished. What replaced it was a calm, deadly intent.

This was no longer a simple black market conflict.

If they dared to kill, how could Lin Yu not dare?

Little did they know, compared to Lin Yu's killing intent, the black-clad men's regret ran much deeper.

After all, it was originally just a conflict, but now it had truly become a fight to the death.

"He's gone mad... that guy has completely lost his mind!"

Not far away, several black-clad men who had narrowly escaped from the ruins were hiding behind a broken wall, gasping for breath in terror.

Scar-face's chest heaved violently, each breath carrying the scent of blood as he glared venomously at an equally disheveled companion beside him.

"Li San! This is all your doing!"

"If you hadn't taken it upon yourself to attack that old man, how could things have come to this!"

The man called Li San had a face covered in sweat and dust, his lips trembling as he defended himself.

"I... how was I supposed to know he was so fragile!"

Li San's voice carried a sob and a sense of grievance.

"Damn it, how was I supposed to know!"

Li San's voice was sharp and piercing, filled with fear and a desperate urge to shift blame.

He pointed at the eight-armed blood shadow in the sky, then at Old Ghost kneeling in the ruins, his entire body shaking.

"That kid is a monster! This old man is treacherous too! I... I thought the remaining one was also tough! I just wanted to strike first and force that monster to stop! Who the hell could have known he was just an ordinary old man! He broke at the slightest touch!"

His excuses sounded weak and pathetic, full of attempts to evade responsibility.

"Idiot!" Scar-face covered his chest, coughing up a mouthful of bloody foam, cursing viciously, "What's the use of saying all this now! Look at that monster! He's going to fight us to the death!"

The few surviving black-clad men looked at the Asura manifestation in the sky slowly brandishing eight hellish weapons, each feeling a chill of terror.

They could sense that the frenzied killing intent had completely locked onto every one of them.

"All of you, shut up."

A cold voice, not loud, instantly overpowered all the arguing and fear.

It was the silent squad leader.

He stepped out from behind the broken wall, his empty sleeve swaying in the wind, but he himself remained exceptionally calm.

He didn't even glance at Li San, just calmly watched Old Ghost in the center of the ruins, who was holding Seventh Master's corpse, utterly devastated.

"He's dead, so he's dead."

The man's words carried not a single ripple of emotion, as if stating some trivial matter.

"Just an old man about to enter the ground, no big deal."

Li San suddenly looked up, his face full of disbelief.

"But..."

"No buts." The squad leader cut him off, finally turning his gaze to him—a look of indifference as if viewing a dead object. "Don't forget who we are."

"We are Master Ao's men."

These words carried an arrogance and sense of entitlement that ran deep into the bones.

"In the black market, Master Ao is the law. Forget killing one useless old man, even if we killed everyone here, so what?"

His words made the few black-clad men who had been fearful moments ago suddenly perk up.

That's right.

What were they afraid of?

Behind them stood Chen Ao! The sole king of Linzhou's black market!

The squad leader was quite satisfied with his subordinates' reaction as he slowly scanned the devastated battlefield.

"Things have reached this point, there's no turning back now."

He raised his hand, pointing at the towering eight-armed Asura, then at the grief-stricken Old Ghost in the ruins.

"Today, no one from Old Ghost Hall can live."

"Not just them."

"Everyone who witnessed this scene must die."

The man's voice carried an unyielding determination.

"Master Ao doesn't like trouble, and he especially dislikes people challenging his authority."

"If word of today's events gets out, where would Master Ao's face be? How would we explain ourselves?"

He pulled out a palm-sized black metal cube from his chest, covered in intricate patterns.

"I'll contact Master Ao now to request reinforcements."

The corner of his mouth curled into a cruel arc.

"Gather manpower, seal off the entire Western District, and then... clean up."

Clean up!

These two words carried a chilling cruelty.

The black metal cube in the squad leader's hand had already begun emitting faint energy fluctuations.

He was about to activate it.

Once the message was sent, the entire Black Market Western District would become an isolated slaughterhouse.

The fear on Li San and the other survivors' faces was replaced by a sick excitement.

They were the executioners, not the sacrifices.

This realization made them rediscover the arrogance that belonged to "Master Ao's men."

However.

Just as the squad leader was about to press the center of the metal cube.

A hand appeared out of nowhere, gently pressing down on the back of his hand.

This hand was slender, clean, with distinct knuckles.

Its appearance had no warning, yet carried an absolute will that brooked no refusal.

Every hair on the squad leader's body stood on end instantly.

He hadn't even seen where this hand came from.

An indescribable terrifying pressure, like a towering mountain range, descended upon them.

This pressure wasn't directed at him alone.

It enveloped the entire battlefield.

In the sky, the eight-armed Asura that had been wildly brandishing weapons suddenly froze mid-motion.

In the ruins, Old Ghost's mournful cries while holding Seventh Master's corpse abruptly ceased.

Behind the broken wall, those black-clad men who had just been showing ferocious expressions became rigid, unable to move.

Even Wang Han and Wang Qingxuan, hiding behind the obsidian shield, felt a trembling from the depths of their souls.

Time seemed to have been put on pause at this moment.

The entire chaotic, violent, and turbulent battlefield fell into an eerie silence.

"Not bad, but there's still room for improvement."

A calm yet slightly amused voice sounded by the squad leader's ear.

The squad leader turned his head slowly, inch by inch, with great difficulty.

He saw a man.

A man wearing casual clothes, with utterly ordinary features.

The man wore a faint, elusive smile, standing right beside him as if he were just an ordinary citizen passing by to watch the commotion.

But the profound, mountain-like aura emanating from him made it difficult for the squad leader to even breathe.

"M-Master... Master Ao!"

The squad leader's lips trembled as he squeezed out two words through gritted teeth.

Beside him, Li San and the other black-clad men, upon recognizing the newcomer, were so terrified they nearly lost their souls, lowering their heads in unison.

"Master Ao!"

Chen Ao.

The sole king of Linzhou's black market.

He had actually come personally.

Chen Ao paid no attention to these kneeling subordinates, simply releasing the hand that had been pressing on the squad leader's hand.

Chapter 132: Not Knowing Who You Are

Chen Ao's gaze slowly swept across the entire scene.

Finally, it landed on Lin Yu's massive, pitch-black jade barrier.

Through that translucent barrier, his stare collided directly with Wang Han's terrified expression.

It was a warning.

A warning from a superior to an inferior, completely devoid of any emotion.

Wang Han's heart constricted violently, a chill shooting from his soles straight to the crown of his head. Instinctively, he grabbed Lin Yu and Wang Qingxuan tightly, pulling them more forcefully behind himself as he shrank into the shield's shadow, not daring to make any further movements.

Even though he was bursting with questions and shock about Lin Yu, he could only suppress them deep within his heart.

That was Chen Ao.

The legendary Chen Ao.

No one knew exactly how terrifying he truly was.

Chen Ao withdrew his gaze, as if he had merely glanced at ants by the roadside.

Beside him, a man similarly dressed in casual clothes with a hood and mask whispered something in his ear.

That was Li Mo in disguise.

Chen Ao's interest was clearly entirely focused on the eight-armed Asura in the sky.

He looked up at the terrifying dharma form that had temporarily paused due to his arrival, showing not fear but rather undisguised appreciation.

"Burning life force in exchange for power beyond limits."

Chen Ao spoke as if evaluating a work of art.

"Not bad, promising talent."

"Pity, you followed the wrong person."

He extended a hand toward Zhao Tianyang in the sky and casually crooked his finger.

"Kid, come here, work with me."

"I guarantee you an unlimited future."

His words carried the natural tone of recruitment.

As if his mere offer was the greatest favor, something no one had the right to refuse.

However.

What answered him wasn't Zhao Tianyang's submission.

It was the eight-armed Asura that had just paused, now erupting with killing intent ten times more ferocious than before!

"ROAR—!"

That was no longer a human roar.

It was the shriek of a hellish demon!

In Zhao Tianyang's eyes, which had completely turned blood-red, there was no trace of reason, only the purest desire for destruction.

Who cares about Chen Ao, who cares about the king of the black market!

Kill!

Kill everything in sight!

BOOM!

Eight bloody arms instantly transformed into eight streams of destructive light, simultaneously blasting toward Chen Ao!

The two thickest arms, holding massive clawed blood-hands, swept toward Chen Ao's face from left and right with air-rending shrieks!

This scene made everyone hold their breath.

Mad!

This monster was truly insane!

He actually dared to attack Master Ao!

Chen Ao's subordinates all turned deathly pale, as if already witnessing a scene of bloody carnage.

Even Chen Ao himself showed a moment of astonishment.

He seemed equally unprepared for such direct, face-denying defiance.

But he was, after all, Chen Ao.

After the astonishment came even more intense excitement.

"Haha! Got guts!"

He laughed loudly, advancing instead of retreating, energy erupting from within him like roaring mountains and tidal waves as he prepared to meet the attack head-on.

But he was still a step too slow.

Or rather, he underestimated the Asura's madness.

SMACK!

Two incredibly crisp, thunderous slaps exploded across the silent battlefield!

The two massive blood-hands landed squarely, left and right, across Chen Ao's face.

Time froze once again.

The wild grin on Chen Ao's face stiffened.

His entire body spun like a home-run baseball at an unbelievable speed, flying backward!

BOOM!

He smashed through a ruined wall over ten meters away, completely buried under countless bricks and rubble.

The entire scene fell into dead silence.

Li Mo's face beneath the mask twitched.

The small boss, Scar-face, Li San... all of Chen Ao's subordinates stood petrified, their minds completely blank.

Master Ao...

Got slapped away?

Just as everyone expected Chen Ao to erupt in fury the next second.

From the rubble pile came uncontrollable, deep-bellied laughter.

"Haha... HAHAAHAHAHA!"

"Interesting! So incredibly interesting!"

BOOM!

Rubble exploded as Chen Ao leaped out from the ruins.

Clear palm marks were visible on both sides of his face, and a trace of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth, but his body burned with unprecedented fighting spirit.

"It's been so long since I've had this much fun!"

He cracked his neck, joints popping loudly, his gaze fixed on Zhao Tianyang filled with blazing intensity.

"I'm definitely claiming you as my treasure!"

The moment his words fell, Chen Ao's figure vanished from his spot.

The next instant, he appeared above the eight-armed Asura's head.

He pressed his palms together, an invisible yet vast mental energy transforming into a massive unseen needle that stabbed fiercely toward Zhao Tianyang's brow.

"Wake up for me!"

BUZZ!

The violent Asura dharma form trembled violently.

The eight arms brandishing hellish weapons froze momentarily in their movements.

Deep within the blood-red eyes, a flicker of extreme agony and struggle seemed to appear.

"It's working!"

Joy erupted on the faces of Chen Ao's subordinates.

Master Ao is truly Master Ao!

No matter how strong this monster is, before Master Ao's unfathomable mental techniques, it can only be forcibly awakened and kneel in submission!

Even the always-calm Li Mo showed slight movement beneath his hood.

Chen Ao's mental energy was even stronger than he had estimated.

Chen Ao himself was brimming with confidence.

This technique, [Awakening Spirit Pierce], was an esoteric art he obtained from ruins in his early years, specifically designed to deal with enemies who had fallen into berserk and out-of-control states.

It ignored physical defense, striking directly at the soul's origin.

As long as the target's consciousness wasn't completely extinguished, they would be forcibly pulled out of their madness.

He refused to believe this young man had truly gone mad to the point of forgetting who he was.

However.

The next second.

"ROAR—!!!"

A shriek more piercing and savage than any before exploded from the Asura dharma form's chest!

This wasn't a sign of awakening.

It was the fury of excruciating pain and violation!

Chen Ao's mental energy, far from awakening Zhao Tianyang's reason, had instead become like a red-hot branding iron thrust into a beast's brain!

The last trace of struggle vanished completely from those blood-red eyes.

Replaced by purity to the extreme, completely unadulterated... destruction!

BOOM!

The frozen eight arms began dancing wildly again!

This time, their targets weren't scattered but moved with unprecedented coordination, all locking onto Chen Ao suspended in mid-air!

Eight hellish weapons tore through the air, carrying overwhelming bloodlust energy, sealing off all of Chen Ao's escape routes from every direction!

"Not good!" Alarm bells screamed in Chen Ao's mind.

The other's madness exceeded his comprehension.

That killing intent was no longer simple anger, but rather a... Dao!

A pure Dao centered around slaughter!

This person could no longer be called human.

He was a vessel of the Dao, a walking embodiment of slaughter in the mortal world!

He might truly no longer remember who he was!

Chapter 133: Asura Battle Chen Ao

Eight hellish weapons, carrying bloodlust energy capable of tearing the heavens apart, attacked from eight impossibly tricky angles, sealing off all possible escape routes for Chen Ao.

This wasn't an attack.

This was slaughter.

Pure, absolute destruction that left no room for survival.

Chen Ao's subordinates had completely lost their ability to think, frozen in place with the only thing they could do being waiting for the inevitable bloodshed.

However, the reason why the name "Chen Ao" had become the sole taboo in Linzhou's black market...

Wasn't just because of his mental energy techniques.

Facing this world-destroying encirclement, Chen Ao didn't even look up.

He simply raised his right hand.

Then, lightly snapped his fingers.

Snap.

There was no energy explosion, no shockwave surge.

Only six fist-sized elemental spheres emitting different lights appeared out of thin air around his body.

Crimson fire.

Deep blue ice.

Crackling lightning.

Invisible wind.

Heavy earth.

Sharp metal.

The six elemental spheres floated silently, orbiting him with perfect rhythm to form an absolute domain.

The next instant, the Eight-Armed Asura's attacks arrived.

Boom!

The first to arrive was the mountain-splitting giant axe. Carrying unstoppable immense force, it viciously chopped down on the crimson fire sphere above Chen Ao's head.

The expected explosion didn't occur.

The crimson fire sphere simply rotated gently, a soft yet incredibly resilient vortex of flames swallowing the giant axe.

The terrifying kinetic energy capable of splitting tanks was rapidly dissipated, transferred, and ultimately vanished within the vortex.

Immediately after.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Seven metal impact sounds so dense they almost merged into one erupted thunderously at the battlefield's center!

Claws met the ice sphere, instantly freezing the bloodlust at their fingertips.

Bone blades collided with the lightning sphere, trembling violently from the wild electric arcs.

Spears, daggers, chain hammers...

Every hellish weapon was precisely intercepted by a corresponding elemental sphere.

Those eight frenzied attacks powerful enough to destroy the entire street district couldn't even touch the hem of Chen Ao's clothes.

He stood like a reef in the eye of the storm, unmoved despite the tsunami raging around him.

Behind the obsidian shield.

Wang Han's jaw dropped open wide enough to fit an egg.

He didn't really understand practitioner combat.

But he could recognize strength differences.

The eight-armed blood shadow in the sky was such a terrifying demon god posture.

Yet now, all of this demon god's attacks were being so effortlessly blocked by that man using six small light spheres.

This had completely exceeded his understanding.

From beginning to end, Chen Ao never considered Zhao Tianyang as an opponent of equal level.

He was observing, analyzing, enjoying.

He was using the most energy-efficient, most effective method to deplete the power Zhao Tianyang obtained by burning his life.

Simultaneously, he was demonstrating to everyone his absolute dominance as the king of Linzhou.

"Roar!"

Failing with his first strike, Zhao Tianyang's madness intensified.

His eight arms moved with even greater speed and more chaotic postures, launching second, third, countless waves of attacks!

The sky above completely transformed into a hellscape of light and shadow.

Blood-colored weapon afterimages and six-colored elemental brilliance collided wildly, each impact erupting with deafening roars and destructive energy remnants.

Yet no matter how frenzied or dense Zhao Tianyang's attacks became.

Those six elemental spheres always appeared precisely at the most critical positions, using minimal cost to neutralize the deadliest attacks.

Chen Ao hadn't even moved half a step.

His hands clasped behind his back, head tilted upward, watching the frenzied Asura manifestation as if appreciating an exquisite drama.

"It's useless! It's useless! Tianyang!"

From within the ruins, Old Ghost clutching Seventh Master's corpse let out a heart-rending scream.

His eyes were bloodshot, filled with both grief and boundless hatred.

"His elemental spheres may seem perfect, but each defense consumes core energy! Attack his main body! All his mental energy is focused on controlling the spheres, his physical defense is weakest now!"

"Did you hear that! Attack beneath him! He appears to be floating in air, but there's still energy flow! That's his foundation!"

Old Ghost screamed with all his strength, trying to convey his decades of experience with medicines and combat to the young man who had already lost his sanity.

He hoped for a miracle.

He hoped Zhao Tianyang retained a shred of reason.

However, the Asura manifestation in the sky showed no response to his shouts.

Its eyes contained only destruction.

In its world, only this enemy that must be torn apart remained.

It continued using the most primitive, most savage method, recklessly squandering its own life.

Old Ghost's shouts gradually turned into despairing sobs.

He looked at the sky, then at the cold body of Seventh Master in his arms, his turbid old tears finally bursting through the dam.

"Old Seventh... I'm useless... I'm completely useless..."

Chen Ao seemed to have heard Old Ghost's analysis, casting an interested glance toward the ruins.

"Not bad analysis."

He even offered commentary.

"Unfortunately, this guy can no longer understand human speech."

These words completely shattered Old Ghost's last remaining mental defenses.

Ever since being betrayed by all at Qingyun, he had rarely experienced pure human connection.

Only a handful of people made him feel worthy of friendship.

Zhao Tianyang was one such person.

He couldn't understand Zhao Tianyang's thinking, but he knew this kid was pure, so pure it bordered on foolish.

Such purity and childlike heart inevitably made Old Ghost develop special feelings.

Like looking at his own child.

But now the child had gone mad, his friend was dead.

The same despair he felt back then surged up once more.

This time he still had no solutions whatsoever.

"Chen Ao! Fuck your mother! You'll die horribly! You'll die a terrible death!"

Old Ghost raved like a madman, cursing with the most venomous language.

But Chen Ao couldn't even be bothered to give him an extra reaction.

His patience seemed to be running out.

The amused appreciation gradually faded from his face, replaced by bottomless coldness.

Zhao Tianyang had gone mad, unfortunately, he wasn't an indecisive person.

"This farce should end now."

He murmured to himself.

No longer passively defending.

The six elemental spheres floating around him suddenly blazed with intense light!

Boom!

The crimson fire sphere violently erupted, transforming into a roaring fire dragon that instantly entangled the Asura's giant axe arm, the terrifying high temperatures distorting the air.

Crack!

The deep blue ice sphere exploded, turning into countless ice crystals that froze two of the Asura's arms along with their weapons mid-air.

Zap!

The lightning sphere transformed into an electric net that descended headfirst.

The wind, earth, and metal elemental spheres simultaneously launched their attacks.

In just an instant.

The offensive-defensive situation completely reversed!

The Eight-Armed Asura that moments ago had been imposing and frenziedly attacking now had six arms instantly restrained, unable to move.

Only two arms holding claws remained, struggling futilely.

Chapter 134: Let him come over!

"I'm giving you one last chance."

Chen Ao's figure appeared ghost-like before the Asura Manifestation, his eyes level with those blood-red pupils.

"Submit to me."

"Or be completely shattered by me, then remolded."

His words carried no emotion, only the absolute will belonging to a ruler.

The response he received was Zhao Tianyang's final madness.

The two remaining arms gathered the Asura Manifestation's last remaining strength, clutching toward Chen Ao's head with the determination to perish together!

"Foolish."

Chen Ao finally completely lost his patience.

He didn't dodge, merely slowly raised his own hands.

Then, under everyone's horrified gazes.

Pressed them together.

Buzz!

The six elemental spheres that were separately suppressing the Asura's arms seemed to receive some command, instantly abandoning their targets.

They transformed into six streams of light, converging before Chen Ao's palms at speeds surpassing lightning.

Fire and ice, thunder and wind, earth and metal.

Six completely different, even mutually destructive violent elements were forcibly merged and compressed within Chen Ao's palms by an incomprehensible great power.

A gray energy sphere the size of a fist, yet seemingly containing an entire chaotic nebula within, slowly took form.

That gray chaotic energy sphere emitted a deathly stillness that could end all things.

It emitted no light, nor was it hot.

It simply existed there, causing the surrounding space to begin distorting, light being devoured, sound being erased.

A fear originating from life's instinct gripped the heart of every living being present who could still breathe.

Zhao Tianyang's frenzied Asura Manifestation's final swinging claws stopped less than half a meter from Chen Ao, frozen in place by an invisible force.

The bloodlust energy constituting the manifestation was being silently decomposed and absorbed by that small gray sphere.

Destruction was already inevitable.

"No!"

From within the ruins, Old Ghost let out a blood-curdling roar.

He abruptly raised his head, his bloodshot eyes fixed firmly on Chen Ao in midair, roaring with his last bit of strength.

"Chen Ao! How dare you touch him! Our boss won't let you off!"

"Old Seventh and I, dying is one thing, but Zhao Tianyang is different..."

This roar seemed particularly abrupt in the deathly silent battlefield.

Chen Ao's movements paused slightly.

He had apprehensions, but more than that, he felt offended anger.

He slowly turned his head, looking down from above at Old Ghost kneeling in the rubble pile, his expression that of looking at a noisy ant.

Then, he smiled.

A silent, thoroughly mocking smile.

"Boss?"

Chen Ao repeated the word, full of contempt.

"In this Linzhou, who dares call themselves my boss?"

"A guy who hides his head and shows his tail, only daring to send trash like you to show your face?"

"What kind of thing is he?"

With each word he spoke, the suction force of the gray energy sphere in his hand intensified.

The speed of the Asura Manifestation's collapse visibly accelerated.

Those eight ferocious arms were beginning to turn into ethereal energy particles from their ends, being drawn into the chaos.

"My boss..."

Old Ghost wanted to say more, but his words abruptly stopped when he saw Chen Ao's reaction.

His face, originally twisted with despair, suddenly showed a strange calmness.

It was an eerie calmness of having completely seen through something.

He no longer roared, nor cursed.

He just looked at Chen Ao, looking at his deliberately displayed, confident arrogance.

Old Ghost noticed.

While Chen Ao was speaking, he glanced out of the corner of his eye at the hooded man behind him.

An extremely subtle, almost imperceptible movement.

But Old Ghost saw it.

That wasn't seeking opinion.

It was a subconscious confirmation, an instinct to seek support.

He was apprehensive.

This sole king of Linzhou's black market, when hearing the word "boss," deep inside, was apprehensive.

All his arrogance, all his mockery, were just to cover up that moment of hesitation.

Having realized this, Old Ghost suddenly wasn't despairing anymore.

He even found it somewhat laughable.

He slowly lowered his head, using his dust-covered sleeve to gently wipe Seventh Master's already cold, stiff cheek in his arms.

The movement was gentle, filled with final tenderness.

Then, he raised his head again to look at Chen Ao.

This time, his eyes no longer held grief and indignation or fear, only a pity as if looking at a dead man.

"We might all die here today."

Old Ghost's voice was no longer sharp, but instead a settled hoarseness, each word clear and distinct.

"Zhao Tianyang might die."

"I might die too."

"We're just possibilities..."

"But you, Chen Ao..."

He paused, then spoke word by word.

"Will inevitably die."

These words carried no threatening tone.

More like a pronouncement.

A statement of established fact.

The air seemed to solidify.

The mocking smile on Chen Ao's face froze.

The energy fluctuations of the chaotic energy sphere in his hand that was devouring the Asura Manifestation showed a trace of unstable disorder.

Compared to Old Ghost's previous desperate curses, this extremely calm "will inevitably die" made him feel an inexplicable irritation and anger.

It was the humiliation of being seen through by an ant and having his fate predicted.

"Are you telling me what to do?"

Chen Ao narrowed his eyes, killing intent soaring.

"No." Old Ghost shook his head, he even twitched his dry, cracked lips to reveal an ugly smile, "I'm just stating a fact."

"As long as my boss comes over and sees this scene."

"Whether we live or not is uncertain."

"But you will definitely die miserably."

"Is that so?" Chen Ao laughed in extreme anger, "Then I'd like to see how he makes me die miserably!"

Li Mo beside him finally couldn't help but speak quietly.

"Master Ao, there's no need to argue with someone about to die. First deal with this strange guy, his condition can't hold much longer."

Li Mo's reminder was timely.

This wasn't the time for arguments, dealing with this endlessly troublesome Asura and cleaning up the scene were the primary tasks.

Chen Ao certainly understood this logic.

But that inexplicable anger in his heart just wouldn't be suppressed.

In all his years dominating Linzhou, when had Chen Ao ever been spoken to with such pity, such a look as if he were already dead?

But... really, should he kill Zhao Tianyang?

How credible were Old Ghost's words?

Would killing Zhao Tianyang be irreversible?

"Haha... Hahahaha!"

Chen Ao suddenly burst into loud laughter, the laughter filled with unrestrained arrogance.

He slowly released his pressed-together hands.

That chaotic energy sphere powerful enough to destroy everything didn't shoot out, but under his control, slowly dissipated, decomposing back into six most primitive elemental spheres orbiting around him.

The Asura Manifestation suppressed to the brink of collapse thus gained a breathing opportunity, no longer continuing to disintegrate and dissipate.

Chen Ao's action stunned everyone.

Including his own subordinates.

Also including Lin Yu behind the Obsidian Shield, who had been coldly observing.

Chen Ao stretched out his hand, pointing at Old Ghost in the ruins, pointing at that broken Asura Manifestation.

On his face was the ultimate expression of arrogance and provocation.

"Fine!"

"Today I'll give your boss some face!"

"I'll wait right here!"

He took a step forward, the six elemental spheres around him shining brightly, his unparalleled aura soaring skyward, stirring up wind and clouds in the entire western district's sky.

"Let him come over then!"

Chapter 135: He called me, so naturally I had to go out.

"Let him come!"

Chen Ao's voice, filled with unparalleled arrogance, echoed through the deathly silent western district.

The six elemental spheres swirling around him emitted suffocating pressure, making him appear like a deity holding absolute power over life and death.

Li Mo stood behind him, his face hidden beneath a hood showing no visible reaction.

Chen Ao's subordinates, after a brief moment of stunned silence, erupted with fanatical fervor as if they had narrowly escaped death.

Master Ao truly lived up to his name!

No matter how bizarre the opponent was, no matter what powerful figure might be backing them, Master Ao showed no fear whatsoever!

He had even voluntarily stopped his attack, giving the opponent a chance to call for reinforcements!

What incredible confidence! What overwhelming dominance!

Behind the Obsidian Shield, Wang Han trembled like a leaf in the autumn wind.

He desperately covered Wang Qingxuan's mouth to prevent her from making any sound, yet his own teeth chattered uncontrollably.

Madmen.

They were all madmen!

He had never imagined that the legendary world of practitioners could be so unreasonable, so bloody and terrifying.

The slightest disagreement could lead to earth-shattering battles.

And now, that man called Chen Ao was actually waiting here for some unknown "boss" to arrive.

Then what?

Another even more terrifying slaughter?

Wang Han didn't dare to think further, feeling only bone-chilling cold that made him almost faint.

Yet, in this deathly silence dominated by absolute power.

An untimely voice rang out.

"Heh... hehe..."

It was Old Ghost.

Kneeling in the ruins, holding Seventh Master's cold corpse in his arms, he suddenly began laughing softly.

The laughter started very quiet, very suppressed, filled with sorrow.

But soon, it grew louder and more unrestrained.

"Haha... HAHAAAA!"

Old Ghost threw his head back, his graying hair dancing wildly in the wind as he pointed at the arrogant figure floating mid-air, laughing until tears streamed down his face.

"Chen Ao, oh Chen Ao, you're putting on quite the act!"

This sudden mockery instantly froze the atmosphere on the scene.

Chen Ao's face, filled with arrogance, stiffened slightly.

"Look at you, saying the toughest words, putting on the proudest show, but what's the result?"

Old Ghost's laughter abruptly stopped, replaced by sarcastic insight.

"You don't dare kill him!"

He pointed at the damaged Asura Manifestation, enunciating each word clearly.

"You're scared!"

"You're afraid my boss will actually come for you and wipe you out along with this pathetic black market of yours from Linzhou!"

"That's why you're putting on this performance! Who are you performing for? Yourself?!"

Each word struck at the heart.

If the earlier "certain death" was merely a prediction.

Now, he was publicly tearing off Chen Ao's "king" disguise and trampling it underfoot!

"You're asking for death!"

Chen Ao finally became completely enraged.

The last trace of playful "face-giving" vanished from his expression.

Replaced by volcanic fury!

Boom!

The six elemental spheres surrounding him suddenly blazed with intense light!

Terrifying energy fluctuations transformed into substantial storms that swept out in all directions!

"Very well!"

Chen Ao's chest heaved violently, each word seeming to be squeezed through gritted teeth.

"Since you're so eager to meet your boss, I'll send you to meet the King of Hell first!"

"I'll crush you, this loyal subordinate, along with your precious treasure!"

"Then mix your ashes together and scatter them on this street!"

"Let's see what he can do to me when he arrives!"

Killing intent!

Pure, completely unmasked killing intent!

This time, Chen Ao truly intended to kill.

He slowly raised his hand, palm aimed at the already teetering Asura Manifestation.

The gray chaotic energy sphere that had just dissipated moments before was visibly gathering again.

Destruction was imminent.

Wang Han felt as if an invisible hand had gripped his heart, stopping his breath completely.

He was finished.

Everyone was finished.

This man called Chen Ao would truly level this place to the ground.

Just as Wang Han fell into complete despair.

A warm hand gently rested on his cold, stiff shoulder.

He shuddered violently and turned around.

It was Lin Yu.

"Uncle Wang."

Lin Yu's face showed no trace of tension or fear, maintaining the same calm expression.

"You and Qingxuan stay here, don't move."

Wang Han stared blankly.

He looked at Lin Yu, then at the apocalyptic scene outside the shield, his mind completely blank.

"You... what are you going to do?"

Wang Han's voice turned shrill from extreme terror as he desperately grabbed Lin Yu's arm.

"Lin Yu! Don't do anything reckless! Outside now..."

He spoke incoherently, unable to describe the horror outside.

This wasn't something ordinary people like them should get involved in!

Lin Yu simply smiled faintly, gently patting the back of Wang Han's hand to reassure him.

Then, facing Wang Han's frightened and confused gaze, he said something that the latter completely couldn't understand.

"He called me."

"How could I not go out?"

Wang Han was completely baffled.

He stared dumbfounded at Lin Yu, his mind unable to process this.

"What do you mean?"

He asked instinctively.

"Who... who called you?"

Lin Yu didn't answer.

He simply turned around, facing the massive and thick Obsidian Shield.

Wang Han wanted to ask more.

But he saw Lin Yu already calmly taking a step forward.

Without any earth-shattering commotion.

The indestructible Obsidian Shield that had withstood countless destructive impacts silently melted open a gap just large enough for one person to pass through.

Like a silent water curtain making way for its master.

Lin Yu's figure passed through the shield.

One step.

From absolute safety into the eye of the storm.

He stood on the devastated ruins, directly facing Chen Ao's overwhelming killing intent.

The noise, the violent winds, and the suffocating energy pressure from outside instantly washed over him.

Lin Yu's casual clothes flapped loudly in the wind.

His appearance was so abrupt, yet so natural.

So much so that everyone on the battlefield froze for an instant.

Chen Ao, who had been about to gather the chaotic energy sphere, stopped his movement.

Behind him, the always composed Li Mo focused his hooded gaze completely on this suddenly appearing young man for the first time.

In the ruins, Old Ghost, who had been holding Seventh Master's corpse and acting like a madman, stopped his cursing and stared over blankly.

Even the Asura Manifestation floating in the sky, driven only by destructive instinct, showed an almost imperceptible hesitation in its wildly swinging arms.

Chapter 136: He's the Boss!

The entire scene fell into dead silence.

This young man who suddenly emerged from the obsidian shield was like a piece of ice thrown into boiling water, instantly causing the entire battlefield to steam with an eerie stillness.

Wang Han's brain completely crashed.

He reached out, wanting to grab Lin Yu's sleeve, but only caught a handful of cold air.

What just happened?

Lin Yu said... someone was calling him?

Who?

That old man kneeling in the ruins was desperately shouting for his "boss."

Then, Lin Yu went out.

An absurd thought so insane it made him question his own sanity exploded in Wang Han's mind.

Could it be...

Lin Yu... was that mysterious "boss"?

Once this thought took root, it grew wildly, almost bursting through his rationality.

But how?

How could it be?

How old was Lin Yu?

What did he rely on to become a boss that even Chen Ao feared?

And...

Why was he so strong?

It wasn't just Wang Han—even the two sides confronting each other on the battlefield were stunned by this sudden development.

Chen Ao stopped gathering energy, narrowing his eyes as he examined this unexpected visitor.

Very young.

His aura seemed ordinary, like a regular college student.

But anyone who could walk out of that strange black shield definitely couldn't be normal.

Could it be... he was that elusive "boss"?

Chen Ao raised his guard to the highest level.

He didn't immediately attack but subtly glanced toward Old Ghost in the ruins.

Old Ghost was his only reference for judgment.

If this young man was the "boss," Old Ghost would definitely react.

However.

Old Ghost's reaction defied everyone's expectations.

He just blankly raised his head, staring at Lin Yu standing in the center of the battlefield, his face filled with complete confusion and bewilderment.

He didn't recognize him.

It was a genuine, pure sense of unfamiliarity from the depths of his being.

Who was this young man?

Why did he emerge from that monster's shield?

What did he want to do?

Old Ghost's mind was a complete mess.

First, whenever Lin Yu had visited Old Ghost Hall before, it was either late at night or he wore a hood and mask, never showing his true face.

Second, after undergoing the baptism of the Origin-tier skill, Lin Yu's physique, appearance, and even his core temperament had undergone earth-shaking changes.

A complete rebirth.

To Old Ghost, the current Lin Yu was a total stranger.

And Old Ghost's momentary confusion became the final straw that broke the camel's back.

Chen Ao smiled.

It was a cruel smile, one that had been suppressed for a long time and finally found an outlet.

He understood.

Old Ghost didn't recognize this kid!

Then what was there to fear?

What damn boss? He never came!

This kid was just someone who happened to get caught up in this, had some special life-saving methods, and now didn't know his place, trying to play the hero!

Wang Han also understood.

When he saw Old Ghost's confused expression, the flame of hope that had just ignited in him was completely extinguished with a "poof" sound, as if doused by a bucket of ice water.

No...

Lin Yu wasn't that boss!

Then what was the difference between going out now and committing suicide?

"Lin Yu! Come back! Get back here now!"

Wang Han could no longer care about fear. He rushed to the edge of the opening melted in the shield, shouting with all his might.

But that invisible barrier firmly blocked both his voice and body within the safe zone.

Despair.

Complete and utter despair consumed him once again.

"Hah, another one who's not afraid to die."

Chen Ao's patience had completely run out. He couldn't even be bothered with extra words.

Being repeatedly provoked by an old man, and now having some young punk interrupt his rhythm.

The rage in his heart had completely boiled over.

"Since you're so eager to die, I'll grant your wish!"

Chen Ao no longer paid attention to Zhao Tianyang in the sky, instead completely locking his overwhelming killing intent onto Lin Yu.

"I'll crush you into dust first, then—"

His words were cut short.

Because a being with purer killing intent and more violent rage than his own had taken new action.

High in the sky.

The eight-armed Asura, which had gained a brief respite when Chen Ao stopped attacking but was still partially restrained by six elemental forces, suddenly stopped struggling.

Those blood-red eyes containing only destruction and madness slowly turned.

Finally, they focused on Lin Yu.

"It's over..."

Wang Han saw this scene, his vision going dark as he almost fainted.

That insane monster had identified Lin Yu as an enemy!

Chen Ao's subordinates also showed expressions of schadenfreude.

This fool who didn't know his place was about to be torn to pieces by that monster!

Even Chen Ao himself stopped with interest, preparing to enjoy a show of "bad guys fighting bad guys."

He even thought this would be more entertaining than doing it himself.

However.

The next second.

A scene that would make everyone's eyes nearly pop out of their sockets, something they would remember for the rest of their lives, occurred.

That towering eight-armed Asura.

That monster so insane it dared to slap even Chen Ao, retaining only its killing instinct.

After staring at Lin Yu for three seconds.

Slowly... slowly...

Bent its ferocious, massive body composed of bloodlust energy.

Those eight arms brandishing hellish weapons retracted all their sharp edges, hanging by its sides.

That proud, unyielding head filled with destructive will.

Faced the thin young man standing on the ruins.

Deeply, lowered.

It wasn't submission.

Nor was it fear.

It was something... engraved in the deepest part of its soul, something that would never fade even if it lost its mind, even if it forgot everything...

Instinct.

The absolute loyalty of a beast to its master.

...

Behind the obsidian shield.

Wang Han was completely speechless.

His mouth hung open, his throat making "heh heh" leaking air sounds, but he couldn't utter a single word.

In his mind, that insane thought that had just emerged and which he had dismissed as madness now exploded, becoming the one and only, unshakable reality.

Boss.

Lin Yu.

Lin Yu... was actually that mysterious "boss" that even Chen Ao secretly feared?

He looked at his nephew's back, that "waste delay examinee" who had recently been criticized by relatives at home and worried about by his parents.

Then looked at the terrifying demon god kneeling at his feet, capable of destroying heaven and earth.

The world shattered before his eyes into countless incomprehensible fragments.

...

In the ruins.

Old Ghost also saw it.

His eyes, clouded by grief and despair, suddenly shone with a terrifying brilliance when he witnessed this scene.

How could he not understand now?

Zhao Tianyang had a Myth-level profession [Asura]! And now he was a madman burning his life for revenge!

He had long forgotten everything!

If there was anyone in this world who could make him, who had completely lost his mind, adopt such a posture...

There was only one!

The boss!

Chapter 137: Kill First, Then Kill

The wind stopped.

The chaotic flow of energy subsided.

Everyone's breathing seemed to be sucked away in that moment.

The arrogance, confidence, and the murderous intent about to erupt on Chen Ao's face all froze solid.

He resembled a stone sculpture instantly weathered by time, maintaining his raised hand posture, completely motionless.

His mind went completely blank.

His rationality completely shattered.

What happened?

That frenzied, Asura monster who dared to slap even him... was bowing to some random kid who appeared out of nowhere?

This was more absurd than seeing the sun rise from the west with his own eyes.

This completely exceeded his understanding, overturning the worldview he relied on for survival.

He couldn't comprehend it.

He refused to comprehend it.

In the midst of extreme shock and absurdity, Chen Ao made an instinctive movement.

His head, almost imperceptibly, tilted just a fraction toward the direction behind him.

The corner of his eye, passing over his shoulder, landed on that always quiet, hooded man.

He was seeking answers.

He was silently asking.

Is this person from the Abyssal Domains?

Only this explanation could provide a barely supporting point for his collapsing worldview.

Only someone from that legendary terrifying place could possess such unreasonable methods, making a myth-level frenzied practitioner bow in submission!

Li Mo received his inquiry.

This man who crawled out from mountains of corpses and seas of blood had maintained a transcendent calm from beginning to end.

When that Asura Manifestation knelt down, his silhouette hidden in the hood's shadow only moved extremely slightly.

Now, facing Chen Ao's almost pleading glance, Li Mo finally made a clear movement.

He observed Lin Yu.

That young man standing in the center of the ruins, with a thin build and ordinary aura.

He carefully discerned.

Discerning whether that person carried that familiar aura unique to the Abyssal Domains, mixed with madness, slaughter, despair, and survival instinct.

None.

Not a trace.

That person was as clean as a blank sheet of paper, as calm as an ancient well.

Therefore, Li Mo slowly, shook his head.

This movement was light, slow, but like an invisible heavy hammer, fiercely smashing against Chen Ao's nerves.

No?

Not from the Abyssal Domains?

The moment he received this answer, Chen Ao's heart strangely surged with a wild joy of relief.

The giant boulder named "Abyssal Domains" that had been pressing on his heart crashed to the ground.

Excellent.

He wasn't some fierce dragon crossing the river that he couldn't understand or resist.

However.

This feeling of relief lasted less than a tenth of a second.

Before being completely submerged by an even more scorching, more ferocious emotion.

It was an indescribable, ultimate humiliation!

He, Chen Ao, the sole king of Linzhou's black market.

What had he just been doing?

He was being apprehensive! He was being fearful!

He was scared into stopping by an old man's few threats and a monster's madness!

He even put on an attitude of "giving your boss some face," waiting here pretentiously!

And the result?

The result was the other party wasn't some big shot from the Abyssal Domains at all!

Just some local kid who got lucky somehow!

He performed a monkey show for a local kid!

Performed for his most trusted subordinate to see!

Performed for that Li Mo from the Abyssal Domains, whom he already held grudges against!

Performed for all the surviving ants on the scene to see!

"Heh..."

A scorching airflow uncontrollably rushed out from Chen Ao's throat.

That wasn't laughter.

That was the mournful cry of shame squeezed out from the cracks after his dignity was crushed.

He felt humiliated by his own moment of suspicion and paranoia just now!

He felt pathetic about his unconsciously revealed apprehension and caution!

Since when did Chen Ao need to consider others' feelings when acting? Need to think twice before acting?

From a street thug climbing to where he was today, he relied on blood, on fists, on the ruthlessness of crushing all his enemies' bones!

But today, just moments ago, he hesitated.

All because of some illusory "boss," some legend from the Abyssal Domains.

This massive sense of humiliation that even he couldn't bear instantly found its only outlet.

It transformed into tenfold, a hundredfold rage and killing intent, all pouring onto the source that caused his embarrassment!

It was this kid!

He would return this humiliation with principal and interest, no, a thousandfold, ten thousandfold!

He would personally crush this kid into mincemeat!

He would let everyone know that Chen Ao never makes mistakes!

Even if he did, he would personally erase the mistake itself from this world completely!

Boom!

An energy fluctuation more terrifying and condensed than any before exploded from within Chen Ao!

The six elemental spheres surrounding him instantly transformed from stable orbiting to becoming wildly violent!

"Very good."

Chen Ao slowly, inch by inch, turned his stiff head back.

His face now showed no expression whatsoever.

It was an absolute calm that appeared after extreme anger.

"It seems you are that so-called 'boss'."

He no longer looked at the kneeling Asura, nor paid attention to Old Ghost in the ruins.

His entire attention was focused on Lin Yu.

This statement wasn't a question.

It was a verdict.

However, Lin Yu didn't respond to this verdict.

He didn't even glance at Chen Ao again.

His gaze passed over this enraged king, passed over the chaotic battlefield, landing in the center of the ruins.

Landing on the cold, stiff corpse in Old Ghost's arms.

Seventh Master.

After [Vitality Nourishment] advanced to the [Origin] tier, the new effect gained was "Physical Control."

This was originally just a passive effect, but logically, Vitality Nourishment was an active skill—could it work on Old Seventh?

And to what extent could this effect actually achieve?

For the living, it was near-immortal recovery capability.

What about for the dead?

A thought uncontrollably took root and sprouted in Lin Yu's mind.

Was there a chance?

Perhaps...

Lin Yu's momentary silence and disregard transformed into a sharper, more ultimate provocation than any words in Chen Ao's eyes.

It wasn't contempt.

It was complete, pure eradication of Chen Ao as a person from the level of existence itself.

As if he wasn't a king who made Linzhou tremble.

Just a speck of dust in the air, unworthy of being seen.

"Good..."

Chen Ao's chest heaved violently.

"Very good!"

He laughed, a twisted wild joy that burst forth after being humiliated to the extreme.

He completely abandoned any thought of communicating with Lin Yu.

Since you look down on me.

Since you're not even worthy of looking me in the eye.

Then I'll kill your dog first!

Let you see with your own eyes how your dog gets torn to pieces bit by bit before me!

Boom!

Chen Ao's figure disappeared from his spot.

He didn't charge toward Lin Yu.

Instead, with thunderous momentum, wrapped in the six violent elemental spheres surrounding him, he fiercely charged toward the eight-armed Asura kneeling on the ground!

Chapter 138: Three Major Skills

First kill Zhao Tianyang!

Then kill Old Ghost!

Finally, crush this insolent brat and his ridiculous pride into dust!

He wanted everyone to know what happened to those who provoked Chen Ao!

Of course, how much of that was just his own deep-seated fear of confronting Lin Yu directly, only he knew.

At this moment, Chen Ao's speed reached its peak.

That destructive energy almost instantly descended upon Zhao Tianyang's head.

However.

Someone was faster than him.

The instant Chen Ao moved.

Lin Yu moved.

He didn't even make any extra motion, he simply raised his hand calmly.

Three radiant cards, shimmering with light, appeared out of thin air at his fingertips.

There was no time to stack multiplication to a millionfold.

But it was enough.

Vitality Nourishment (Origin)!

Divine Remains Armament (Primordial)!

Eight Directions Return to Origin (Primordial)!

Hum! Hum! Hum!

Three streams of light, each a different color yet all containing terrifying energy, were released.

They did not shoot toward Chen Ao.

Instead, in a manner that ignored spatial distance, they instantly sank entirely into the massive, shattered Asura manifestation body.

Three skill cards under a 256-fold multiplication effect.

In unbelievably short time, he used three skills individually and interrupted them, then manifested the cards, stacked Joker multiplication, and flung them to Zhao Tianyang.

This was the limit Lin Yu could achieve in a single instant.

The moment the light poured in.

Zhao Tianyang's Asura manifestation, on the verge of collapse from burning life force, trembled violently.

A vast surge of life energy, like a breached dam, raged through his body.

Vitality Nourishment began to take effect!

Those deep, bone-exposing wounds, those constantly disintegrating body edges, began to heal and re-solidify at a speed visible to the naked eye!

Immediately afterward.

A layer of armor as black as ink, yet metallic in texture, emerged from his body surface.

Ancient and mysterious patterns lit up on the armor, and an aura of indestructibility and law-defying resistance thundered outward.

Divine Remains Armament, equipped!

Trait Still Water Reflects, activated!

A clear, mountain-spring-like energy surged into Zhao Tianyang's mind.

That consciousness, which had been completely occupied by slaughter and madness, was as if plunged into an age-old block of ice.

Sizzle!

The blood-colored sea of consciousness froze in an instant!

Inside those blood-red eyes that had been reduced to pure destruction instinct, for the first time, a flicker of struggle appeared.

A sliver of clarity.

Finally.

Wind, fire, thunder, lightning... eight kinds of savage elemental forces, bolstered by Eight Directions Return to Origin, poured into his eight grotesque arms!

The hellish weapons originally formed from Bloodlust Energy were, in that moment, given entirely new attributes!

A burning warhammer! Claws entangled with lightning! A glaive that freezes all it touches!

All of it happened in the blink of an eye!

When Chen Ao's annihilating strike, wrapped with six elemental forces, was about to smash down on Zhao Tianyang's head.

That head, originally bowed low in submission.

Slowly, it lifted.

Those blood-red eyes remained blood-red.

But within that redness, there was no longer pure madness.

Instead, something more terrifying had taken root.

A cold, rational, relentless... hatred!

He saw.

He saw Old Ghost kneeling in the rubble, clutching Seventh Master's corpse, devastated with grief.

He saw Chen Ao hovering midair, face contorted with ferocity, having just tried to kill him.

Finally.

He saw the one standing not far away, calmly watching all of this, his master.

Lin Yu.

Zhao Tianyang's body no longer trembled.

He slowly rose from his kneeling posture.

That ruined Asura manifestation, with the support of three Primordial-tier skills, not only did not collapse, it gave off a more terrifying, more solid pressure than ever before!

Chen Ao's attack stopped midair.

He froze completely.

He looked at the scene before him in disbelief.

What happened?

Why?

Why had this berserk monster's aura surged by multiple times in an instant!

Why were rational lights appearing in those mad eyes!

This is impossible!

But Zhao Tianyang did not give him time to think.

The Asura who had regained clarity turned his questioning gaze toward Lin Yu.

Awaiting orders.

Lin Yu still did not speak.

He only calmly raised his right hand and extended his index finger.

Across a distance of dozens of meters, he pointed faintly at the figure already completely stunned in midair.

Chen Ao.

The command was given.

"Roar—!"

A thunderous roar blasted from Zhao Tianyang's chest!

This was no longer an animal's scream.

This was a warrior's battle cry, the cry of vengeance after suppressing all pain and fury!

Boom!

The ground beneath his feet cracked inch by inch!

The massive Asura form transformed into a dark-red streak of light, shooting skyward!

Eight arms burning with elemental flames swung the various annihilating weapons, charging with resolute, tragic determination toward the Black Market king of Linzhou!

Charging headlong at the six Chaos Elemental Spheres capable of destroying everything!

Old Ghost in the ruins stopped crying.

He watched the Asura rekindled with fighting spirit, watched the young man giving commands, and in his murky eyes, an ecstatic, survival-after-disaster fervor exploded.

Boss!

He really is boss!

Only one person in the entire scene remained mired in a huge absurdity he could not comprehend.

Chen Ao.

He looked at the Asura that charged at him, whose aura was now ten times more terrifying than before.

He looked at those icy, rational eyes filled with killing intent.

Boom!

Heaven and earth turned on their head at that moment.

The dark-red Asura collided with the king surrounded by six elemental spheres in midair with a thunderous impact!

No technique.

No probing.

Just the purest, most primitive clash of power!

A furious energy storm, centered on the collision point, coalesced into a visible ring of destruction that swept madly in all directions!

This time, the shockwave's force was more terrifying than any before.

Yet Lin Yu's gaze was not on that earth-shattering battle at all.

All his focus was on Zhao Tianyang.

Or rather, on the effects of the three cards he had just thrown out.

It worked.

It really worked!

The black ink-like armor on Zhao Tianyang was indeed Divine Remains Armament.

And those blood-red eyes, though still red, filled with cold rationality and hatred, were the best proof that the trait Still Water Reflects had taken effect!

Immune to all mental attacks.

Greatly increased mental stability.

Chen Ao's prideful Awakening Spirit Pierce—capable of forcibly awakening the uncontrolled—couldn't even make a splash against Still Water Reflects.

And earlier.

When Zhao Tianyang rose from kneeling and erupted to meet Chen Ao.

His movements were incredibly fast and ethereal, completely inconsistent with the agility expected of his huge frame.

That was not merely speed.

That was Treading Snow Without Trace!

Although in combat state now, the passive boost from Treading Snow Without Trace still transformed Zhao Tianyang's mobility qualitatively!

An uncontrollable joy quietly swelled in Lin Yu's heart.

He had gambled correctly!

The Primordial-tier skills' traits unlocked upon promotion could indeed be bestowed along with the skills themselves to others!

If that was the case, Old Seventh might not be completely beyond saving.

Chapter 139: Attempting to Rescue People

In midair, the dark red Asura and the monarch surrounded by six-colored elements clashed wildly, each impact erupting with light and heat capable of tearing through the heavens.

But all of this had nothing to do with Lin Yu.

He withdrew his gaze, completely blocking out all external interference.

In his world, only one goal remained.

Joker.

Multiplication.

Cycle.

He extended both hands, palms facing each other, forming a circle in the air.

A pitch-black ■Joker■ quietly appeared, suspended between his palms.

Then came the Doubling Card.

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred and seventy-six phantom images of Doubling Cards layered upon each other before him, forming a cycle system leading to infinity that ordinary people couldn't comprehend.

He didn't look at Old Ghost again, nor did he offer any explanation.

Now, every second was incredibly precious.

Skill Card.

■Vitality Nourishment (Origin)■.

This skill that had just been promoted would be his sole reliance for creating miracles.

The passive ability "Physical Control" was a divine skill for the living, but its effect on the dead remained unknown.

What Lin Yu needed to do was transform this "unknown" into "possibility".

Using infinite energy to pry open the door named "Death"!

Buzz.

As his will stirred, a barely detectable emerald green light spot emerged from between his eyebrows, slowly injecting into the multiplication cycle before him.

The cycle, began!

...

Behind the Obsidian Shield.

Wang Han and his daughter Wang Qingxuan had completely lost their voices.

Wang Han tightly covered his daughter's mouth while also covering his own, afraid that making the slightest sound would disturb his nephew who was conducting some mysterious ritual outside.

His brain had stopped thinking.

Lin Yu, this child, from prodigy to genius to lunatic to waste.

Throughout all these years, this was the first time he truly felt unfamiliar with his real nature.

The delay examinee who needed his parents to worry about living expenses at home.

Was he the "boss" who could make mythical demons bow with a single word?

Was he the mastermind who could casually dress the rampaging Asura in divine armor and reverse the battle situation?

Wang Han watched the shimmering, ever-changing phantom card images before Lin Yu, feeling as if his worldview was being smashed into powder blow by blow.

What exactly had happened to this world?

Or had he never truly understood his own nephew?

...

In the ruins.

Old Ghost, holding Seventh Master's gradually cooling corpse, stopped his mournful cries.

He watched the young man with his back turned, conducting some kind of ritual.

Although he didn't understand what the boss was doing.

The nearly blind trust and hope born from surviving disaster made him react instinctively.

He carefully laid Seventh Master's corpse flat on the ground.

Then he stood up, hunched over, and walked behind Lin Yu.

He pulled out a blood-stained dagger from his chest, adopting a protective stance as he vigilantly scanned his surroundings.

He didn't know what he could do.

But he knew that before the boss completed his task, no one would take a single step toward the boss from behind him!

...

On the other side of the battlefield.

Chen Ao's subordinates had transformed from initial shock to bone-chilling fear.

They watched the battle in the sky that completely overturned their understanding, each one terrified into silence.

Defeated.

Master Ao was actually gradually falling behind!

That monster, after regaining sanity, hadn't become weaker but instead turned more terrifying!

Every attack carried precise and deadly calculation, his eight arms coordinating flawlessly, integrating offense and defense.

The terrifying defensive power brought by ■Divine Remains Armament■ rendered most of Chen Ao's attacks useless.

Meanwhile, the elemental weapons enhanced by ■Eight Directions Return to Origin■ could easily tear through Chen Ao's protective energy, leaving wounds all over his body.

"How could this be... Master Ao he..." a black-clad man stammered.

"Shut up!"

The squad leader who had lost an arm coldly shouted.

His condition was the calmest among everyone, but his slightly trembling body still betrayed his inner turmoil.

He stared intently at the young man performing "rituals" in the distance.

All the variables originated from him!

As long as they killed him, that Asura monster would naturally collapse!

Master Ao could instantly regain the initiative!

His gaze turned to a trembling figure beside him.

Li San.

The man who had accidentally killed Seventh Master.

"Li San." The squad leader's voice carried no warmth.

Li San's body trembled, his head jerking up.

"Boss..."

"Your opportunity has arrived." The squad leader stated calmly.

"What?" Li San didn't comprehend.

"Go, kill him." The squad leader raised his only remaining left hand, pointing at Lin Yu in the distance.

Li San followed the direction he pointed, nearly scared out of his wits.

"Boss! You want me to kill that boss? I..."

"You have no choice." The squad leader interrupted him, "You killed that old man, pushing things to an irreparable point. Now, with Master Ao suppressed, we might all die here."

"This is your only chance to atone through merit."

"And your only chance to survive."

Every word from the squad leader felt like a needle piercing Li San's heart.

Li San's face instantly turned deathly pale as he remembered the fatal mistake he'd just made, recalling Master Ao's cruel methods.

He knew that if they miraculously survived today, he definitely wouldn't escape punishment afterward.

Unless...

He could achieve tremendous merit!

"Why me?" Li San asked trembling, clinging to his last shred of hope, "My strength..."

"Because of your profession." The squad leader said indifferently, "■Shadow Assassin■, your ■Shadow Concealment■ is one of Blue Star's top stealth skills, completely silent without any energy fluctuations."

"That kid is completely focused right now, he definitely won't detect you."

"This is the most suitable mission for you."

"And it's a mission you must complete."

The squad leader's gaze felt like two knives scraping against Li San's face.

Li San swallowed, his throat painfully dry.

He knew he had no way out now.

Either be killed on the spot by the angry boss.

Or gamble on that slim chance of survival.

"I..." Li San's breathing became rapid, a flash of desperate resolve appearing in his eyes.

"I understand."

He gritted his teeth, squeezing out these words.

The squad leader nodded with satisfaction, pulling out a pitch-black dagger only palm-length long from his chest and tossing it to him.

"This is the Soul-Extinguishing Dagger, which comes with an instant death judgment. Even if it doesn't kill him, it can heavily damage his soul."

"Go."

"Let him see that under Master Ao's command, there are no useless people."

Li San caught the short dagger, its cold touch refreshing his spirit.

He no longer hesitated, nodding heavily to the squad leader, then his entire body began to turn illusory.

His figure didn't disappear, but rather like a drop of ink, silently merged into the mottled shadows on the ground.

No energy fluctuations.

No spatial ripples.

Not even the slightest distortion of light.

Just like that, he completely vanished from this world.

Chapter 140: Instant Death Judgment

As the target of Li San's assassination attempt, Lin Yu remained completely focused.

In Lin Yu's world, all the noise had faded away.

The energy collisions in the sky, the mournful cries from the ruins, the distant exclamations—all had become blurred and distant background sounds.

His entire mind was immersed in the infinite cyclic system formed by countless card phantoms before him.

One million, forty-eight thousand, five hundred and seventy-six cycles.

This was the current limit he could achieve with the Multiplication cycle.

And what he had invested into it was the skill that had just advanced to the [Origin] tier.

[Vitality Nourishment].

The emerald green energy, faint as fireflies, was being stacked and amplified again and again within the extremely intricate cycle, its contained life force increasing wildly at a geometric rate.

Lin Yu could even sense that the energy had become so concentrated it was on the verge of materializing.

It was no longer just pure energy.

It had become a rule.

A supreme rule power representing "life."

"Go."

With a single thought from Lin Yu.

The emerald green light sphere concentrated through millions of multiplications silently detached from the cyclic system, tracing a trajectory invisible to the naked eye, and precisely entered Seventh Master's lifeless body.

There were no earth-shattering phenomena.

Nor any dazzling, brilliant light.

Everything happened as silently as the spring rain moistening the earth.

Old Ghost, standing behind Lin Yu, didn't even detect any energy fluctuations.

Driven by instinct, he stared fixedly at his old friend's corpse, his turbid eyes filled with one last shred of unrealistic hope.

One second.

Two seconds.

Nothing happened.

Seventh Master still lay quietly there, the gruesome blood hole in his chest looking terrifying, his body temperature gradually dissipating.

The light that had just ignited in Old Ghost's eyes quickly dimmed.

Yes.

What exactly was he hoping for?

The dead cannot return to life.

This was something even a three-year-old child understood.

No matter how powerful the boss was, he was still human, not a god.

Just as the last shred of hope in Old Ghost's heart was about to extinguish completely.

A sudden change occurred abruptly.

A faint emerald green speck of light, so weak it was almost negligible, lit up without warning at the position of Seventh Master's heart that had already stopped beating.

The glow was faint, yet carried an undeniable tenacity.

Then, centered around that speck of light, countless even finer emerald green light threads, like spiderwebs, began spreading toward Seventh Master's limbs and bones.

Those necrotic tissues, those severed blood vessels, those cells that had lost vitality—the moment they came into contact with these light threads, it was as if they had been injected with the most primitive life commands.

They began to gently writhe in a way that defied conventional logic.

At the edge of the gruesome blood hole in Seventh Master's chest, a small piece of completely carbonized tissue suddenly fell off, and beneath it, a fresh new bud of flesh grew out with visible speed, stubbornly!

"This... this..."

Old Ghost's breathing stopped.

He stared with wide eyes, as if trying to force his eyeballs out of their sockets.

What was he seeing?

An illusion?

He reached out a trembling hand, wanting to touch, but abruptly stopped mid-air, afraid that his recklessness would disturb this miraculous scene before him.

The boss...

The boss he...

He was truly creating a miracle!

He was pulling someone already dead back from the hands of the god of death!

Old Ghost fell to his knees with a thud.

This time, not from grief.

But from a reverence and fervor for the unknown great power that came from the depths of his soul!

God!

This was the true god!

However, just as everyone's attention was drawn to the fierce battle in the sky and the miracle on the ground.

No one noticed.

An extremely faint shadow, almost blending with the rubble on the ground, was silently approaching at absolute silence toward the center where the miracle was being created, toward Lin Yu who had his back to everyone, approaching at extreme speed.

Li San.

His [Shadow Concealment] skill had completely transformed him into a ghost wandering the shadow plane.

No aura.

No energy fluctuations.

Even his killing intent was tightly restrained deep within his soul using secret techniques.

His eyes were fixed only on that back so close at hand.

The one and only flaw that determined his life and death, and the direction of this battle!

Closer.

Even closer.

Ten meters.

Five meters.

Three meters!

The young man remained completely focused, unaware of the impending death.

Li San's heart was pounding wildly, a near-successful ecstasy making it almost impossible for him to suppress his killing intent.

Now!

However, just as he prepared to launch his sudden attack.

A shrill, distorted scream exploded without warning from the edge of the battlefield!

"Lin Yu! Behind you!"

It was Wang Han!

Behind the Obsidian Shield, this ordinary middle-aged man had maintained a shred of bystander's clarity amidst extreme fear.

He wasn't looking at the sky, nor at the "resurrecting" corpse.

All his attention was firmly locked on his nephew!

And precisely because of this, he saw it!

He saw that shadow moving unnaturally on the ground!

The moment that scream sounded, Wang Han used all his strength, rushing out recklessly from behind the shield, spreading his arms like a mother hen protecting her chicks, fearlessly throwing himself toward Lin Yu!

He didn't know what was happening.

He only knew that his child was in danger!

"Fool!"

The one-armed squad leader reacted with extreme speed.

The moment Wang Han rushed out, a flash of brutality crossed his eyes. With a flick of his left hand, a sharp metal throwing blade flew out, cutting through the air with a sharp sound, aimed directly at Wang Han's back!

Seeking death!

This sudden turn of events made everyone momentarily stunned.

Lin Yu's spellcasting was forcibly interrupted by Wang Han's shrill scream.

But he was a step too late.

Or rather, that throwing blade happened to achieve an unexpected effect at this moment!

Just as Lin Yu's attention was drawn to Wang Han.

The shadow beside him suddenly came to life.

A pitch-black figure emerged ghostlike from the ground, the palm-sized black short dagger in his hand, [Soul-Extinguishing Dagger], carrying an aura of deathly stillness, silently stabbed into Lin Yu's side.

Squelch.

The sound of the blade entering flesh was faint, yet terrifyingly clear.

Lin Yu's body suddenly stiffened.

He slowly looked down.

Looking at the dagger that had mostly penetrated his body, emitting an ominous black glow.

An extreme coldness, not from the wound, but exploding from the depths of his soul.

Having succeeded with his strike, Li San's face twisted into a distorted, ecstatic grimace.

"Die!"

He frantically activated the dagger's additional effect!

Hum!

On the blade of the Soul-Extinguishing Dagger, a ferocious skull rune suddenly lit up!

The light flashed!

Success!!

[Instant Death Judgment], triggered!!

Chapter 141: Lin Yu Makes a Move

Success!

A twisted smile mixing madness and ecstasy appeared on Li San's face.

On the blade of the Soul-Extinguishing Dagger, the ferocious skull rune glowed brightly. An intangible death rule instantly poured into Lin Yu's body through the dagger.

Instant Death Judgment, triggered!

The most powerful effect of this epic-grade weapon below level one hundred was activated.

As long as the target's level was below one hundred, as long as the target's life form wasn't undead or a special elemental entity, death was absolutely certain!

He had bet correctly!

This so-called "boss," this young man putting on mysterious airs, was no peerless expert! He was just a soft target with a low level, only able to issue commands because of some strange encounter!

Li San could already imagine the scene in the next second: this young man's soul annihilated, his body turning to dust.

He would become the hero who ended this battle!

He would gain Master Ao's appreciation!

He would survive!

One second.

Two seconds.

Three seconds.

Time passed.

The ecstasy on Li San's face slowly solidified.

The expected scene of soul disintegration did not appear.

The young man before him, whose kidney he had stabbed, hadn't even swayed.

Lin Yu simply lowered his head, calmly looking at the black short dagger embedded in his body as if it weren't his own.

What was going on?

Li San's brain froze.

What about the Instant Death Judgment?

He had seen the triggering glow clearly, so why... was there no effect?

Could it be that this kid's level exceeded one hundred?

Impossible! All the publicly known level one hundred powerhouses in the entire Linzhou could be counted on one hand! How could he be one!

Or perhaps... he wasn't a living person at all? Was he an undead creature?

One absurd thought after another exploded in Li San's mind, completely washing away his last shred of reason.

Looking at Lin Yu's eerily calm profile, a chill deeper than death itself shot up from his tailbone to the crown of his head.

It seemed he had committed the two biggest mistakes of his life today.

The first was accidentally killing that old man called Seventh Master.

The second was right now.

Lin Yu was indeed somewhat angry.

A cold, soul-targeting malice was rampaging within his body. But for someone who had already mastered Physical Control, this power was like an insignificant cool breeze that dissipated after blowing past.

He couldn't even be bothered to deal with it.

What truly displeased him were two other matters.

First, what was happening behind him.

That wretched, piercing shriek belonging to Wang Han still echoed in his ears.

Lin Yu still held favorable feelings for this Uncle Wang.

Second, was the joyful feeling of creating miracles that had just been interrupted.

Vitality Nourishment was effective on the deceased.

The characteristics of Primordial-tier skills could be bestowed.

These two discoveries had almost opened a door to a brand new world for him, revealing countless possibilities. That clarity and joy of seeing the blue sky after dispersing the clouds was something he hadn't experienced even during his five years of lying low.

And then, this joy had been rudely interrupted by a fool with a broken dagger.

So annoying.

Lin Yu raised his hand.

Through the air, he gently snapped his fingers.

Primordial Snap – Micro-Object Manipulation

The metal throwing dagger that was about to pierce Wang Han's back, less than a centimeter from his skin, abruptly stopped.

Then, silently, it turned to dust.

After doing this, Lin Yu slowly turned around, properly looking at this assassin who had stabbed him for the first time.

Fine.

He was just worrying about not having a place to test the new ideas that had just sprouted in his mind.

In Li San's pupils, which were rapidly contracting from extreme fear, Lin Yu's aura changed.

No longer that ancient-well-like stillness.

But an indescribable, absolute pressure that seemed capable of bringing the entire world under control!

Buzz!

Joker, Multiplication.

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred seventy-six cycles!

A phantom of a card emitting eight-colored halo flashed before him and disappeared.

Joker Copy

Skill Card

Eight Directions Return to Origin (Primordial)!

Wind, fire, earth, lightning, light, darkness, space, spirit...

The eight most fundamental elemental forces were wildly amplified by the million-fold cycles, transforming into eight invisible torrents of rules that roared as they poured into Lin Yu's entire body!

Lin Yu's body underwent no changes.

But the space around him began to distort.

The various energy particles floating in the air, as if summoned by an emperor, frantically converged toward him, submitting.

The sky, at this moment, darkened slightly.

Chen Ao and Zhao Tianyang, who were wildly clashing, involuntarily slowed their movements for a beat, simultaneously casting uncertain, suspicious gazes toward the ground.

That power... what was it?

The small leader with the severed arm had pupils that contracted to pinpricks.

He could feel a terrifying power that transcended everything awakening within that young man.

Li San had completely lost his ability to think.

He only felt that what he faced was no longer a person, but a starry sky condensed from the entire universe—vast, boundless, and bottomlessly deep.

He wanted to escape.

He wanted to pull out the dagger and use everything he had ever learned to flee for his life.

But his body, his soul, under that pressure, couldn't even move a finger.

He could only watch helplessly.

Watch as Lin Yu raised his other hand.

Watch as the card cycle leading to infinity appeared before Lin Yu once again.

A golden card was cast into it.

Lightning Spell (Golden Epic).

A common, basic skill.

Cycle, begin!

Million-fold energy was mobilized once more.

But this time, it wasn't gentle life energy.

It was violent, destructive, representing divine punishment... thunder!

Crackle!

A faint, almost negligible strand of golden electric light appeared at Lin Yu's fingertip.

Li San's gaze was firmly captured by that strand of electric light.

He instinctively felt fear, a terror originating from the deepest part of life itself—the fear of being completely erased without leaving a single trace.

"No... don't..."

He finally regained his voice, emitting a mosquito-like whimper.

Lin Yu paid no attention.

He simply aimed that index finger entwined with golden electric light from a distance, pointing it directly at Li San before him.

The violent energy continued to stack endlessly.

The million-fold Eight Directions Return to Origin served as the foundation, providing nearly infinite elemental support for this single Lightning Spell.

The million-fold Lightning Spell itself compressed, purified this energy, transforming it into the purest law of destruction capable of piercing through everything.

Lin Yu's face showed no expression.

Only those pitch-black pupils reflected the increasingly dazzling, golden electric light.

And Li San's face, already completely consumed by despair.

The next instant.

That small strand of golden electric light suddenly brightened.

Chapter 142: Electricity Overflows Linzhou!

A slender golden thread shot silently from Lin Yu's fingertip.

It lacked the thunderous roar of lightning, nor did it possess the dazzling brilliance of electricity—it was simply pure, condensed to the extreme gold.

Fast.

So fast it surpassed visual capture.

Before Li San could even process his shock that Lin Yu hadn't died on the spot, that golden thread had already reached the center of his forehead.

No explosion, no scorching, not even a trace of heat.

Li San's entire body, along with the frozen despair on his face, was pierced straight through by the golden thread.

Then, decomposition.

He was like a dust-constructed phantom struck by sunlight, from head to toe, silently transforming into the most fundamental particles that dissipated into the air.

Not even a speck of dust remained.

After completing this, the golden thread traced a barely perceptible arc through the air.

Lin Yu's index finger merely twitched slightly.

Behind the broken wall, the one-armed squad leader who had just been giving orders suddenly stiffened.

He didn't even have time to react.

The golden thread entered through the back of his skull and exited through his forehead.

Just like Li San, his tall frame, along with the arrogance befitting Chen Ao's trusted subordinate, completely vanished into nothingness in less than half a second.

Dead.

Two powerful Practitioners had just been erased.

Lin Yu's movements didn't stop.

His index finger, entwined with golden electric arcs, traced casual, gentle patterns through the air.

Like a drunken conductor waving his absurd baton.

And that golden electric light was his most loyal, and most lethal, musical score.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

The golden thread leaped and sliced wantonly through the ruins.

Each flash represented the end of a life.

Those black-clad men who had miraculously survived Zhao Tianyang's rampage couldn't even scream before being completely erased from this world, one after another, as the golden thread passed through them.

That wasn't slaughter.

It was purification.

A purification using absolute strength to thoroughly eliminate all impurities.

The frenzied killing intent from the Eight-Armed Asura in the sky abruptly receded.

Zhao Tianyang's massive dharma form slowly dissipated as he landed on the ground, respectfully retreating behind Lin Yu to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Old Ghost, protecting the corpse undergoing miracles between them.

The boss was handling business.

All they needed to do was watch quietly.

The only remaining enemies still standing in the area were Chen Ao, and the perpetually hooded Li Mo behind him.

Chen Ao didn't move.

He simply watched quietly as Lin Yu used one finger to systematically eliminate his elite subordinates one by one.

He showed neither anger nor fear.

What he displayed was an unprecedented solemnity, and a spark... of ignited battle spirit.

"Interesting."

Chen Ao murmured.

The elemental spheres of wind, fire, water, and earth surrounding him underwent a violent transformation in an instant.

All elements converged into lightning!

A deep purple thunder sphere, covered with violent electric arcs, completely enveloped him.

Just as he completed this transformation, the golden thread that had cleared all the minor threats finally targeted him.

Whoosh!

The golden thread shot through the air, aiming straight for Chen Ao's heart.

"Well met!"

Instead of retreating, Chen Ao advanced to meet it head-on.

The golden thread collided with the thunder sphere.

No earth-shattering explosion.

Only an ear-piercing shriek, with a frequency so high it could tear souls apart.

Two completely different yet fundamentally similar forces clashed and annihilated each other wildly.

Lin Yu's golden lightning was the manifestation of rules amplified a million times over—pure, condensed, and indestructible.

Chen Ao's purple thunder was the embodiment of his own profession—violent, chaotic, yet carrying an overbearing aura that sought to devour everything.

The golden thread pierced through the outer defense of the purple thunder sphere without any suspense.

But Chen Ao's intention was never to withstand it directly.

"Shift!"

He roared, energy surging wildly within him as he forcibly distorted the force field before him.

The deep purple thunder sphere transformed into a rapidly spinning vortex.

The golden thread piercing into it was deflected from its trajectory by a massive redirecting force, grazing past Chen Ao's body as it shot diagonally into the sky.

Chen Ao grunted, the thunder sphere around him dimming by ninety percent, with another trickle of blood spilling from the corner of his mouth.

But he had ultimately blocked it.

He had successfully redirected this fatal strike into the sky.

Behind him, the hooded Li Mo relaxed almost imperceptibly for a moment.

However, no one noticed.

On Lin Yu's face, there was no surprise at having his attack blocked.

He simply watched calmly as that golden thread soared into the clouds.

Then.

Watched it explode like fireworks.

That wasn't a single explosion.

It was a silent feast of light that swept across the entire city.

Centered around that golden thread, a massive net composed of billions of blue electric arcs suddenly spread open ten thousand meters above!

In that instant, the sky above Linzhou City bloomed like the ultimate extreme.

Brighter than daylight!

That net covered the entire Linzhou City, covering eight thousand square kilometers of land!

This wasn't a thunderstorm.

This was a heavenly net woven from pure destructive lightning!

Throughout the city, countless sleeping citizens were awakened by this sudden intense light. They looked blankly out their windows, watching the miraculous scene in the sky, their minds completely empty.

Countless alarms screamed frantically in every corner of the city.

At the Linzhou City Security Bureau headquarters, all equipment malfunctioned simultaneously, needles spinning wildly as screens displayed nothing but blinding snow indicating energy overload.

Viewed from Blue Star's synchronous orbit.

The location of Linzhou was no longer a patch of dark land, but an irregular, violently flashing patch of electric light, strikingly conspicuous and heart-pounding against the black velvet backdrop.

The sliver of relief Chen Ao had felt after blocking the attack was instantly crushed by the oppressive force descending from above—a pressure that could make even deities tremble.

He snapped his head upward.

He saw that lightning net covering the entire sky.

He felt that pure destructive energy capable of wiping the entire city, along with the crust, from the planet's surface.

What was this?

So, the attack he had desperately blocked...

Should be considered, the windup?

How laughable...

His heart sank to the depths.

What he had blocked was actually just the beginning.

Or rather, just a... trigger.

Above the ruins.

Lin Yu slowly raised his other hand.

With his movement, the massive lightning net covering the entire city in the heavens began to churn violently, restlessly, agitatedly.

Like a pot of boiling water about to erupt, inverted over the entire city.

Or like billions of thunder dragons awaiting their monarch's command, ready at any moment to unleash apocalyptic divine punishment.

Chapter 143: The Visitor from the Abyss

Chen Ao's heart was no longer just sinking to the bottom.

It had been completely crushed, ground into dust.

What he had blocked was merely a catalyst.

A tiny, insignificant spark... meant to ignite the entire forest.

He looked at that young man, the one slowly raising his other hand as if to embrace the entire sky.

At this moment, Chen Ao finally understood everything Li Mo had said.

Abyssal Domains.

Powerful beings.

Showing goodwill.

He had been wrong.

Terribly wrong.

This wasn't a question of whether he could afford to provoke him.

Rather, the other party simply didn't consider him to be on the same level of existence.

Does an ant need to think about how to show goodwill to a dragon?

No.

Because the dragon wouldn't even notice it.

Unless, by accident, it happened to block the dragon's path.

"Hah..."

Chen Ao suddenly laughed.

It was a pure, unburdened release after completely letting go of all dignity, all arrogance, all unwillingness.

So this was what the pressure of death felt like.

Lin Yu's hand paused in mid-air.

For just a moment.

He remembered the days and nights of five years in hiding.

He remembered the white hairs at his parents' temples and their worries.

He remembered the greedy faces of those capitalists when his younger sister Lin Yao awakened.

He remembered Seventh Master's death, and Old Ghost's mournful cry.

Enough.

All of this should end today.

From this day forward, he would make everyone understand that some people were existences they could never touch.

He already had the qualifications to sit at the table.

Lin Yu's other hand decisively fell.

No words.

No declaration.

Just a single motion.

The sky collapsed.

That lightning net covering eight thousand square kilometers lost all support the instant his hand fell.

The entire curtain of pure destructive energy collapsed toward the ground, toward the center of these ruins, toward the single point where Chen Ao stood, in a catastrophic implosion!

Time lost all meaning at this moment.

Space was distorted and deformed by the extreme energy compression.

In everyone's vision, there remained only pure, continuously descending white light.

It was an ocean of thunder.

It was divine punishment itself!

"Well met!"

In his final moments, Chen Ao erupted with the last madness and pride befitting the King of Linzhou.

He didn't flee.

He knew he couldn't escape anyway.

The dim purple thunderball on his body's surface instantly reignited, shining more brilliantly than ever before!

He poured all his lifelong cultivation, all his energy, all his spirit into it!

"Break... open!"

With a soul-shaking roar, Chen Ao actively charged toward the descending divine punishment!

He would use his final life to shake this godlike power!

Even if he could only create a tiny, insignificant splash!

However.

The purple thunderball, upon contacting the golden thunder sea.

Didn't even create a splash.

Like a snowflake thrown into the sun.

It evaporated silently.

Along with Chen Ao's final pride.

Chen Ao's body began to disintegrate before the golden sea.

Death was imminent.

He had even prepared himself for the annihilation of his soul.

But at that moment.

Rip!

A sharp tearing sound, like cloth being ripped apart, abruptly rang out in front of Chen Ao.

The space before him seemed to be sliced open by an invisible blade, a pitch-black, bottomless fissure appearing out of nowhere!

Immediately after.

Two figures, one after another, stepped out from the spatial rift.

Leading was a middle-aged man wearing a black trench coat with a cold, stern face.

The moment he appeared, he didn't even glance at Chen Ao who was about to be consumed by the thunder sea, merely raising his head to look at the world-destroying golden thunder.

His reaction was incredibly fast.

"Defend!"

An ancient syllable emerged from his mouth.

He extended his right hand, fingers spread.

A pure black, octagonal shield that seemed made of the deepest dark matter instantly unfolded above his head!

On the shield's surface, countless mysterious silver runes flowed continuously, forming complex and profound array patterns.

BOOOOOOM——!!!

The collapsing thunder sea finally arrived!

The weight of billions of tons of thunder poured entirely onto that small black shield!

The entire world lost all sound.

Only blindingly intense white light remained.

And the energy ripples capable of tearing space apart, generated by the violent collision and annihilation between the black shield and the endless thunder sea!

"Pfft!"

The black-clad man's body shook violently as he spat out a mouthful of blood.

The ground beneath his feet, along with hundreds of meters of surrounding ruins, instantly turned to dust under this recoil force, forming a massive circular crater!

But he, incredibly, held firm!

The black octagonal shield trembled violently under the thunder sea's assault, its surface silver runes flickering uncertainly, even developing fine cracks.

Yet it ultimately didn't shatter immediately!

It stood like a black reef in an apocalyptic flood, stubbornly blocking the golden sea of death outside!

The person following him also wore black clothing, but his figure seemed somewhat illusory, as if he might merge with the air at any moment.

He glanced at his struggling companion, then at the completely terrified Chen Ao beside him, finally turning his gaze toward the source of the thunder sea.

That young man standing on the ruins, one hand in his pocket, the other having just been lowered.

"Sir, you've gone too far."

He spoke, his tone flat yet carrying a condescending questioning quality.

This scene left everyone in the distance stunned.

Wang Han and his daughter, Old Ghost, Zhao Tianyang.

None of them expected that someone could step forward under such world-destroying attack.

And actually block it!

Lin Yu also slightly raised an eyebrow.

Interesting.

This power didn't belong to Blue Star's system.

No wonder it could block.

But, it was only blocking.

The golden electric light at Lin Yu's fingertips began gathering again.

If once wasn't enough, then do it again.

For him, this was just one Lightning Spell.

If the Joker's Multiplication pre-cast time wasn't so long, he could use it as a basic attack.

"Sir, you've gone too far."

The flat questioning echoed over the deathly silent ruins.

The later-arriving black-clad man, his figure illusory as if merged with shadows, watched Lin Yu with a natural sense of judgment.

However, among all present, the most intense reaction didn't come from Lin Yu.

It came from Li Mo.

The moment the black-clad man appeared, the instant that dark spatial rift tore open, Li Mo's face hidden beneath his hood and mask completely drained of color.

Abyssal Domains!

It was the aura of the Abyssal Domains!

This pure, condensed energy with the unique fluctuations of spatial law—he would never mistake it even in death!

His entire being became like a rabbit spotted by a predator, every hair standing on end, every cell screaming danger.

Chapter 144: I dare to splash it, do you dare to catch it?

When he clearly saw that stern-faced middle-aged man emerging from the spatial rift, a fear rooted deep in his memories instantly seized his heart.

It was him!

"Black Shield" Yan Xing!

A Level 100 powerhouse renowned throughout the Abyssal Domains for his ferocity!

Li Mo had once glimpsed him from afar when Yan Xing's team returned from the depths of a Level 300 forbidden zone. He was the only survivor, drenched in blood, with a collapsing world and countless high-level entity corpses behind him.

Why was he here?

Why would he appear on Blue Star?

Ten thousand questions exploded in Li Mo's mind, but his body had already made the most instinctive, and most correct, reaction.

Hide!

He absolutely couldn't be recognized by them!

In the Abyssal Domains, "maggots" like him feared madmen like Yan Xing who had fought their way through mountains of corpses and seas of blood the most.

The Abyssal Domain aura on him hadn't completely faded yet. If discovered, his fate would be a hundred times more miserable than dying at Chen Ao's hands!

Li Mo's movement attracted no one's attention as he silently retreated one step, completely merging into the shadow cast by Chen Ao, his presence fully concealed as if he had never existed.

His only hope now was that this battle between deities wouldn't affect a small fish like him.

However, the very next second, his humble wish was completely shattered.

Because he saw it.

He saw that young man standing on the ruins with one hand in his pocket. After hearing the words "Sir, you've gone too far," not only did he show no intention of stopping.

Instead, he raised that hand he had just lowered once more.

Hum!

That infinite cycle of card illusions reappeared.

"You!"

The illusory man who had questioned Lin Yu found his words stuck in his throat.

Yan Xing, holding the black shield, had his pupils violently contract.

Again?

Lin Yu paid them no mind.

Only this time, the condensation process seemed somewhat different.

The Joker cycle didn't activate.

That terrifying wind-up requiring time accumulation for million-fold amplification had disappeared.

Lin Yu clearly understood that these two opponents who could withstand his million-fold amplified [Lightning Spell] were definitely not easy targets.

Using the Joker multiplication again would make that lengthy wind-up his greatest vulnerability.

Since that was the case...

Then there was no need for multiplication anyway.

After all, the starting posture was the same.

Under everyone's horrified gaze, not one but ten golden card illusions flashed briefly before Lin Yu!

[Skill Card] [Lightning Spell (Golden Epic)]

...

Ten times!

He had consecutively used the most basic skill card ten times!

Zap! Zap! Zap! Zap! Zap!

Ten slender yet intensely bright golden electric arcs simultaneously began gathering at the tips of his ten fingers!

It wasn't one golden thread.

It was ten!

The opponents couldn't possibly know the difference between million-fold amplification or not.

This starting posture was no different from before!

Electric arcs madly danced in the air.

To everyone else, this was exactly the same attack as before, just multiplied by ten!

"....."

The illusory man was completely speechless.

His condescending attitude instantly crumbled.

Yan Xing, holding the black shield, felt the trace of blood he had just stopped at the corner of his mouth begin flowing again.

His body trembled uncontrollably.

It wasn't fear.

It was his body's instinctive reaction after withstanding the previous blow, now pushed to its absolute limits.

One more time, and his Abyssal Domain treasure [Profound Nether Prison-Suppressing Shield] would definitely shatter on the spot!

Ten more times?

What would that even mean?

They would die.

Along with Chen Ao behind them, along with this land, would be brutally scraped off this planet by that terrifying energy!

Madman!

This man was a complete and utter madman!

Li Mo, hiding in the shadows, was beyond terrified now.

His very soul was screaming in agony.

Ten shots!

Goddamn ten shots!

That single shot earlier had already reshaped his understanding of power.

Now, this monster was going to unleash ten shots in one go?

This wasn't fighting anymore.

This was formatting Linzhou's entire hard drive!

Were they going to grind this land along with the mantle ten kilometers deep?!

At this moment, every last bit of analysis, speculation, and assessment Li Mo had about Lin Yu transformed into pure, primal reverence.

Even the highest-ranking Executors in the Abyssal Domains couldn't so casually conjure ten world-ending spells of this caliber simultaneously!

Chen Ao, you fool!

What kind of existence have you provoked!

In the distance, Wang Han and his daughter, Old Ghost, and Zhao Tianyang had completely lost their ability to think.

Their understanding had been repeatedly shattered, rebuilt, and shattered again today.

Now, their minds were completely blank.

They could only stare dumbly.

Staring at that man standing between heaven and earth, with golden "suns" hovering at the tips of each of his ten fingers.

That wasn't a man.

That was divine punishment incarnate.

The battlefield fell into an eerie silence once more.

Only the ten golden electric arcs emitted soft "zapping" sounds, as if ready to break free at any moment.

Lin Yu's face still showed no extra expression.

He simply watched calmly as the two uninvited guests who had emerged from the spatial rift.

Watched the spectacular changes on their faces—from stunned, to shocked, to horrified, finally turning ashen gray.

Seemed like the effect was quite good.

Finally.

The illusory man moved.

He didn't waste any more words.

Nor did he hesitate any longer.

He grabbed the completely bewildered Chen Ao beside him as if lifting a chick.

Simultaneously, his other hand slammed hard onto his companion Yan Xing's shoulder.

"Go!"

The word was squeezed out through clenched teeth.

Yan Xing didn't respond, only using his last bit of strength to forcibly tear open another dark spatial rift.

The rift appeared right behind them.

The two men carrying Chen Ao plunged into it without the slightest hesitation.

The rift instantly closed.

As if they had never appeared.

Their arrival had been abrupt, but their departure was even more panicked.

With their disappearance, that suffocating oppressive feeling also vanished without a trace.

On the ruins.

Lin Yu slowly lowered his raised hand.

The ten golden electric arcs at his fingertips that could make even deities tremble quietly dissipated into the air.

A wind blew past.

Stirring up dust from the ground.

Between heaven and earth, only devastation and deathly silence remained.

Lin Yu's gaze fell upon the spot where the spatial rift had disappeared.

That hastily closed spatial rift left behind a faint, rapidly dissipating energy ripple in the air.

The wind began flowing again.

Blowing across this ruin that could no longer be called a street, stirring up choking dust.

This move works really well!

Lin Yu suddenly discovered a new application for his profession.

Amplified attacks had long wind-ups, high consumption, and extreme power, but their starting appearance didn't change much.

It was literally a divine skill for bluffing with borrowed authority!

Moreover, as long as he stored enough Doubling Cards, he could activate multiplication anytime.

I dare to use it as an ordinary Lightning Spell, but would you dare to receive it as one?

Chapter 145: I am Li Mo!

Just as Lin Yu hadn't yet figured things out in detail.

From the shadows, a figure swooshed out!

Extremely fast, carrying a piercing whistle that tore through the air!

Another expert?

Lin Yu's body, which had just relaxed, instantly tensed up again, the energy within him ready to burst forth, prepared to create another spectacle of "Ten Suns Dominating the Sky."

However, that figure didn't attack.

When he was still seven or eight meters away from Lin Yu, he made a move that caught everyone completely off guard.

A textbook-perfect sliding kneel that could be written into teaching manuals.

Thump!

The man's knees heavily smashed onto the ground covered with gravel, his immense momentum carrying him sliding forward until he precisely stopped right in front of Lin Yu.

Then, a pair of hands tightly, desperately, hugged Lin Yu's thigh.

The entire movement flowed smoothly and seamlessly, filled with practiced elegance.

Lin Yu: "..."

Zhao Tianyang: "..."

Old Ghost: "..."

On the ruins, the few remaining survivors all fell into prolonged silence.

"Sir! Sir, have mercy!"

The man hugging Lin Yu's thigh began wailing with tears and snot running down his face, his mournful cries filled with the relief of surviving a disaster and genuine terror from the depths of his soul.

"I was blind and failed to recognize Mount Tai! I deserve to die ten thousand deaths!"

"I'm just a dog beside that idiot Chen Ao! No, I'm not even as good as a dog! I'm just a fart! You're magnanimous, please just let me go like passing gas!"

The newcomer was none other than Li Mo, who had been hiding for half the day.

He had completely lost any trace of the composure of an Abyssal Domains visitor, nor any of the cold calculation he had shown when scheming against Chen Ao.

He now had only one thought.

Survive.

The man before him, this monster who could casually create ten world-destroying spells, was absolutely not someone he could comprehend.

Another matter was that people from the Abyssal Domains had arrived, so he needed to consider his own situation!

He needed to cling to a powerful patron!

More crucially, he could cling to one!

At this moment, he cast aside all the demeanor he had cultivated since coming to Blue Star, reverting to the identity of that insignificant character who had barely survived in the Abyssal Domains.

Lin Yu looked down at this man hugging his thigh, crying as if the sky was falling.

Hood, face mask, casual clothes.

It was that "extra" who had been following Chen Ao earlier.

He actually hadn't died.

Lin Yu was somewhat surprised, but didn't pay it much mind.

Just an ant who surrendered voluntarily—to kill or not kill depended entirely on his mood.

He was just about to kick this noisy fellow away.

But from behind came the sound of uncontrollable, violent gasping.

It was Wang Han.

Under the treatment of another [Primordial Light's Redemption] from Lin Yu, Wang Han had not only completely recovered from his injuries, but his spirit had also become clearer.

He felt better than ever before.

The relaxation in both body and mind finally allowed his brain, which had been numbed by successive shocks, to start functioning again.

Then he saw this absurd scene.

A man kneeling before his long-unseen nephew, hugging his thigh, crying as if his heart was breaking.

Wang Han instinctively found this scene somewhat ridiculous.

But when he clearly saw the man's face—the mask had slipped aside from his wailing, revealing a face covered with terror and sweat—

Wang Han completely froze solid.

The stiffness in his body was even more severe than when he had faced Chen Ao earlier.

That face...

That face!

There was no mistake!

He would recognize it even if the man turned to ashes!

Li Mo!

The CEO of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals!

That legendary figure who could overturn clouds and rain in Linzhou's business world!

That exceptional talent who led Qingyun to crush them in multiple projects!

Wang Han would never forget.

Last year, for an important company project, he had wanted to request a meeting with Li Mo. He had pulled countless strings, sent countless gifts, yet in the end couldn't even get through the door of the other's office.

He wanted to establish connections with the man, but the other simply ignored him.

At that time, he had been quite resentful.

Heaven's Pillar Group's scale wasn't much smaller than Qingyun's, and as a director of Heaven's Pillar, he had personally gone to see Li Mo, yet Li Mo hadn't given him any face at all.

But he truly admired Li Mo.

He had seen this guy long before.

Back then, Li Mo was in high spirits, standing on stage, confidently addressing thousands of entrepreneurs in the audience.

He dared to openly call several shareholder directors of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals "fossilized old antiques" in front of everyone.

He dared to contemptuously evaluate all local medicine companies in Linzhou as "clay chickens and pottery dogs" when answering reporters' questions.

That deep-seated arrogance, that demeanor of treating all heroes as nothing, left an indelible impression on Wang Han.

It was as if he was naturally on a different level from everyone else.

That was someone who truly stood above the clouds, looking down on all living beings.

But now...

Now...

Wang Han's brain completely crashed.

He looked at that man kneeling on the ground, with tears and snot flowing freely, completely devoid of dignity.

Then he looked at his nephew standing before him, one hand in his pocket, face completely calm.

Had the world gone mad?

"You..."

Wang Han's lips trembled as he tried to say something, but found his throat so dry he couldn't produce a complete syllable.

Lin Yu heard the commotion behind him and glanced back.

"Uncle Wang, are you okay?"

"I..." Wang Han pointed at Li Mo, who was still crying vigorously on the ground, then pointed at Lin Yu, completely incoherent, "He... you... Li..."

"You know him?"

Lin Yu raised an eyebrow, turning his attention back to the "attachment" on his leg.

"Li... Li Mo?" Wang Han finally squeezed out a complete name, his voice trembling, "That President Li... of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals?"

Li Mo, who had been completely absorbed in crying while hugging the thigh, suddenly stiffened.

He had heard Wang Han's words.

He slowly, slowly raised his head and saw Wang Han's face, filled with shock and disbelief.

Li Mo's crying abruptly stopped.

It's over.

He's been recognized.

Li Mo's crying ceased.

That face covered in dust and tear tracks froze in mid-air, appearing both ridiculous and pitiful.

The air seemed to solidify at that moment.

Wang Han's accusation was like a needle, puncturing the eerie balance on the scene.

Qingyun Pharmaceuticals?

President Li?

Lin Yu had no impression of this name, but from Wang Han's expression of having seen a ghost, he could guess this person's importance.

Interesting.

Someone who could follow Chen Ao around and shock his uncle so much was actually hugging his leg without any dignity.

Wang Han's brain was still buzzing.

He stared intently at that face, trying to find any trace of pretense.

None.

There was nothing but extreme fear and humility.

That Li Mo who dominated the business world, whom countless people regarded as a legend, that man whom even he found nearly impossible to meet—was truly kneeling here.

Like a dog wagging its tail and begging for mercy.

This was even more subversive to Wang Han's understanding than Chen Ao being slapped away, more shocking than the world-destroying thunder.

Chapter 146: I am useful, very useful!

Just as Wang Han's brain was about to completely shut down from overload.

A faint, yet crystal clear, somewhat teasing hoarse narration came from the other side of the ruins.

"Li Mo, CEO of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals, took office at thirty-four years old. In three years, he led Qingyun Pharmaceuticals to triple its market value, squeezing into the ranks of Linzhou's top four medicine companies."

This narration was intermittent, as faint as a dying breath, yet it struck precisely at everyone's hearts.

"He spearheaded seventeen hostile takeovers, personally bankrupted five promising medium-sized medicine companies. In the Linzhou business circle, they privately call him the 'Capital Harvester'."

"Chairman Wang, that overseas project you begged him to help broker last year was ruined by just one sentence from him. Because he felt Heaven's Pillar Group wasn't worthy of cooperating with him."

These words weren't an explanation.

They were stomping several more vicious kicks onto Li Mo's already shattered legendary halo.

Each sentence made Li Mo's body tremble more violently.

Each sentence made Wang Han's shock-filled face turn even paler.

But Wang Han's pallor was soon replaced by another, even more extreme emotion.

Disbelief.

He sharply turned his head, looking toward the source of the voice.

There, Old Ghost was kneeling on the ground.

And in his arms, the corpse that should have been cold and stiff, the one with a pierced chest and severed vitality, Seventh Master...

Was half-leaning his head up, struggling, word by word, to finish speaking.

"Cough cough... Old bastard, stop fucking looking like you've seen a ghost."

Seventh Master coughed up bloody spittle, pulling a smile uglier than crying.

"I'm not completely dead yet."

Old Ghost's body froze solid.

His eyes, clouded by grief, stared fixedly at the person in his arms.

He could feel the temperature of Seventh Master's body.

He could feel the faint but tenacious heartbeat in his chest.

"Old... Old Seventh?"

Old Ghost's lips trembled, emitting a syllable that didn't sound human.

"Ah..."

The next second, a howling cry suppressed by half a lifetime of vicissitudes and the ecstasy of regaining what was lost erupted from the old man's throat.

He didn't ask more questions.

He didn't want to ask anything.

He just held tightly, tightly onto this old partner returned from death in his arms, crying like a child.

Seventh Master was alive.

This realization was even more shocking than the world-destroying thunder from before.

Lin Yu wasn't surprised by this.

Earlier, to comfort Wang Han and his daughter, he had casually tossed out a Primordial-tier [Light's Redemption].

That skill had area effect.

Combined with his previous Origin-tier [Vitality Nourishment].

Plus Old Seventh's will to survive, it was normal for him to wake up.

He just hadn't expected it to be this fast.

However, when this scene fell into Li Mo's perception, it became a horror story on an entirely different level.

Resurrection.

A confirmed dead individual regaining vital signs.

This method, this great power that defied the laws of life, even in the Abyssal Domains he knew—where strong experts were as common as clouds and gods and demons danced wildly—was considered an extremely rare, high-cost forbidden technique.

But here...

Before this man...

It was like casually completing a trivial matter.

Even more, this man hadn't glanced toward the dead person from beginning to end.

He simply didn't care.

Li Mo's body stopped trembling.

Not because the fear had disappeared.

But because when fear surpasses a certain threshold, all that remains is the purest numbness and... awe.

He finally, completely, one hundred percent confirmed one thing.

The thigh he was clinging to wasn't some Fierce Dragon Crossing the River, nor some reclusive expert.

That was a... god walking among mortals, whose upper limit of power he couldn't even imagine.

This thought flashed through Li Mo's mind, but was immediately drowned by a surge of survival-driven madness.

So what if he recognized it!

President Li of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals?

Capital Harvester?

Those were all in the past!

Now with the Abyssal Domains clearly about to make major moves, no one knew what kind of upheavals awaited them in the future!

He had to prove his value!

Before Lin Yu kicked away this leg accessory, he had to prove he was still useful!

In that lightning-fast moment, Li Mo's brain operated at unprecedented speed.

Old Ghost Hall.

Medicine.

Top four medicine companies.

Chen Ao came causing trouble because of the medicine business.

This man was the behind-the-scenes boss of Old Ghost Hall.

The clues connected!

A clear path to survival emerged in his mind!

"Great One!"

Li Mo sharply raised his head, his face covered in tear stains and dust erupting with a morbid fanaticism and humble flattery.

His crying stopped, replaced by an extremely urgent confession.

"Great One! I know you! I know Old Ghost Hall!"

"I know what you're doing!"

He spoke extremely fast, afraid that if he slowed by one second, this deity before him would lose patience and casually crush him to death.

"I know you want to deal with the three major medicine companies! I know all their deployments! Their counterattack plan was personally drafted by me!"

Li Mo spoke incoherently, for the sake of survival, pouring out his value without reservation.

"I can help you! I can dismantle them from within! Their weaknesses, their lifelines, I know them all! Give me a chance, Great One! I can save you endless trouble!"

As he spoke, he kowtowed heavily, his forehead hitting the broken stones, soon bleeding, but he didn't care at all, just raised his blood-stained face, looking at Lin Yu with an almost insane begging posture.

Lin Yu still didn't speak.

That calm demeanor frightened Li Mo more than any rage.

He knew this wasn't enough.

These mundane commercial methods might be completely insignificant before this deity.

He had to offer more substantial bargaining chips!

"Abyssal Domains! Great One!"

Li Mo shouted these two words, as if grabbing the last lifesaving straw.

"Those two people earlier! The one using the shield, and the one hiding in the shadows! They were visitors from the Abyssal Domains! I know them! I know their identities, their origins!"

He was gambling, betting that his instincts were right—this person wasn't from the Abyssal Domains, so he needed information about them!

These words finally caused an imperceptible change in the atmosphere.

Even Old Ghost, crying over his regained old partner, paused his movements.

Wang Han was even more confused, feeling that every word contained terrifying information he couldn't comprehend.

Lin Yu's gaze finally withdrew from the distance, landing on the blood-covered person at his feet.

Li Mo's heart leaped with joy.

It worked!

He gambled correctly!

This Great One indeed reacted to the word "Abyssal Domains"!

He was about to press his advantage, spilling everything he knew to exchange for a chance to survive.

Lin Yu, however, suddenly spoke.

He didn't ask Li Mo any questions about the Abyssal Domains.

His gaze passed over Li Mo, toward the other end of the ruins.

"Old Ghost."

Lin Yu's call was soft.

Old Ghost, immersed in the ecstasy and grief of regaining what was lost, jolted violently.

He slowly raised his head, his old face covered in tear stains filled with confusion.

"Boss?"

Lin Yu's next sentence made everyone present completely stunned.

"What do you think of this person?"

He asked.

He was asking Old Ghost.

But deciding Li Mo's life or death.

Chapter 147: I Know Whereabouts

Li Mo's newly ignited hope, his face full of wild joy, instantly froze solid.

The blood on his face seemed to turn cold at this moment.

A chill more piercing than death itself shot up from his tailbone all the way to the crown of his head.

Why?

Why was he being asked?

A low-level medicine dealer from the black market, an ant he could casually crush to death—why could this person decide his fate?

What exactly was this deity thinking?

Old Ghost was also stunned.

Holding Seventh Master who still retained some warmth in his arms, he stared blankly at Lin Yu, then looked at Li Mo kneeling on the ground with an ashen face.

The boss... was asking for my opinion?

Was he not joking?

Wang Han and Wang Qingxuan, father and daughter, felt their worldview being repeatedly shattered and reconstructed.

President Li of Qingyun Pharmaceuticals.

That legendary figure who wielded immense influence in Linzhou's business circles, someone even Wang Han had to request an audience with.

His life and death now actually depended on the opinion of a... black market old man he had never even glanced at properly before?

This world was truly insane.

Under the gazes of everyone present—some shocked, some fearful, some confused—Old Ghost slowly, gently placed Seventh Master from his arms onto the ground.

He stood up.

His hunched back seemed to straighten slightly at this moment.

His cloudy old eyes fixed intently on Li Mo.

Within them, there was no pity, no hesitation, only undissolved resentment and hatred that had accumulated for decades.

"Heh heh..."

Old Ghost laughed.

The laughter was dry, unpleasant, filled with endless vicissitudes.

"Li Mo... I know him."

He spoke this name, each word seeming squeezed out from between his teeth.

"Of course I know him."

"How could I possibly not know him."

Old Ghost's gaze made Li Mo feel like all the blood in his body was about to freeze. He remembered now, he finally dug out this face from the corner of his memory.

Decades ago, at Qingyun Pharmaceuticals, a somewhat talented researcher he had laid off during optimization.

So it was him.

"When I was young, I also worked at Qingyun Pharmaceuticals." Old Ghost didn't pay attention to Li Mo's instantly pale face, just continued speaking to Lin Yu on his own.

"Back then, I also had a family."

"Not big, but very warm."

"My wife was very virtuous, my son was very obedient, and did well in school too."

Old Ghost's narration was very calm, so calm it made people uneasy.

"Later, he came."

Old Ghost's hand pointed at Li Mo.

"He became the CEO and began drastic reforms. Everyone who couldn't keep up with his pace, everyone who disagreed with him, everyone he deemed useless, were all kicked out by him."

"I was one of them."

"Without a job, without income, to support my family, I did everything. But as a researcher, besides compounding medicines, I couldn't do anything else. In the end, I could only come to the black market to be a shady medicine dealer."

"My wife thought I was useless and ran off with someone else."

"My son looked down on his father, left home right after high school graduation, and never came back."

Old Ghost paused here.

He raised his head, looking at Lin Yu, his wrinkled face pulling into a smile uglier than crying.

"Boss, my life... is like this now."

"Family broken, wife and children separated."

"All thanks to him."

Sentence after sentence, word after word, were accusations filled with blood and tears.

Li Mo knelt on the ground, his mind racing rapidly.

Wang Han listened to all this, feeling mixed emotions in his heart. He only knew Li Mo was a business legend, but didn't know that behind this legend were countless broken lives like Old Ghost's.

Above the ruins, dead silence prevailed.

Everyone thought Old Ghost's next words would be "kill him."

However.

After staring at Li Mo for a long time, Old Ghost slowly shook his head.

He turned around, facing Lin Yu again, that soaring resentment forcibly suppressed by him.

"Boss."

"He is an out-and-out bastard."

"But... what he said isn't wrong either."

Old Ghost took a deep breath, as if using all his strength.

"He truly is a once-in-a-century talent. In terms of methods, schemes, and understanding of the entire Linzhou medicine market, no one surpasses him."

"Keeping him would be of great use for what we need to do."

These words made everyone's jaws drop.

Including Li Mo himself.

He raised his head, looking incredulously at Old Ghost's back.

This man whose life he had ruined, actually... was pleading for him?

Old Ghost didn't look back.

He just bowed deeply to Lin Yu.

"The specific punishment is entirely up to the boss's decision."

"Whatever decision you make, Old Ghost accepts it."

After speaking, he said no more, turned and walked back to Seventh Master's side, carefully picking up his old friend who had returned from death, holding him in his arms again.

As if nothing else in this world concerned him anymore.

The entire ruins fell into absolute silence once more.

Lin Yu nodded, not immediately stating his position.

The flame of hope within Li Mo was completely extinguished by Old Ghost's words.

But he wasn't despairing.

Because he knew that the one deciding his life and death was never Old Ghost.

But the man before him, the one even deities had to bow to.

Li Mo prostrated on the ground, his posture even lower, he didn't even dare to look up at Lin Yu, just pressed his blood-stained, dust-covered face firmly against the cold ground.

"Your Excellency, I know I deserve death ten thousand times over."

His words were no longer the urgent defense from before, but carried a calmness that came from having figured something out.

"Someone like me isn't worth pitying in death."

"I just... don't want to die without any value."

Li Mo paused, as if organizing his words, but actually every word was the result of careful consideration.

"I'm just an employee."

"Qingyun Pharmaceuticals belongs to others, I just work for them. They want to make money, so I have to help sharpen their blades. When blades are sharp, they naturally hurt people."

He only mentioned this briefly, then immediately changed the subject, avoiding giving the impression of shifting blame.

"I'm sorry for what happened to Mr. Old Ghost. But I know apologies are the most useless things in this world."

"What I can do is compensate."

Li Mo didn't raise his head, but his words accurately reached Old Ghost's ears.

"I know the whereabouts of your wife and son."

This one sentence made Old Ghost, who had just embraced Seventh Master again and was immersed in the emotion of regaining what was lost, stiffen abruptly.

Even Wang Han, who had been shocked by Seventh Master's resurrection, turned his gaze over.

Lin Yu still showed no reaction.

That calm posture gave Li Mo immense pressure.

He knew that just "knowing the whereabouts" wasn't enough.

This could be seen as a threat, a bargaining chip.

And negotiating with the existence before him was the stupidest behavior in this world.

Chapter 148: I Can Work

Li Mo gritted his teeth.

He made a decision that no one expected.

"Your son, Chu Tiankuo, is currently working as an apprentice at 'Feichi Auto Repair Shop' in the western suburbs of Linzhou. Your ex-wife, Tao Ran, remarried three years ago and now lives in Unit 7012, Building B of the 'Riverside Blossoms' residential complex in the southern part of the city."

Without the slightest hesitation, he directly stated two specific addresses, speaking with crystal clarity.

This was information he had gathered by mobilizing all his intelligence networks overnight before coming here.

He originally thought it would just be a backup measure, never expecting it would actually prove useful.

This could serve as leverage for coercion.

But Li Mo's survival intuition, honed in the mountains of corpses and seas of blood within the Abyssal Domains, told him that if he dared show even the slightest hint of coercion, he would become a corpse colder than Seventh Master in the next second.

Therefore, he chose the most thorough honesty.

This was a gesture of goodwill.

A complete, unreserved offering of his final trump card as a pledge of allegiance, presented with both hands.

Old Ghost's body trembled violently.

He abruptly raised his head, his turbid old eyes filled with bloodshot veins and disbelief.

He opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but couldn't utter a single word.

Feichi Auto Repair Shop...

Riverside Blossoms...

These two names burned into his heart like two red-hot branding irons.

Li Mo didn't look at Old Ghost's reaction.

He knew he had already done his absolute best.

Next was the next bargaining chip.

"Great One!"

He turned again toward Lin Yu's direction and heavily kowtowed once more.

"Although Chen Ao isn't dead, after this battle, he's bound to be severely weakened and won't dare show his face again for quite some time. The power vacuum he left behind is our best opportunity!"

"The Linzhou Black Market, along with the underground trading networks of several surrounding cities, are now leaderless!"

"As long as you give the nod, I guarantee that within three days, I will integrate everything Chen Ao left behind under your command! All his channels, connections, and wealth will become yours for the taking!"

"I will turn the entire Linzhou Black Market into the backyard of Old Ghost Hall!"

These words finally made Old Ghost and Seventh Master, who had just caught his breath, show expressions of interest.

If they could take control of the entire black market...

Then whatever they wanted to do, whether selling medicine or gathering intelligence, would become infinitely more convenient.

That would be an underground kingdom completely belonging to them.

Wang Han listened nearby, his heart pounding with fear, his brain completely unable to process the information before him.

The Linzhou Black Market was a massive market worth hundreds of billions.

Plus several surrounding cities... that would form an unimaginable commercial empire!

And now, the key to this empire was held in Li Mo's hands.

He was humbly offering it to his own nephew.

After saying all this.

Li Mo fell silent.

He pressed his forehead firmly against the ground, maintaining the most humble posture, completely motionless.

He had demonstrated all his value.

Intelligence, methods, commercial empire.

Everything he could do, he had done.

All that remained was waiting.

Waiting for the supreme, final judgment.

Time stretched infinitely at this moment.

Every second felt like a lingering death torture to Li Mo's soul.

Lin Yu remained silent throughout.

That calmness carried more pressure than any thunderous rage.

He didn't look at Li Mo prostrate on the ground, nor at Old Ghost with his complex expression.

His gaze seemed to penetrate through this ruins, falling upon some more distant place.

A long time passed.

So long that Li Mo almost thought he had fainted from excessive blood loss.

So long that Wang Han's heavily impacted heart was about to stop beating.

Lin Yu finally spoke.

"From now on, you'll work under Old Ghost."

A plain statement.

No judgment, no questioning, not even a ripple of emotion.

As if arranging some trivial matter.

But for Li Mo, this was nothing short of heavenly music.

He let out a long sigh of relief - by hook or by crook, he had survived another day.

Lin Yu's gaze finally withdrew from the distance and fell upon Old Ghost.

"Old Ghost."

"Boss, I'm here." Old Ghost quickly responded, holding Seventh Master in his arms a bit tighter.

"This person will be your deputy from now on." Lin Yu's arrangements were concise and clear. "Handle the matters he knows about as you see fit. Whether it's finding people or integrating the black market, I'm giving you full authority to handle it."

Old Ghost's body shuddered.

Full authority?

The boss was entrusting him with Li Mo, this priceless "dog," along with his vast network of connections, without any reservation?

This level of trust was simply too...

Old Ghost opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but found any words would seem pale and powerless at this moment.

He could only nod heavily.

"Yes, Boss!"

Lin Yu said no more, turning and walking toward another side of the ruins.

There, Wang Han was carefully supporting his precious daughter, trying to help her out from the narrow space formed by the jade barrier.

"Uncle, Qingxuan, it's alright now."

Lin Yu's voice wasn't loud, but it clearly reached the ears of the father and daughter.

Wang Qingxuan's dust-covered little face finally broke when she saw Lin Yu.

"Waaah—"

She threw herself into Wang Han's embrace and burst into loud sobs.

Everything that had just happened was simply too shocking for a girl who lived in an ivory tower.

The world-destroying thunder, the battlefield with severed limbs, and that person kneeling on the ground, bloody and mangled.

Every scene lingered in her mind like a nightmare.

"It's alright, it's alright, Xuan'er don't cry, Daddy's here."

Wang Han clumsily patted his daughter's back, constantly comforting her.

His own emotions were equally tangled and confused.

His nephew, Lin Yu.

That child he remembered as somewhat introverted, even a bit stubborn - the shocks he had delivered today surpassed everything Wang Han had experienced in his past fifty years combined.

His mind was in complete chaos right now.

Lin Yu watched the father and daughter embracing and crying, not disturbing them.

His gaze turned to the other side.

Old Ghost was carefully settling Seventh Master comfortably, then walked over to stand before Li Mo.

Li Mo still maintained his prostrate position.

"President Li, get up." Old Ghost's address carried a somewhat indescribable meaning.

Li Mo's body stiffened, slowly raising his head.

He saw Old Ghost's face, covered with wrinkles and weathered by time.

The once deep-seated resentment and hatred seemed to have faded considerably.

Replaced by a complex, scrutinizing calmness.

"From now on, don't call me President Li." Li Mo struggled to stand up, adopting an extremely humble posture. "You can just call me Little Li."

Old Ghost remained silent for a moment, then nodded.

"You mentioned earlier that you know about the three major pharmaceutical companies' counterattack plan?"

"Yes!" Li Mo immediately perked up - this was his moment to prove his value. "They've already detected the threat of our medicine and are preparing to join forces to launch a comprehensive suppression against us from three fronts: raw materials, channels, and public opinion! The specific plan document is what I—"

"Stop."

Old Ghost interrupted him.

"We'll discuss these matters later." Old Ghost's gaze went past Li Mo, looking toward Lin Yu's direction. "Right now, there's something more important."

Li Mo was stunned.

Something more important than dealing with the three major companies' suppression?

"The boss wants to meet them." Old Ghost said word by word.

"Meet who?" Li Mo asked instinctively.

"The decision-makers... of the three major pharmaceutical companies." Old Ghost's response made Li Mo's brain instantly shut down.

Chapter 149: Post-Event Arrangements

Li Mo didn't ask why.

He didn't need to.

The survival instincts honed in the Abyssal Domains told him that when facing such incomprehensible beings, the best response was execution.

Execution without compromise, two hundred percent execution.

"I understand."

Li Mo didn't even wipe the blood from his face, already entering a terrifyingly efficient work mode.

He pulled out a peculiarly shaped black communicator, fingers flying across its surface.

It wasn't any phone model available on the market.

"Three days from now, 2:15 PM."

"Location, the 'Celestial Realm' revolving restaurant at the top floor of Linzhou Tower."

Li Mo announced the time and place without the slightest hesitation, as if he wasn't arranging a meeting that would determine Linzhou's business future, but simply reserving an ordinary table.

He hadn't even coordinated with those three companies beforehand.

But he had this confidence.

He, Li Mo, would use his own name to "invite" those three over.

They wouldn't dare refuse.

Lin Yu offered no comment on this.

A tacit approval.

For beings at this level, the process was meaningless—he only needed to see the results.

Tools like Li Mo who could get things done properly were indeed convenient to use.

After handling this matter, Lin Yu no longer looked at him.

His gaze shifted to the other side, landing on Seventh Master who was being tightly held in Old Ghost's arms.

"Old Seventh, how are you feeling?"

"Cough... cough cough..." Seventh Master struggled to sit up straight, but was immediately pressed down by Old Ghost.

He grinned, revealing a smile missing several teeth, yet his voice was surprisingly robust.

"Not dead yet! Boss, I feel full of energy, like I could go tear down that bastard Chen Ao's den right now!"

As he spoke, he even waved his fist, stirring up a slight breeze.

His body's recovery speed exceeded his own expectations.

The moment that light descended, he felt his parched body immersed in a fountain of life, every cell cheering and leaping with joy.

Old Ghost, feeling the vitality of his companion in his arms, couldn't help but laugh again, the tear stains on his old face not yet dry.

"Alright, alright, you're the capable one."

Lin Yu nodded.

With an Origin-tier [Vitality Nourishment] as foundation, plus a Primordial-tier [Light's Redemption], this level of recovery was within expectations.

"No rush."

Lin Yu's arrangements were clear.

"First, repair Old Ghost Hall."

"As for the territory Chen Ao left behind, take it over if you have the capacity. If not, just leave it—it won't rot."

His words were plain.

That vast power vacuum, enough to drive all of Linzhou's underground forces mad, was nothing more than disposable scrap in his mouth.

Old Ghost and Seventh Master exchanged glances, both seeing immense shock and fervor in each other's eyes.

This was the boss they followed.

Vision.

"Yes! Boss!"

They spoke in unison, their voices filled with unprecedented motivation.

Especially Seventh Master, after being brought back from death, he only wanted to devote himself entirely to the boss.

Li Mo listened silently nearby, his heart roiling with towering waves.

Once again, he refreshed his understanding of this new boss.

Controlling Linzhou's black market—what immense profits and power that represented.

Yet the boss's attitude was like handling some insignificant clutter.

What did he actually want?

Money? Power?

Neither seemed to be the case.

Then what did he want from meeting the three major medicine companies?

Li Mo didn't dare think further, simply lowering his posture even more.

With arrangements settled.

Lin Yu's gaze shifted away from Li Mo and Old Ghost.

He walked toward the other end of the ruins.

Wang Han was tightly holding his daughter, using his not-so-broad back to shield her from the hellish scene.

Wang Qingxuan's body was still trembling uncontrollably, her face buried deep in her father's chest, not daring to look at anything outside.

Lin Yu's footsteps were light, barely making any sound as he stepped on the rubble.

"Uncle."

He spoke.

Wang Han's body stiffened abruptly, and he slowly turned his head.

That scholarly face was now filled with indescribably complex emotions. There was terror, confusion, disbelief, and a trace of... distance.

He looked at Lin Yu before him, this nephew he'd watched grow up, yet felt utterly unfamiliar.

"Xi... Xiao Yu..."

Wang Han's voice was hoarse, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down, but he couldn't form a complete sentence.

What should he ask?

Ask what that world-destroying thunder just now was about?

Ask why that President Li from Qingyun Pharmaceuticals was kneeling at your feet?

Or ask how you brought the dead back to life?

Every question exceeded his fifty-plus years of life experience.

"It's alright now." Lin Yu's reply was simple. "I'll have someone take you back."

He offered no explanation.

Some things couldn't be explained, and didn't need explanation.

Wang Han opened his mouth, but ultimately swallowed all his questions. He just instinctively held his daughter even tighter.

Lin Yu's gaze moved past Wang Han and his daughter, turning again toward not far away.

There, Li Mo was following closely behind Old Ghost.

"Old sir." Li Mo's posture was extremely humble, even somewhat obsequious. "You see, the boss's matters are all arranged now, so... shall I take you to see them first?"

He ventured tentatively.

"Riverside Blossoms isn't far from here, at most half an hour by car. Your son's auto repair shop is only about forty minutes away."

Li Mo had calculated everything clearly.

This was his best, and only, opportunity to show goodwill to his new master.

Helping Old Ghost reunite with his family—this merit wasn't huge, but it was enough to secure his first step in this new group.

Old Ghost's footsteps halted.

He didn't turn around.

He just stood there motionless, holding the still-recovering Seventh Master in his arms.

On the ruins, the wind howled.

Li Mo held his breath, waiting.

Seventh Master shifted in Old Ghost's arms, as if wanting to say something, but after looking at his old companion's rigid back, he ultimately chose silence.

A long time passed.

Old Ghost finally spoke.

"Not necessary."

Two words, cold and hard, like stones fished out from an ice cellar.

Li Mo was taken aback.

"Old sir, this..."

"I said not necessary!"

Old Ghost suddenly raised his voice, whirling around to glare at Li Mo with bloodshot eyes.

"The matters the boss assigned are of utmost importance!"

"Repairing Old Ghost Hall, consolidating the black market, meeting with the three major companies! Which one isn't more important than my trivial matters?"

His chest heaved violently, almost roaring these words.

"My family issues are nothing!"

"Worthless before the boss's great enterprise!"

His words were righteous and loyal.

Li Mo was stunned by this sudden outburst, instinctively taking half a step back and bowing repeatedly.

"Yes, yes! I was foolish! The old sir's lesson is correct! Everything must prioritize the boss's great enterprise!"

He didn't dare mention it again.

Why hadn't he noticed before...

This Old Ghost's temper was really something.

Chapter 150: The Time Is Not Yet Ripe

Old Ghost snorted heavily and stopped paying attention to Li Mo, turning to face the surrounding black market members who had survived by luck and were now timidly gathering together, beginning to loudly issue commands.

"Are you all dead! What are you standing there for!"

"Get your asses moving! Clear the rubble! Gather all the usable supplies together for me!"

"I want this place restored to its original state before dark! Do you hear me!"

His voice was booming, filled with unquestionable authority.

Those usually unruly black market veterans were now more docile than sheep, each one hurriedly starting to work.

The entire scene instantly became orderly.

Lin Yu quietly watched all of this.

Watching the roaring, energetic Old Ghost who commanded everything like an old lion.

He saw that loyalty.

And beneath that loyalty, he saw something even deeper.

Cowardice.

Yes, exactly that—cowardice.

A dream he had cherished for decades, an obsession that had supported him through countless dark years.

When that dream was within reach, he retreated.

He didn't dare to go.

He didn't dare to knock on that door of a home inhabited by strangers.

He didn't dare to face the son who might no longer recognize him, or even hate him.

He was afraid to see unfamiliar happiness on his wife's face.

He was even more afraid to see the contempt in his son's eyes.

Decades of separation, decades of emptiness—how could they be bridged?

With a simple "I'm back"?

Or with his ineradicable black market aura and empty-handed poverty?

So, he would rather use the grandest reasons, his absolute loyalty to the boss, to cover up the fear in his heart.

He threw himself into the busiest work, using shouts and commands to fill the heart being gnawed by fear.

This was an escape.

An escape that even he himself might be unwilling to acknowledge.

Lin Yu didn't expose it.

Some wounds can only heal on their own.

Any external intervention might only make them fester more thoroughly.

Just then, the steady sound of an engine approached from afar.

A black business car with a low-profile design but smooth lines silently stopped at the periphery of the ruins.

The door slid open, and a man in a crisp suit with gold-rimmed glasses quickly stepped out.

He showed no surprise at the devastation before him, merely walking quickly to Wang Han and bowing slightly.

"Chairman, Young Miss, the car is ready."

It was Wang Han's assistant.

The people from Heaven's Pillar Group had arrived.

Lin Yu stepped forward, walking toward the father and daughter pair who were still in shock.

His footsteps crunched on the gravel, this time without deliberate restraint, making rustling sounds.

Wang Han's body stiffened once more.

Holding his daughter, he slowly turned around, his refined face displaying emotions of extreme complexity.

"Uncle."

Lin Yu stopped before them and spoke calmly.

"If you ever encounter any unsolvable problems in Linzhou from now on, or if anyone foolishly provokes you."

"Come find me anytime."

"As your nephew, it's my unquestionable duty."

His words were plain and simple.

Yet they struck like thunder, exploding violently in Wang Han's mind.

Exactly the same.

Almost identical to the words he had spoken hours earlier when patting Lin Yu's shoulder.

"Xiao Yu, if you ever have any problems, just tell Uncle."

"As long as I'm still in Linzhou, no one can bully you."

That time, that moment.

This time, this moment.

The positions of offense and defense had completely reversed.

Wang Han opened his mouth, his throat feeling clogged with cotton, unable to utter a single word.

How should he respond?

Say "Okay"?

How could he dare?

The world-destroying scenes from earlier, the kneeling, bloodied business magnate Li Mo, the contract master Seventh Master who had returned from death...

All of this clearly told him that the nephew before him had already reached a height he couldn't comprehend, couldn't even imagine.

This favor, he couldn't accept.

Nor could he repay it.

He suddenly understood completely—Lin Yu's father, his old friend.

Why had his childhood friend, someone he'd grown up sharing pants with, acted so awkwardly like a stranger when asking for such a small favor?

Even fabricating the strange notion that "if I help this once, we'll be even from now on."

He had thought his old friend was being too distant, too stubborn back then.

Now he understood.

When the gap between two people becomes so vast it forms an unbridgeable chasm, that once-equal friendship is no longer pure.

Every request for help becomes a depletion.

Every act of grace becomes a separation.

Could he, Wang Han, still accept Lin Yu's help with the peace of mind of an "uncle"?

If there really came a day when he was desperate, and Lin Yu, honoring this uncle-nephew relationship, helped him with an enormous favor.

What then?

Would he still have the face to present himself as an elder before Lin Yu?

Wang Han didn't know.

He truly didn't know.

Seeing the discomfort on Wang Han's face, Lin Yu said nothing more.

With a flick of his wrist, a storage bracelet gleaming with metallic luster appeared in his hand.

"Uncle, take this."

He directly slipped the bracelet onto Wang Han's wrist.

"Inside are some basic medicines and some Life Serums. You and Qingxuan can use them normally, consider it a small gesture from your nephew."

Wang Han instinctively wanted to refuse.

"Xiao Yu, this... this is too precious! I can't..."

"Keep it."

Lin Yu's action brooked no argument.

"For me, it's nothing special."

That single sentence blocked all Wang Han's words of refusal in his throat.

Yes.

For him, it's nothing special.

Channeling his mental energy into the bracelet, Wang Han only needed one glance before his heart suddenly constricted.

Strength, Agility, Constitution, Mental Energy—four types of top-grade perfect medicines, each piled up like mountains.

And beside those medicine mountains, neatly arranged, were tens of thousands of Life Serums emitting a faint glow.

Wang Han's breathing instantly stopped.

He sharply looked up at Lin Yu.

This gift was even heavier than the earlier promise.

So heavy it could crush the last thin threads of their uncle-nephew relationship.

"Chairman?"

The assistant quietly reminded from the side.

Wang Han then snapped out of his daze. He gave Lin Yu one final look—gratitude, shock, confusion were in that gaze, but more than anything, an indescribable distance.

"Xiao Yu, you... take care of yourself."

In the end, he only managed these dry, hollow words.

Then, supporting his still-sobbing daughter, guided by his assistant, he quickly walked toward the car.

As if fleeing.

Lin Yu stood in place, watching the black business car silently start, trace an arc, and disappear into the gray horizon.

His gaze returned to the bustling ruins.

Falling upon the back of Old Ghost, who was still using roaring to conceal something.

Uncle Wang Han's discomfort and distance.

Old Ghost's fear and escape.

Two completely different reactions, yet their core pointed to the same thing.

A thought emerged in Lin Yu's mind.

If even the experienced Wang Han reacted this way.

What about his own parents?

What about his younger sister Lin Yao?

They were just ordinary citizens, living their entire lives in the sunlight, not even knowing what the black market was.

If they had witnessed the scenes from earlier.

Seen him summoning lightning with a flick of his finger, seen the dead returning to life, seen the helmsman of a business empire prostrating at his feet like a dog.

What would they think?

Would they feel no pride, no excitement?

Would they only feel fear?

He had always believed that becoming stronger was to better protect his family.

Now it seemed that sometimes, ignorance was the best protection for them.

At least, the time hasn't come yet...

Chapter 151: Excavation Profession

The black business car carrying Wang Han and his daughter soon disappeared around the street corner.

Lin Yu withdrew his gaze and turned it back toward the devastated ruins.

Old Ghost's roaring voice still echoed, directing the survivors in cleaning up the scene, his tone carrying an artificially created excitement meant to cover that cowardice of being afraid to face one's hometown.

Lin Yu didn't approach.

He simply stood quietly in place, like an outsider.

Just then, a figure passed through the scattered rubble and wreckage, stopping before him.

It was Zhao Tianyang.

The wounds on his body had mostly healed, but his specially made combat suit was in tatters, his face still stained with dried blood and dust.

"Boss."

Zhao Tianyang lowered his head, clenching his fists.

"It's my fault for being useless, for failing to protect everyone, and for letting Seventh Master..."

His words were filled with heavy self-blame and regret.

If only he were stronger.

If only he had stopped those people earlier.

If only...

"It's not your fault."

Lin Yu interrupted his self-pity.

"Chen Ao came prepared and even colluded with people from the Abyssal Domains. No one could have anticipated something like this."

His words were calm, carrying neither blame nor comfort, merely stating a fact.

Yet Zhao Tianyang's body trembled, and he abruptly looked up.

He had expected the boss to be disappointed, to be angry.

But Lin Yu's reaction was terrifyingly calm.

This calmness made him feel even more ashamed than any reprimand could.

"But..."

"No buts." Lin Yu's gaze settled on him. "You already did very well. If you hadn't held off Chen Ao, Seventh Master and Old Ghost might not have even had the chance to wait for my arrival."

Zhao Tianyang's lips moved slightly, but he ultimately swallowed his words.

He just clenched his fists even tighter.

Lin Yu didn't continue this topic, being more curious about another matter.

"That final form of yours, what was that about?"

"Eight-Armed Asura... I remember your profession doesn't have that ability."

That violent, chaotic, yet beautifully destructive power had surprised even Lin Yu.

Mentioning this, a trace of confusion also appeared on Zhao Tianyang's face.

"I... I can't really explain it clearly either."

He spread open his hands, carefully examining them.

"While fighting Chen Ao and the others, especially after seeing Seventh Master fall, it felt like something exploded in my mind."

"I felt like my body was no longer my own, as if some older, more powerful will had taken over everything."

"Those eight arms, those weapons—they didn't come from my thoughts. They... just grew out on their own."

He struggled to describe the sensation at the time, but his words seemed inadequate.

It was an incredibly profound experience.

As if in that life-or-death battle, he had truly touched the core of his profession.

[Asura].

A Myth-level profession was far more than just the skills listed on the status panel.

It seemed to harbor some more primitive instinct lying dormant within.

An instinct... born for battle.

"Combat allows you to gain deeper understanding of your profession?" Lin Yu extracted the key information.

"Seems that way." Zhao Tianyang nodded, then shook his head. "But not entirely. It felt more like unlocking... unlocking things that originally belonged to me."

Lin Yu pondered thoughtfully.

It appeared that Zhao Tianyang's [Asura] profession was growth-oriented.

Its true potential needed to be squeezed out and awakened through repeated limit-pushing battles.

This wouldn't do.

They couldn't just hope for people to come seeking revenge every day.

He needed to find him a place where he could fully release his power, yet remain safe enough.

After thinking for a moment, Lin Yu reached a decision.

With a flick of his wrist, a completely black card emitting a metallic cold gleam appeared in his hand.

"This is for you."

He handed the card to Zhao Tianyang.

Zhao Tianyang instinctively accepted it. The card felt icy cold to the touch, its front adorned with dark golden patterns outlining a magnificent building floating above the clouds.

"Sky Dome Summit."

Lin Yu provided the address.

"Linzhou's best private training ground. I've already obtained the highest-level VIP card. You can freely use all the facilities inside."

That violent, chaotic, yet beautifully destructive power had surprised even Lin Yu.

Lin Yu's instructions were concise and clear.

"I need an Asura who can draw his blade at any moment, not a reckless fool who can't even control his own power."

Zhao Tianyang gripped the icy card, yet his heart burned with fervor.

He didn't say thank you.

He just nodded heavily, clutching the card tightly in his hand.

"Yes, Boss!"

Watching Zhao Tianyang's highly motivated appearance, Lin Yu's thoughts drifted elsewhere.

Sky Dome Summit...

He probably couldn't use it himself.

Given his current skill potency, a mere snap of his fingers would likely instantly destroy Sky Dome Summit's energy protective shield, which boasted the ability to withstand a full-power strike from a lord-level entity.

Even if it could withstand it, that place operated on a real-name system after all.

Causing too much commotion would inevitably bring some trouble.

It seemed he still needed to find another path.

Pure brute force attacks had become somewhat excessive for him.

Although that previous attempt at "trillion-fold" spellcasting had nearly killed him...

The underlying concept itself wasn't wrong.

The combination of [Joker]'s replication and multiplication, plus [Primordial Snap]'s instant-cast and storage capabilities.

This combination's potential was far from fully tapped.

Storing a million-fold enhanced [Lightning Spell] into [Primordial Snap], then using [Joker] to perform million-fold enhancement on this snap card...

This kind of insane "nesting doll" operation, with its terrifying stacking of energy levels, would indeed exceed his body's endurance limit, leading to immediate self-destruction.

That experience of death and revival remained fresh in his memory.

But what if he changed his approach?

Instead of pursuing that ultimate, world-destroying final strike.

Lower the standards slightly.

For example, first use [Joker] to enhance a normal [Fireball Technique] by ten times, then store it in [Primordial Snap].

Then turn this [Primordial Snap] card storing the "ten-fold fireball technique" into a card again, and use [Joker] to perform multiplication once more.

If he wanted, this process could repeat infinitely.

Combined, stacking several million-fold, or even tens of millions-fold in power, would be effortless.

This approach was indeed feasible.

Moreover, it currently seemed like the only way for him to fully utilize his terrifying power in the safest, most efficient, and most concealed manner.

Lin Yu's thoughts raced rapidly.

A ten-fold enhanced [Fireball Technique], stored in [Primordial Snap].

Then enhance this snap card by a million times.

The final release would be a ten million-fold power [Fireball Technique].

And it would be instant-cast.

Chapter 152: Returning to the Insect Dwelling

No chanting required, no preparation needed, not even any extra movements.

Just a snap of the fingers.

If he wanted, he could prepare a whole stack of these snap cards in advance.

One would be a ten million times amplified Fireball Technique.

One would be a ten million times amplified Ice Spike Technique.

One would be a ten million times amplified Wind Blade.

One would be a ten million times amplified Arcane Missile.

...

He could even store those support and control type skills in the same way.

One snap would unleash a ten million times amplified Slow Spell.

One snap would unleash a ten million times amplified Weakness Curse.

One snap would unleash a ten million times amplified Mass Fear.

Just thinking about that scene made Lin Yu himself feel a chill run down his spine.

That would no longer be combat.

That would be Dimensional Reduction Assault.

A few snaps of the fingers, and enemies would drop dead in swathes.

However, an extremely realistic problem quickly surfaced in his mind.

When he conceptualized the first Primordial Snap - Ten Times Fireball Technique card, an extremely subtle yet crystal clear sense of obstruction transmitted from the mental plane.

Full.

His "card slots" seemed to have one occupied.

Lin Yu's movements paused.

He immediately calmed his mind and looked inward at his ability core.

There, the Joker floated quietly, serving as both the starting point and endpoint of the entire cycle.

Surrounding it were twenty-two layers of Doubling Cards, shining brilliantly like planetary rings.

They formed the foundation of his power.

And just now, the moment he conceptualized that Primordial Snap, the outermost position in the ring of stars, where a Doubling Card should be, was ruthlessly taken over.

If he actually created that snap card, that Doubling Card would disappear.

One for one.

This discovery instantly doused Lin Yu's soaring ambition with cold water.

He understood.

Any skill card he created that wasn't a Doubling Card would occupy the number of Doubling Cards.

This meant that for every additional trump card he prepared, his power ceiling, his infinitely stackable cycle system, would be weakened by one portion.

If he really did what he imagined earlier, preparing a complete set of dozens of snap cards to carry with him...

Then his Joker cycle might not even be able to stack to one hundred thousand times.

This was a form of balance.

You can't have your cake and eat it too.

Lin Yu stood in place, silent for a long time.

After all the twists and turns, it came back to the beginning - mental energy, mental energy!

Damn mental attribute...

All roads were blocked at the mental attribute.

If it weren't for the fact that skill cards wouldn't disappear on their own if not used quickly, and staying on his body would consume Doubling Card slots, he really would have wanted to replicate a complete set of snap cards to carry with him.

When trouble came, he could instantly unleash a barrage of forbidden spell-level skills to cleanse the area.

Sigh...

What other paths were there that could give him further improvement?

Watching Zhao Tianyang's retreating back, Lin Yu suddenly had an epiphany.

Profession!

Professional characteristics.

This thought made everything clear to him.

Perhaps during this period, he should also properly explore the depth of his own profession?

After all, since his awakening began, he had been a crazy gambler.

Gambling five years of his youth, gambling with all the misunderstandings from those around him, gambling with his own uncertain future.

All for a vague possibility.

Fortunately, he won the gamble.

The cycle system of Joker and Doubling Cards allowed him to turn his situation around overnight, giving him the capital to oppose the entire world.

But his understanding of his own profession still remained at the most superficial level.

Replication.

Multiplication.

And then, that was it.

Could a golden epic-level profession really have only this much functionality?

He didn't believe it.

Now that he possessed infinite principal capital, any seemingly minor characteristic might be infinitely amplified by him!

Taking a step back to think...

When he was conducting Card Innovation, he had seen those cards that could improve attributes.

Attribute enhancement might not only come through Medicine!

The more he thought about it, the more excited he became.

He realized that he had been too narrow-minded before.

Like a beggar sitting on a gold mountain, only knowing to break off a small piece of gold each day to trade for steamed buns, never thinking about building the entire gold mountain into a palace of his own.

Five years of dormancy, success achieved in one day.

He had been too focused on revenge, too focused on becoming stronger, to the point of neglecting the origin of his own power.

It was time.

It was time to calm his mind and properly research the true usage of his profession.

As Lin Yu thought about this, he no longer paid attention to the noisy ruins behind him.

Old Ghost's roars, the busyness of survivors, Li Mo's cautiousness...

None of this concerned him anymore.

He had more important things to do.

He turned around, stepped forward, and walked in the direction of Bug Residence.

There, there was absolute quiet and safety.

It was the best place for him to conduct these crazy experiments.

On the streets of the Black Market, neon lights flashed and crowds flowed like weaving.

Lin Yu's figure merged into the crowd, like a drop of water entering the ocean, completely inconspicuous.

No one knew that this young man wearing ordinary casual clothes was conceiving plans in his mind that could overturn the entire world.

He walked through familiar streets, but his thoughts had already drifted beyond the highest clouds.

What was the essence of a Card Creator?

Was it the transformation of energy? Or the manifestation of rules?

He reached out his hand, spreading it open before his eyes.

If the essence of cards was merely carriers of information...

The utilization of rules...

One of the entrances to Bug Residence was hidden at the end of a dark, damp back alley - an inconspicuous metal door.

This was also for the sake of ultimate privacy protection.

Lin Yu skillfully verified his identity, and the thick lead door slid inward, completely isolating the noise and chaos from outside.

Different from the ruins outside that had just experienced catastrophe and were still covered in dust, the interior of Bug Residence was as quiet as ever, even excessively so.

The air was filled with a faint, barely perceptible tension.

The lights in the corridor seemed to have been dimmed, and occasionally residents would peek out from their rooms. When they saw it was Lin Yu, they quickly pulled back inside, their movements full of vigilance and unease.

It seemed the commotion from Old Ghost Hall had already spread throughout the entire Black Market.

A battle significant enough to overturn the Black Market's structure had turned these residents living in the shadows into frightened birds.

Lin Yu paid no attention to those peeping gazes, walking directly toward the room he shared with his sister.

His pace wasn't fast, but each step was incredibly steady.

In his mind, thoughts about the essential nature of the Card Creator profession were still rapidly operating, deducing countless possibilities.

Lin Yu's heart began to beat faster uncontrollably.

He pushed open the door to his room.

Just as he stepped into the room, the door next to his slammed open with a bang.

"Wah!"

A cry filled with sobs, a petite figure carrying a fragrant breeze rushed over without a second thought, tightly hugging his waist.

It was Lin Yao.

"Brother!"

The girl's body was trembling slightly, her entire face buried in his chest, her words filled with suppressed fear and lingering terror.

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